Foreword

RADAC (Recherches sur les Arts Dramatiques Anglophones Contemporains) was set up in 1978 to provide a platform for academics and theatre practitioners working in the field of contemporary Anglophone drama in France. In collaboration with other associations or institutions, our group organises conferences and seminars and awards an annual prize to the best Master's dissertation on contemporary Anglophone drama written in a French university. Every year we publish an issue of our journal *Coup de Théâtre* as well as special issues. We include in this volume a short version of Sophia Mallek's 2019 prize-winning Master's dissertation: The Body, the Dance, and the Voice: Asserting the Celtic Identity in Contemporary Irish Drama.

Just as our membership has evolved to include scholars and theatre practitioners from outside France, the range of subjects treated has widened to respond to new areas of research and theatre practice. Increasing attention is given to performance and to adaptation. In recent years *Coup de Théâtre* has also dealt with the question of translation. Recent issues bear witness to the inclusion of many international contributors.

This year *Coup de Théâtre* focuses on Immersive Theatre, now a fairly established feature in Britain, but a more recent phenomenon in France. The starting point for this volume was a symposium organised at the Théâtre Lepic in Paris on January 17, 2020 before a large, diverse and enthusiastic public. Readers will find contributions, in both English and French, from a range of international scholars and theatre practitioners. This volume is the first work devoted to the topic of Immersive Theatre to appear in France.

Over the years we have tried to keep up with the many changes affecting both academic research in general and Anglophone the-

atre in particular whilst staying true to the aims of the founding members: conducting quality research in a spirit of friendship and mutual respect.

My thanks go to Juliette Mézergues, Déborah Prudhon and Emeline Jouve for editing this issue with the help of Xavier Lemoine, director of publication. On behalf of RADAC, I would also like to thank all the contributors and the members of the advisory board.

Susan Blattès

RADAC President

Introduction

Juliette Mézergues, Déborah Prudhon, Emeline Jouve

Au moment où nous finalisons ce volume, beaucoup de choses ont changé. La pandémie de COVID-19 a fermé momentanément les théâtres et les lieux de culture dans un grand nombre de pays. Le théâtre immersif apparaît comme encore plus touché que d'autres formes théâtrales car c'est une pratique de contact, d'échange. Cet ouvrage regroupe des contributions qui évoquent des spectacles qui semblent aujourd'hui d'un autre temps. On y partage de la nourriture, on se parle, on se touche, on se sent, on danse ensemble. Toutes ces pratiques, dont nous sommes temporairement privés, soulèvent de nombreuses questions sociales et sociétales, comme les articles que vous allez découvrir le soulignent.

Le théâtre dit *immersif* apparaît comme une tendance florissante dans le paysage théâtral contemporain. Les pièces ou expériences de théâtre auxquelles ce terme s'applique partagent toutes l'intention de placer le spectateur au cœur du dispositif en abolissant la distinction entre scène et salle pour les fondre en un espace unique. Les productions de la compagnie britannique Punchdrunk, fondée en 2000 par Felix Barrett, sont souvent considérées comme les plus emblématiques du genre. Au croisement du théâtre, de la performance, de la danse et de l'installation, Punchdrunk déconstruit la pièce de théâtre traditionnelle pour créer un univers théâtral que le spectateur, ou « immersant », peut habiter et explorer le temps d'une soirée. Il est invité à déambuler à sa guise dans de très vastes environnements, aux décors particulièrement travaillés, s'étendant sur plusieurs milliers de mètres carrés. Découvrant les différentes scènes au gré de ses pérégrinations, il trace un itinéraire personnel unique. Cependant, Punchdrunk et

théâtre immersif ne sont pas synonymes et il est important de considérer d'autres compagnies qui proposent un travail différent. Dans le monde anglo-saxon, on peut citer, loin de viser l'exhaustivité, Darkfield qui propose des pièces audio à un public restreint rassemblé dans des conteneurs maritimes aménagés pour l'occasion, The Lab Collective qui fait du dispositif immersif un moyen de refonder le politique, ZU-UK qui offre des expériences suspendues entre réel et virtuel ou encore Third Rail Projects dont la production *The She Fell* a connu un grand succès aux États-Unis.

Si le théâtre immersif contemporain se développe de manière exponentielle dans le monde anglo-saxon depuis une quinzaine d'années, il arrive petit à petit en France. En 2018, Le Secret ouvre dans le 5ème arrondissement de Paris pour une durée déterminée. Dédié aux pratiques immersives, ce lieu, dirigé par la compagnie A2R, accueille diverses manifestations, et plusieurs stages. Le spectacle inaugural est une adaptation d'*Hamlet* de Shakespeare, sous le titre *Helsingor, le château d'Hamlet*. La promesse est une expérience sensorielle : séparé de ses pairs, le spectateur est mis en condition et invité à déambuler librement dans l'espace où se jouent des scènes de la pièce élisabéthaine. Dès 2015, La Compagnie du Libre Acteur de Sébastien Bonnabel se tourne vers le théâtre immersif avec *Closer* de Patrick Marber, joué à l'origine dans un bar, dans le but d'explorer la relation d'intimité entre acteur/spectateur, ce que de telles pratiques permettent. Suivent *Smoke Rings* (2018) d'après Léonore Confino et *Cyrano Ostinato Fantaisies* (2019) de Sébastien Bonnabel. Dès 2016, la compagnie invite le metteur en scène américain Simón Adinia Hanukai à co-diriger une série de stages dédiés à l'immersif. Les outils de jeu proposés visent à permettre une plus grande liberté et une perméabilité accrue à l'instant présent. L'expérience n'est plus uniquement pour le spectateur, elle est aussi pour l'interprète. On peut encore citer les exemples de la compagnie Big Drama et de leur dernier spectacle *Close* qui s'est joué à guichets fermés, les soirées du Bordel de la Poésie, le travail des compagnie 359° ou Mondes Sauvages, les différents projets initiés par Madame Lupin, comme *The Lost Generation*, et la très controversée

expérience *DAU*: autant de spectacles étiquetés « immersifs » joués récemment à Paris.

Au-delà du succès récent de ces pratiques immersives, on peut s'interroger sur la parenté entre le théâtre étiqueté comme tel et des formes populaires. En effet, ces pratiques ne sont pas sans rappeler les *Murder Party*, *Escape Games* et autres maisons hantées. Si le Manoir de Paris, par exemple, bien que proposant une réelle mise en scène, des acteurs aguerris et un effort considérable de costumes et de maquillage, se présente comme un lieu de divertissement, la similitude des pratiques, fondées sur la circulation des spectateurs et la stimulation de leurs différents sens est frappante. La société Border Live a mis en place *Live Thriller* et *Live HoldUp*, deux expériences aux frontières du jeu et du théâtre, ouvrant la porte à de nouvelles expériences, où le spectateur devient acteur par bien des aspects et réalise le fantasme d'« être au cœur de l'histoire », de faire « partie du film ». Des sociétés audiovisuelles surfent également sur le succès de leurs séries emblématiques en créant leur propre *Escape Game*, tel Netflix et *La Casa del Papel*, qui investit la Monnaie de Paris ou Canal + et *Le Bureau des légendes*.

Cette publication réunit des praticiens et des théoriciens afin d'apporter de nouveaux éclairages sur les pratiques immersives en France et dans les pays anglo-saxons et fait suite à la journée d'études qui s'est tenue le 17 janvier 2020, au Théâtre Lepic, situé dans le 18ème arrondissement de Paris, organisée conjointement par le laboratoire VALE (Voix Anglophone Littérature et Esthétique), l'école doctorale « Civilisations, cultures et littératures » de Sorbonne Université, le laboratoire CAS (Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes) de l'Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, et la société savante RADAC, à l'initiative de trois chercheuses dont le domaine de recherche porte sur le théâtre anglophone contemporain.

Le Théâtre Lepic accueille depuis plusieurs années les créations immersives de la Compagnie du Libre Acteur et depuis 2019, un *Escape Game*, ainsi que des ateliers de formation. C'est un lieu dédié à la création, qui reçoit également des ateliers de formation. Ce lieu semblait donc tout à fait indiqué pour une telle journée. En abritant

un événement à l'initiative d'universités publiques, ce théâtre privé a contribué à jeter un pont entre deux sphères souvent maintenues à distance l'une de l'autre. Cette journée fut l'occasion d'échanges et de rencontres passionnantes, sur un pied d'égalité, entre ceux qui font le théâtre immersif et ceux qui en font leur objet de recherche. Des chercheurs venus de différents pays européens, des professionnels du spectacle de langue française et de langue anglaise, ont réfléchi ensemble aux spécificités de l'immersif. La présence d'un large public venu d'horizons très divers fut la preuve de l'enthousiasme suscité par ces formes nouvelles.

Ce volume constitue le premier ouvrage consacré au sujet publié en France. Les articles, en français et en anglais, sont signés par des universitaires mais aussi par des artistes-praticiens. La dimension pluridisciplinaire permet non seulement d'explorer plusieurs facettes du sujet mais également de varier les approches analytiques du théâtre immersif à proprement parler, de ses enjeux artistiques et philosophiques.

L'ouvrage s'ouvre sur les mots de Josephine Machon, autrice d'études séminales sur le sujet et invitée d'honneur de cette journée d'études. Dans son chapitre introductif, elle rappelle les fondements de ces pratiques et revient sur le travail de la compagnie considérée comme la figure de proue de l'immersif tel qu'il se décline sur la scène anglo-saxonne, Punchdrunk. Les articles suivants, signés de Marianne Drugeon, Séverine Ruset et Estelle Rivier-Arnaud, interrogent les processus de création et les fondements du théâtre immersif en adoptant différents points de vue, autour de ses enjeux et des lieux de représentations. Puis ce volume explore de façon plus directe des perspectives politiques, au travers des contributions de Cyrielle Garson, Marilena Borriello et Musca Szabolcs qui se penchent sur le rapport entre éthique et immersif et remettent en question la prétendue liberté promise aux spectateurs. La parole est ensuite donnée aux artistes-chercheurs et aux artistes, à travers le témoignage de Katharine Fry et Sarah Sigal qui reviennent sur le processus de création de leur spectacle *Eating For Victory* ; la plongée de Richard DesRochers, immersant du spectacle

Then She Fell ; la retranscription de la table ronde avec les membres de l'Association Française des Artistes de l'Immersif qui a eu lieu lors de cette journée d'études, et un entretien avec Dot Pierson sur le théâtre immersif en temps de confinement (l'entretien fut réalisé à la suite de la journée d'études dans le contexte sanitaire inédit que l'on a connu alors). Pour clôturer ce volume, nous publions le texte inédit de la pièce immersive *Cyrano Ostinato Fantaisies* de Sébastien Bonnabel, qui, tout en se référant au texte d'Edmond Rostand, explore le rapport d'une troupe de théâtre à l'engagement artistique et à la difficulté de faire face à la vie et à la mort.

Remerciements :

Nous remercions chaleureusement la société RADAC ainsi que l'équipe éditoriale de *Coup de Théâtre* pour la réalisation de ce volume. Merci aux membres du comité scientifique et aux rapporteurs pour leur concours. Nos pensées vont également à toute l'équipe du Théâtre Lepic et particulièrement à Flora Guillem et Nathan Sebbagh, aux membres de l'Association Française des Artistes de l'Immersif, à Charlotte-Amélie Vaux et Yann Garreau d'Uxmmersive, ainsi qu'à Fanny Abib-Rozenberg, Anouk Bottero et Maïté Ferhat pour leur soutien logistique lors de la journée d'étude.

Prologue

Looking Through a Punchdrunk Lens into the Immersive World of *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*

Josephine Machon

Abstract: Drawing on definitive accounts of history and process presented in *The Punchdrunk Encyclopaedia* (Machon with Punchdrunk 2019), this article surveys the practice of Punchdrunk, pioneers of immersive performance in Britain. Focusing on Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2013-14), the discussion addresses the central themes of space and the aesthetics of intimacy in immersive performance; the place of the text in immersive theatre; and the types of audience attracted to Punchdrunk work specifically, and immersive work more broadly. It highlights the significance of "the cinematic" to Punchdrunk's unique approach and the way this impacts audience experience and interpretation.

Résumé : S'appuyant sur l'histoire de Punchdrunk et ses procédés artistiques présentés dans l'ouvrage séminal *The Punchdrunk Encyclopaedia* (Machon et Punchdrunk 2019), cet article explore la pratique de cette compagnie pionnière des performances immersives en Grande Bretagne. Le propos, centré sur le spectacle *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2013-14), aborde les thèmes centraux de l'espace et de l'esthétique intimiste dans l'immersif, la place du texte dans ce théâtre ainsi que le type de public qu'attire le travail de Punchdrunk en particulier et, plus largement, les spectacles immersifs. L'article souligne l'importance de l'esthétique cinématographique dans l'approche singulière de Punchdrunk et la manière dont celle-ci informe l'expérience et l'interprétation du public.

Keywords: Audience, cinematic, mask, masked, Punchdrunk, text

Mots-clés : Public, cinématographique, masque, Punchdrunk, texte

Founded in 2000, Punchdrunk is considered to be among the pioneers of first wave 21st Century immersive theatre in Britain. Once a nomadic collective, Punchdrunk has evolved to become a highly regarded, nationally funded organisation. Punchdrunk Enrichment, its outreach arm, is a leading force for community-centred, educational work, while Punchdrunk International names its commercially financed global operation. From 2000-2015, Punchdrunk became renowned for large-scale interdisciplinary events that merged installation, performance, film, live music and club-nights in vast disused sites. Audiences were masked and roamed the building, encountering uncanny worlds that played out as they discovered the stories it had to tell.

In charting the mainstream rise of the company since 2003, much scholarly analysis has both celebrated and problematised Punchdrunk's practice. My discussion here attends solely to the aesthetics of Punchdrunk's masked events and its broad philosophy of practice to show how, following the "scale of immersivity" proposed in *Immersive Theatres*, these productions are quintessentially immersive in form (Machon 2013: 70-102). Focusing on Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2013-14),[1] devised with the ensemble and co-directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, I foreground some key forms and techniques that have come to define Punchdrunk's practice. I consider the significance of literary texts within Punchdrunk's intertextualised dramaturgy and the creative agency in interpretation this offers to audiences. Across the interactive journeys they forge, Punchdrunk audiences are encouraged to make *sense*/sense through a fusion of immediate corporeal perception and consequent critical reflection. In this regard, I do not propose a definitive or homogenous interpretation of how *TDM* was or should be interpreted; indeed, Punchdrunk productions in form and intention frustrate the option of doing so as no two audience members' experiences can ever be wholly alike (as is the case with any encounters with interdisciplinary and abstracted art). My analysis of form as theme presented below draws on my own embodied recollections that have been filtered through time and social agenda in this reading of the work.

Punchdrunk's Masked Events



"The Mask." Photo credit: Stephen Dobbie. Image courtesy of Punchdrunk.

In Punchdrunk's large-scale shows it is the audience that is required to wear masks, rather than performers. For Barrett, the mask is a critical device that, for some, instils "a sense of character," serving as the mechanism that adapts behaviour to the aesthetic and logic of the masked world, while for others it engenders ghostlike anonymity, preventing communication and sculpting audience into "scenography...walls to frame the action" (Machon 2013: 160-1). The masks and the spectre-torial bodies to which they are attached thus take on architectural qualities within the space. Correlatedly, although audience experience is at the heart of the concept for any masked show, it is the found building which defines what that show

will be. For *TDM*, this was a vast decommissioned postal sorting office, abandoned and adjacent to London's bustling Paddington Train Station. An impressive overhaul saw the internal structure of this building reinvented as "Temple Studios," the 1962 outpost for the fabled Republic Pictures.

Across the years Punchdrunk has employed site-sympathetic to label its work, defining the activity of responding to the *feeling* as much as the aesthetic of an uninhabited space. Rather than a site-specific literal retelling of a building's history, site-sympathetic offers an "impressionistic response" establishing dream world experiences within the space; an impulse that gives as much weight to the temperature of a room and the cracks in its wall, as to the walls themselves, "building a story around a broken pane of glass" (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 251). The building and consequent journey through it defines where, what Punchdrunk refer to as, "the crescendo," the event's emotional peak, will occur. Crescendos as formal finales evolved from Punchdrunk's 2007-8 production, *The Masque of the Red Death*; created to ensure the hundreds of individuals who had been roaming the building as they chose, were brought together to experience as a collective the final ensemble set piece. Prior to 2007, the buildings that housed masked shows were gradually closed, room by room, the bar being the last to shut and audience ushered out. The implication for audience members being that the world left behind continued without them.

The initial response to the architectural footprint of the building, which takes in both the shape and flow of existing walls, stairs, levels and features alongside their corresponding emotional tones and textures, influences the way Punchdrunk's design team will interpret the source text through a combination of touch-real representational settings and more abstract installation. Only once this scenographic response has taken form is it then fully populated by performers. A rules-set among the core production team, led by Barrett along with Creative Producer, Colin Nightingale and Design Director, Livi Vaughan, is that no one area of production is considered to be more

important in finding a form for the ideas within a masked show. This rules-set is understood and choreographically translated by Doyle with the ensemble, dancers who are expert at duetting with space, light and fixtures as much as each other, and can improvise effortlessly around the audience. It is also carried through the sound-design of Stephen Dobbie, resulting in precisely set, sonic collages that blur and blend across each space to add texture to installations and support or direct performers and audience alike. Audience members may choose to create a hierarchy by prioritising the narratives the dancers communicate over and above the stories revealed by the rooms, objects, and sound with which all the performers are in league. Equally instinct and curiosity may be driven by installation, piecing narrative together solely from one room to the next.

Punchdrunk's approach here relates to my general definition of the anti-hierarchical "in-its-own-world-ness" of immersive practice (Machon 2013: 93), where space, scenography and duration are equally palpable forces that comprise the world, within which performers and audience interact. The sound-design of *TDM* illustrates how audience experience and interpretation might be led by Punchdrunk's sonic-scenography. Omnipresent abstracted soundscapes manifested an expressionist audio-plane, eliciting an imagining beyond, a *sensation* of location and situation. Conjuring the edges of the world, beyond the touchable surfaces and inhabitable spaces, it evoked the hazy rhythmic toil of oil derricks pumping. The whole-body perception of organic sounds (such as the crunch of the wood underfoot in the forest) added to the sensual grounding of the audience. Movie soundtrack samples in the mix ensured a *noir-esque* sensibility hung in the air. In certain spaces, popular songs or live-performed music indicated historical period and geographical setting. As with film soundtracks, these played out through set sequences, providing tempo and emotional resonance for choreography while tapping into a darkly saccharine nostalgia for the illusion of a time past. Where localised through a transistor in a bedroom, at set points the music would expand, bleed into the wider soundscore, reverberate against the walls as much as through the body, enveloping an individual,

swelling out of the room and drawing audiences to locations and experiences elsewhere. As with filmscores, sound in *TDM* heavily influenced emotional response, a constant ominous indicator that something wicked this way comes, unequivocally defining setting, character and events encountered within the world.

Punchdrunk's Cinematic Aesthetic

This focus on the cinematic in relation to sound-design signals the broader significance of this in Punchdrunk's process. "Cinematic" is a threefold description, encompassing, aesthetic influences, practice-led terminology and the quality of experience to be had in audience appreciation. Punchdrunk's aesthetic response to any source material when creating public works, "is always of a film persuasion" (Barrett in Barrett and Machon 2007). Punchdrunk's dramaturgical approach adopts and adapts cinematic techniques, indicated primarily through use of terms, such as "cross-fade," "lens," "close-up" and "long shot," in defining process.

"Long-shot," for Punchdrunk, names the approach to responding to larger spaces within a building. Equally, it pertains to the first view the audience will have of the world:

> The process is much like zooming in on the detail, a letter on a table, first established from a tracking shot of the full expanse from above. [...] [T]he opening shot, the world that you'd see from above, then the specific town, where you zoom in and see its structures, then you end up going inside the hotel, inside [a] bedroom, into the bathroom, zoom into the bath, to see a letter floating. [...] The detail is there but initially it's a bird's-eye-view that then becomes micro (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 83).

Vaughan emphasises that, with this macro to micro approach in mind, she and Design Associate, Beatrice Minns, "filter the focus" within each room: "We always know that we're working with a 360-design but we prioritise a certain shot, focus an impact within the space" (Vaughan in Machon with Punchdrunk 83). As this suggests, "close-up" describes the close-range intimate detail installed in each

space, encouraging the audience to become the camera, to zoom-in on the narrative clues and nuanced themes that exist therein. In *TDM*, this forensic attention to design ensured the long-shot of any space enabled an immediate visual scene setting, while the close-up texture and solidity of objects in space made the world palpably present, supported and accentuated by lighting. The forest was full of shadows, while bedside or office lamps and candles cast *film noir* pools of light. Dense installations lured audience members to home in on detail in tactile close-up; sift through drawers for clues, inhale bottled scents in bedrooms; attend to characters' moods and back-stories from the manner in which clothes are slung over chairs or hung in wardrobes. Whole-body attention to detail—where hands, nose and ears worked as much as the eyes—made *sense*/sense of the world. In larger spaces one could pan across, adjust to its temperature, ground oneself directly through the dusty soil underfoot, note sensations shift with each surface; *feeling* as much as seeing the desolation of this world, the dirt that literally surrounds it. *TDM*'s scenographic experience cast audience as both camera and actor in a continuous and embodied tracking shot, taking in:

> [T]he sweltering small-town with its porches and its fountain on the outskirts of the Californian desert, the trailer park, the Diva's abstracted, multiple-mirrored boudoir, the detritus of the fledgling actresses' dressing room, shooting stages, a desert, The Last Chance Saloon, a wrecked Stude-baker wagon (Machon 2017: 226).

Continuing the cinematic shorthand, for Punchdrunk the "cross-fade" defines the mechanisms that encourage the audience-participant to cross, physically and imaginatively, from the everyday world into the world of the event. For masked events this always involves the acceptance of the mask. *TDM*'s cross-fade began six months before when the strange appearance of a 1960s trailer-van on the thoroughfare of Paddington Station captured the curiosity of passers-by. A clipboard with a shooting-script attached to its locked door intrigued those who drew close to read:

> A bustling city station. Crowds of passengers, tourists, commuters pass through the central concourse. (Camera pans in)...something captures the

> stranger's eye... (Cut to close up).They glimpse a clipboard hanging from the trailer and carefully read a page of script. It dawns on them this trailer may contain a secret waiting to be discovered (Polden n.p.).

Weeks before the previews opened both selected and unsuspecting audience members, descended through a narrow basement corridor of an East London shop to discover Andrez, an old man sitting in the shadows, who played them a reel of film before sending them off, urging them to seek out Temple Studios. For the six-hundred people per night who entered Temple Studios the on-site cross-fade began as a mazelike grid from the box office which channelled scheduled groupings, staggered across a three-hour run. This maze functioned as a method of crowd control as well as decompression from the outside world. Influencing the senses by modulating rhythms of movement, dimming light, increasing awareness of soundscape and scent, in order to acclimatise the audience to the world of Temple Studios. Turning a final corner where masks were provided and donned, codes of conduct were layered into the final fade, alerting each group to ways of behaving and *being* with/in the world.

My memory of this final step over the threshold recalls a hostess (gold sequined dress, glamorous up-do) who ushered us into a lift, bade us look at the headshots that covered its walls, *dramatis personae* styled with Hollywood allure. She hinted at troubled back-stories then clarified studio rules (keep your mask on, split up from your friends, look for clues, follow your own path, find the bar), pulled open the cantilevered door, delivering us directly into the centre of a dusty small-town at the periphery of Temple Studios.

Dance, Performers and Audience-participants

Since 2003 dance, choreographed by Doyle with the ensemble, has been vital to Punchdrunk's masked shows:

> [F]inally, there was a performance language that matched the impact of the building. When you stumbled across a scene, instead of [speech] diluting the experience, [dance] accentuated it... dancers approach from the body... a natural affinity with the way I wanted the audience to read

> it; not right-hand brain processing intellectually but the body absorbing it, an instinctual emotional impact that happens before your head's had a chance to catch up. That synergy, that's the way dancers make stuff (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 254)

Dance frees the audience from needing to wait to let a speech play out in order to understand a scene. It offers a constant and abstracted revealing of narratives, a fluidity in experience and interpretation that supports individual journeys through the event. Dance allows access to an understanding of theme and character psychology in a deeply embodied manner; a fusion of emotional, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and subconscious interpretations. The choreography is initiated over a long process of research and improvisation in the studio between Doyle and the ensemble, unpacking the source texts and building character narratives. This is then elaborated through the dancers' early explorations across the site, responding to specific locations. Once the audience becomes part of the event, the performers play in relation to the audience's presence and participation in each live moment; deftly improvising according to each intuitive interchange, shaped by the close proximity of individual and collective bodies. In turn, audiences have to attune to the shifting movement around them in order to forge their journey and move around the high-energy sequences. "Long-shot" and "close-up" are here deployed as choreographic terms and techniques. Performers are highly trained in understanding how to enter, have presence and pull focus when in long-shot, as well as how to control the intimacy of the 360-degree close-up demanded by the close proximity of audience.

The audience-participants' direct insertion in, and interaction with, the world shapes and transforms potential outcomes of the event. As the cross-fade example earlier indicates, an important feature of Punchdrunk's work is that certain codes of conduct are understood and respected. Once inside the Punchdrunk world, tacit codes are prioritised to assist the audience in editing together their experience. Punchdrunk employ light and sound as signposts to beckon participants to central points of action; attendants (masked and clothed

in black) silently signal pathways one way, deny access another; performers ignore, involve, navigate or lead, expertly handling the conventions and consent for participation, trained in the principles behind the Punchdrunk invitation to interact.

This skill particularly comes to bear in the infamous one-on-one experiences, a prototypical Punchdrunk form. Within the masked shows these are carefully designed, clandestine moments created for one member of the crowd, that occur at specific times. These scenarios are composed of pre-planned, carefully scored action, designed by speaking performers who are adept in these methods, with audience and performer alike invisibly chaperoned by crew members who are hidden from sight. For these precisely timed sequences, the performer chooses an audience-participant to be permitted behind a closed door, away from the rest of the action. Here the audience member's mask is removed, and the audience-participant is spoken to directly, as a brief scenario is played out, usually lasting no more than five minutes and after which time they are sent on their way. Katy Balfour, venerable creator of such encounters, argues that where one-on-ones within masked events are sought out by experienced (and often repeat) Punchdrunk fans, this is not necessarily in an urgent need to "win" or beat everyone else to them, but because they are "drawn to that search for meaning" in the work (Machon with Punchdrunk 207). The deliberate seeking out of a one-on-one is usually related to a desire to piece together all the hidden moments and secrets that exist within the world of the event.

Text and the Intertextualised in Punchdrunk worlds

Extending the cinematic lexicon of the process, "lens" is Punchdrunk's shorthand for the interpretation of a textual source through the reference frame of comparable works to establish a complex, multilayered world. A written source always provides the backbone, forming the thematic thread and narrative arc, of a masked show. Classic texts are interwoven with, and interpreted through, additional sources from film, art and music, as well as wider literary

texts. Textual sources become the critical anchor, tethering the audience to themes. The deconstructed, intertexualised and non-linear form of the world can be experientially challenging "so the source becomes a navigational tool," the baseline from which the space can be triangulated in order to, "pinpoint" oneself "on the map" of that world (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 273). In this way, source texts become a cryptograph that both encipher then decipher that world's puzzles and reimagined plots.

Since 2000 Punchdrunk has returned to certain texts as stimulus including, Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Anton Chekhov's work, Shakespeare's plays, Goethe's *Faust*, the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, primarily because of the "humanity at their core," while driven by "a sense of 'the other', an inherent magic or ambiguity… the uncanny, *unheimlich*… a sense of disorientation is implicit within the narratives" (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 273). This highlights Punchdrunk's intuitive connection to the mythical, gothic or expressionist tendency in form and narrative of chosen texts. Fusing sources together to establish new plotlines, Punchdrunk remains true to the human themes at their core; connecting emotional and psychological narratives to ways in which wider society impacts, for better or worse, on individual and collective consciousness.

TDM was based on Büchner's *Woyzeck*, with its fragmentation, "poetry...abstraction and economy," lending itself to a Punchdrunk adaptation (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 273). This in turn was filtered through the kaleidoscopic lens of Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust*, Ray Bradbury's 1962 novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), shot through with Edward Hopper imagery. Textual sources and cinematic references turned in on themselves, forming new patterns and perspectives, reinvented narratives and themes, all coloured by the hues of the originals. *TDM* accentuates the cinematic in theme and form through these sources; cleverly playing with doublings, doppelgängers and liminal states that merge fantasy with 'reality'. Visual and cinematic references were not

employed merely as a knowing comparison but to emphasise visceral forms and disturbing undercurrents in theme.

West's *Day of the Locust*, set in Depression Era L.A., a time where the Hollywood film industry grew rich in stark contrast to the extreme poverty of the masses, paralleled the military social and economic injustices in Büchner's play for Barrett and Doyle (Machon 2017: 223). This setting was then transposed to the early 1960s (cue Bradbury's sinister, carnivalesque town) and the brink of the demise of the all-powerful Hollywood studio system. Where Woyzeck was driven insane by the struggle between social and moral obligation, frantic to escape his reality, in *TDM* all of the characters are held in this same moral vacuum, desperate to escape personal relationships and societal constraints, manifested in the studio politics with its perpetration of power-abuse. Although not intended at the time, how prescient this interpretation becomes in the wake of Harvey Weinstein, #TimesUp and #MeToo.

Plotting the audience's interpretative journey through these abusive Hollywood eras, *TDM* exposes the sinister underbelly of Temple Studios. Rather than foreseeing the #MeToo or #TimesUp movement, or explicitly critiquing these current and ongoing inequalities, it is by drawing Büchner's pitting of the individual against society and its unfair economic forces through West's, Bradbury's and Lynch's 20th Century counterparts, that the audience can identify the representations of these abuses of power that are clear within the co-directors' shared vision, the design team's installations and each performer's interpretations of their roles. Punchdrunk's textual layering of Hollywood's historical periods, from the 1930s to the 1960s (with the additional application of a retrospective reading of their stark repercussions today) emphasises the repeated existential condition at the heart of these sources; their allegorical (hence fable) implications. By reinventing characters, plots and narratives that resonate with these original texts, and locating these within a touch-real film studio setting—the sole purpose of which is to produce fantasies that require

everyone escape their realities—it in turn reveals the reality of that fantasy; that the glorious Technicolor dream is a dangerous lie.

Punchdrunk's subtextual landscapes unpack existing dreamworlds that lie within each source. With the deliberate intention of undercutting a feeling of security and coherence for the audience. Punchdrunk avoid the functional when interpreting a text, aiming instead to be "unreliable with the source," to ensure the experience is unpredictable, simultaneously delightful and unnerving:

> [W]hen you're dealing with a text...which speaks to a world that we don't quite understand, your head isn't able to solve it initially, so you have to trust your gut. It relies on instinct and returns to that fundamental building block of Punchdrunk; this is theatre to be experienced by our bodies before our minds (Barrett in Machon with Punchdrunk 273).

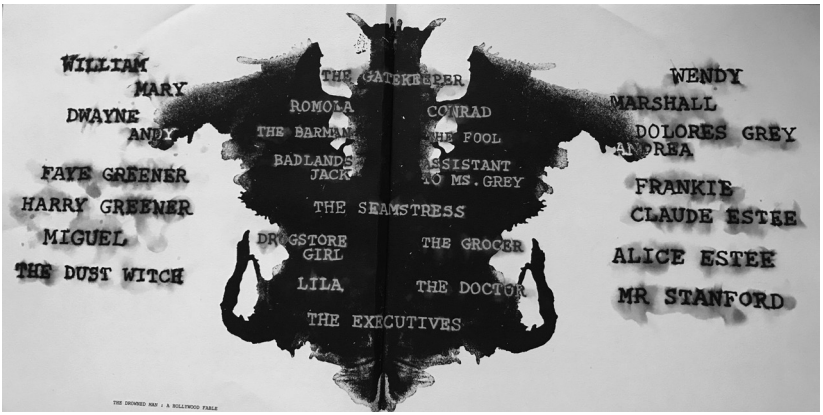
Centred around an image that interconnects textual stories and themes across floors, scenographic 'specials' are employed (Machon with Punchdrunk 267). These are, miniature or large-scale objects that work on a narrative level and simultaneously provide symbolic clues to the world, born from source texts. In *TDM*, the life-size, lifelike-yet-dead fake horse was a "special," deployed alongside repeated statues and pictures of horses in various rooms and the menacing sugar-sculpting of a horse by Mr. Stanford, the studio boss. These foregrounded West's, simultaneously pedestrian and symbolic references to horses in *The Day of the Locust* alongside the repeated horse motif in the Bradbury novel, while evoking Büchner's uncanny, circus soothsaying "astronomical horse" (Büchner 15).

Another defining Punchdrunk technique in masked events, which influences interpretation, is the looped composition. A "loop" is the unit of time that completes one full narrative cycle, involving every character within the building. Approximately 50 minutes in length, these are run three times until each final narrative sequence is drawn through to the crescendo, bringing cast and audience together for a rousing dénouement. Loops, adapted from textual sources, are broken down into twelve scenes for every character. These plot each stage of

that character's narrative, fluidly resetting from scene twelve back to scene one as the cycle plays out. Within these loops, characters share transitory meeting points as their stories, literally, shift across each other's paths. The composition of the omnipresent soundscore runs on these 50-minute cycles and provides the reset signal, functioning as a cue for performers to begin again.

These loops accentuate the tracking shot experience for the audience as they travel with characters or pause to close-in, in close-up, on spaces. It is possible to chart the narrative of individual characters by sticking with them, equally, one might lose them behind closed doors, pick up a different lead, before reaching the final sequence of the third loop, which precipitates the crescendo, the finale and the audience being led to the bar by performers. Within these loops—like the stuff of dreams—plots, subplots and multilayered interpretations abound as focus is shifted away from one protagonist and storylines and themes are fused. Lead characters that own the main narrative arcs from which all others are developed have stories that chart a journey across locations throughout the building. These enable overlapping narratives to ricochet off them throughout the building. Minor characters from the original sources are adapted and elaborated, fused with parallel characters from different sources, expanded across a one-hour storyboard, repeated across a three-hour cyclical run. This looped composition of *TDM* physically marks out Büchner's, West's and Bradbury's themes; the cyclical turn (the begin-again) of brutal systems that nurture self-destruction in the powerless, while allowing the sordid proclivities of tyrants at large.

As captured by the Hermann Rorschach ink-blot-esque visual layout of *dramatis personae*, roles are under psychological examination and mirrored or blurred.



TDM "dramatis personae" (Punchdrunk & National Theatre, 4-5). Image used with permission of Punchdrunk.

The image indicates the overarching reflected and refracted storylines of William and Mary vs Wendy and Marshall. Once within the world, audiences may become cognisant to those characters that live on the outside of Temple Studios, entering as temporary staff or film extras, those that move from inside to outside as permanent staff, B-list wannabes, PAs and executives, all patrolled by "The Gatekeeper," and those such as Mr. Stanford or Dolores the studio Diva that are bound by Temple Studios, unable to break free.

This manifestation of dreamlike doublings and replications, lifted from the meta tropes of its sources, permeates the metatheatrical form of *TDM*. These are present in installations that play with repetition and abstraction and are accentuated by the complex interweaving of character narratives via the looped composition. *TDM* consciously plays with the (con)fusion of the real and the illusory, communicated by the trappings of film itself. Film sets, offices, executive suites, dressing rooms, seamstress wardrobes, the desert, the forest, are situated in a way that intentionally cause locational boundaries to blur, ensuring certainty about "faked" film-set vs "real" setting becomes unfixed. The audience travels between the shooting sets and the implied "real" locations outside of the studios (which also become

themselves locations used by the studio). Inhabiting spaces that are *both* "real" *and* "fake," invites a double-reading of any events in that space and extends the ideas of the world as an unreal-reality, a place of unhappily-lived-everafters.

The otherworldly juxtaposition of the real in the fake is exemplified in The Encino Cinema, a fully functioning, movie-theatre where screenings of 16mm original versions of movies (*The Day of the Locust*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Touch of Evil* and *Wozzeck*) were presented prior to certain performances. This world-within-a-world idea is further encapsulated by "Studio 3," the bar area that lies betwixt-and-between Temple Studios and the external, everyday worlds of the audience. In Studio 3 audience members can remove their masks, attune to a different tempo and mood, remain all night should they choose, enjoying the entertainment and interactions that run solely within this realm on their own individual loops. It is this liminal studio-bar to which audiences are led by cast members at the close of the performance, to mark the space between Punchdrunk fantasy and audience reality and from which they exit back into "real life."

Fact and fiction are fused throughout, merging the corporeal, live(d) experience of the audience, within a fictional framework that is in this constant process of blurring realities and fantasies, truth and lies. *TDM* reconfigures cinematic ways of interpreting the experience in close-up, long and tracking shots to a whole-body inhabiting and editing of narrative and theme. Touch-real engagement with all spaces within the building inject an oxymoronic authenticity into the fantasy world, inviting a constant questioning of situations and scenarios; are these "real" settings or is this a film location? Is this a "real" character or is the performer playing the character of an actor playing out a fictionalised role?

As this suggests, individual interpretative agency is underscored as a vital (albeit frustrating for some) element of the work. The suggestion of creative freedom and sense of audience liberation in Punchdrunk's masked shows is aligned to the ways in which audience members can compose their own experience; yet this is always also carefully

constructed by the company. For the crescendo of *TDM* the audience was brought together from across the building to witness the doomed Wendy perform a violent murder, only for it to be immediately followed by the tannoyed announcement of Mr Stanford calling, "that's a wrap" suggesting that this had all been the make-believe workings of a film-shoot and we were all invited to the wrap party. Yet the whirling hoedown finale culminates with a mirrored revelation of the murdered bodies of Mary and Marshall in the arms of William and Wendy. Standing in shallow pools into which they sink, as rain sleets on their broken bodies, this image denies that Hollywood ending and throws easy resolution into doubt. The creative/critical agency offered in this show is purely one of narrative construction and interpretation. Creative license is allowed only within a highly constructed format and according to rules of control and consent. Audience freedom is *entirely* simulated within this world. As with all Punchdrunk masked shows, the suggestion of freedom is a crucial part of the fantasy in which the audience is immersed.

Conclusion

Punchdrunk was a pivotal force across the first wave of 21st Century immersive practice. It rides the crest of the second wave with a generation of devisers and directors, writers and dramaturgs, performers and spectators, influenced by its aesthetics. Punchdrunk's practice has seen to the evolution of a particular type of audience that is attracted to inventive approaches to involvement and "knows" how "to do" immersive theatre. I say this with caution for such "knowing" is demonstrated in those who can force themselves upon a performance within a space in a manner which may disregard other audience members and disrespect the makers of the work. A "knowing," then, that ignores how intuition, invitation and shared codes of conduct and consent among artists and audiences are essential in all immersive work. In light of its influence on audiences and interactive practice, Punchdrunk has been at the centre of its own controversies and debates about safety, consent, roleplay and responsibility in immersive work. The philosophy

and techniques of safeguarding for audience and performer remain an ongoing concern for Punchdrunk (Machon with Punchdrunk 45-6, 207-8). Correspondingly, performer and audience interactivity is now held under close scrutiny in public, journalistic and academic circles.

Punchdrunk's work to date has opened up theatrical expression and experiences of intimacy and immediacy, evolving new approaches to audience interaction and appreciation. *The Punchdrunk Encyclopaedia* records and celebrates the history and significance of the masked shows, yet it also tantalises with Punchdrunk's ambitions to reinvent approaches to interactive practice for future audiences. Punchdrunk's masked shows are likely to become a rare thing as it prioritises experimentation with new forms (Machon with Punchdrunk 12). Uncertainty, curiosity, discovery and imagination remain vital to the dramaturgy, aesthetic and experience of Punchdrunk's work. Given this, knowing "how to do" as an audience member must also always involve an *un-knowing*, a re-discovering of how one is tacitly enticed "to do" in any new Punchdrunk world. Barrett's own curiosity continues to flame Punchdrunk's stove of ambition: "I'm fascinated by that murky hinterland that is the space between the show and real life and how we can theatricalise that. There's a lot more in there for the future" (Machon 2013, 164). Cross-platform adventures, involving deeper, durational immersion for audiences might provide the spark to ignite those future flames:

> [C]ross-fertilisation and melding disciplines always produce sparks that you're never anticipating, and it only takes a spark. We always want to ask our audience to take huge risks and if we're asking them to take risks, we should take risks too. An audience has seen a lot now, we have to be more inventive, and that's so exciting because there's so much more work to make (James 2020a, n.p.).

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[1] Punchdrunk's *The Downed Man: A Hollywood Fable* is referred to as *TDM* throughout this article.

Immersion and Communion in Community Plays

Marianne Drugeon

Abstract: Community Plays as invented and conceptualised by Ann Jellicoe in the 1970s are not Immersive Theatre, but they are certainly precursors of the form. The article centres on the seven Community Plays written for the city of Dorchester and its inhabitants since 1985, exploring how the hundreds of participants become engrossed in the long creative process in ways that are similar to what immersants experience in an immersive play. But the audience is in its turn invited to participate during the performances, not only interacting with the cast but also really becoming part of an enlarged community. Moreover, the immersive techniques used have a political potency: in creating together and sharing their emotions, views and ideas, all the participants experience commonality not only as a form but also as an ideology which is at odds with the individualistic stance of a lot of immersive plays.

Résumé : Les *Community Plays*, imaginées et conceptualisées par Ann Jellicoe dans les années 1970, ne peuvent être qualifiées de théâtre immersif. Pour autant, elles en sont un des précurseurs. Cet article s'intéresse aux sept *Community Plays* écrites pour la ville de Dorchester et ses habitants depuis 1985. Il explore la façon dont les centaines de participants se trouvent absorbés tout au long du processus créatif, selon des modes qui rappellent ce que ressentent les immersants. Par la suite, les spectateurs sont à leur tour invités à participer, dépassant la seule interaction avec les acteurs pour devenir véritablement membres de la communauté élargie. Mais les techniques immersives que l'on retrouve dans les *Community Plays* ont une portée politique : en partageant leurs émotions, leurs idées et leurs idéaux et en créant ensemble, tous les participants font l'expérience de la communauté, non seulement comme forme d'art mais aussi comme idéologie, une idéologie aux antipodes de l'individualisme souvent prôné par le théâtre immersif.

Keywords: Community Plays, Immersive theatre, politically-committed theatre, site-specific theatre, amateur theatre

Mots-clés : Les *Community Plays*, théâtre immersif, théâtre engagé, théâtre in situ, théâtre amateur

Immersive Theatre places at its centre the spectator turned immersant and reorganises the space of performance so that audience and actors are not separated. In that, it shares many features in common with experiments that have aimed at breaking from more traditional theatre in the UK, especially with the second generation of politically-committed playwrights after 1968. If none of those experiments can strictly speaking be labelled "Immersive Theatre" as it is now known, one can trace a filiation, if not a continuity, which may shed light on the inspirations for and motivations behind such dramaturgical choices.

The present article means to explore specifically the form of the community play, as it was experimented and defined in the 1970s and is still used as a form in the UK and in other countries around the world. In her definitive work *Immersive Theatres*, Josephine Machon defines immersive experiments through degrees of immersion. One of her chapters is entitled "Gauging an immersive event" (67). In that light, we would like to gauge how immersive community plays are, explore how this immersion works and to what end. Community plays are celebrations of the community, not only of actors who perform but also of spectators who share an unforgettable experience. They gather participants together and celebrate unity where Immersive Theatre tends to fragment its audience and celebrate individuality. The common points between the two forms are nevertheless numerous, as is made apparent when Machon quotes David Jubb, Joint Artistic Director of BAC, stating the motivations behind the company's choice of form. His words would fit community plays:

> In a relatively secular society perhaps theatre can provide that place where people come together, explore their differences and by putting differences and creativity together, invent something new, invent a future […] it's about people and it's about putting the audience at the heart of the experience. (23)

Our contention is that the model of the community play can be seen as one of the precursors of Immersive Theatre. But where the former results in (if not aims at) politicising its participants and celebrating a feeling of social bonding, the latter seems most often to be apolitical, more intent on entertaining individuals and adapting to each spectator's particular situation. To explore the stylistic filiation between the two and try to assess the ideological positioning of each, we will first look at the concept of the community play by concentrating on its creative process and its building of a community of actors. We will then examine the position of the audience which is integrated in the community. This will lead us to define the particular connection established between actors and spectators and understand its political impact on the experience as a whole, and how it may be compared to that created in Immersive Theatre.

Community plays appear now in a variety of forms, but as a genre it was created and defined by the established playwright, theatre director and Literary Manager of the Royal Court Ann Jellicoe. In 1974 she decided to leave London and move to Lyme Regis in Dorset. She was asked to write a play for her children's school, and discovered that little by little more and more people, not just the schoolchildren, got involved in the creation. Retrospectively, Jon Oram explains in the afterword to *A Time to Keep* how "[a]n amazing energy emerged; long-lost feelings of belonging to a place and a community began to surface" (in Dale and Edgar 127). In the end, the school play was a promenade production, written for and about the town, involving a professional production team and open to anyone who wanted to participate.

The play was such a success that Ann Jellicoe decided to promote the creation of other such experiments. She therefore set up the Colway Theatre Trust to explore the concept. Among the hundreds of plays which belong to the genre now, we propose to concentrate on the seven community plays which were written for the city of Dorchester since 1985, along the principles defined by Jellicoe. They are all about some part of the history of the city and its inhabitants, and produced and performed by its inhabitants. The first was *Entertaining Strangers*, written by then established playwright David Edgar in 1985 and directed by Ann Jellicoe, with Jon Oram as her assistant. Ann Jellicoe then wrote and directed *Under the God* in 1989. Andrew Dickson, who had been music director in the first two experiments, turned playwright and wrote *Running Still* in 1996. Rupert Creed was asked to write *Fire from Heaven* by the Dorchester Community Plays Association (DCPA) in 2002. David Edgar returned and co-wrote with Stephanie Dale *A Time to Keep* in 2007. Rupert Creed also came back with *Drummer Hodge* in 2014. Finally, Stephanie Dale wrote *Spinning the Moon*,[1] which was to open in April 2020, though its creation is postponed in the context of the Coronavirus crisis. Beyond showing the exceptional endurance of the form, this long list also reveals a filiation in the creative process: people who get involved are often so in the long term, and following the precepts of many 1970s Fringe experiments, change roles and learn new skills in the process itself.

The creation of a Dorchester community play involves a team of 4 or 5 professional writers, directors or music directors but one of its main principles is its inclusiveness: whoever shows up for casting will get a part in the play, even if the playwright must create it. All actors are amateurs even if many have become professional afterwards. There is no main part, as there is no central character. These characteristics stress some of the differences with immersive plays which are performed by professional actors, but they participate in creating a bond with the audience which is arguably even tighter because the participants and the audience are all inhabitants of the same city.

Moreover, the plays are created over a long period of time, usually 18 months, which allows to build real connections and relationships, as the professional team must settle in the town. In that regard, the way actors and spectators describe the experience of the Community Play is often comparable to the way the audience of Immersive Theatre describe their experience:

> Regular theatre audiences can leave a performance elated and enlightened, but in time those feelings generally fade away. Here is the community play, an art that touches people to an extent that adjusts their long-term attitudes and changes their lives. I receive letters and meet people years after their plays are over who tell me this is so. (Oram in Dale and Edgar 129)

We may note the use of the possessive which underlines the appropriation of the play by the participants, but these words are also comparable to the reactions of many spectators of Immersive Theatre, who cannot really define when the experience ends. Daniel Schulze thus writes about Immersive creations: "It is almost sublime to notice that this performance seemingly never ends. It mirrors the real world in that it goes on and on and on, it has no discernible beginning or end" (170). If Schulze here takes the standpoint of the spectator, the process is similar for all the participants of community plays who feel exhilarated, who often take part generation after generation and play after play and who experience a lasting sense of bonding. Similarly, Josephine Machon writes about immersive theatre: "If large-scale you may feel that there is no ending, that a party has begun in the bar. There is a very strong sense of community and shared experience as people chat over drinks, mill around or head to public transport together. […] The experience bleeds into the real world" (55). The participants of a community play tend to see themselves as members of a large family, much like Ariane Mnouchkine's company *Théâtre du Soleil*. There are indeed not only huge casts of actors and musicians but also dozens of participants who help with costumes, design, administration, organisation, people of all ages from babies in their mothers' arms to 90-year-olds, disabled people, unemployed people. This diverse but united community is described by former participants

in letters that Ann Jellicoe quotes in her book, *Community Plays: How to Put Them On*:

> We were a motley collection of people—from a window cleaner to a University lecturer, from factory workers and unemployed to top professionals in various fields, from schoolchildren to ancient people. […] As a result of this new friendships were formed, old ones renewed, history was relived, there were new interests, a fresh sense of comradeship, of belonging, of achievement and an acceptance of us "furriners" by the original Kirtonians. (260)

The letter, written by a new inhabitant of Crediton, emphasises the inclusiveness of the experience. That feeling of finding a large community to which you belong, not only for the time of the creation of the play, but years and decades after it, is probably the contemporary version of the Christian congregation which also found itself galvanised and reunited through the participation in Mysteries in the Middle Ages. The Vicar of Dorchester himself explained, when he participated in *ES* and accepted that the Church be used as a stage: "For two months the church was a real centre and real life went on in it. We had contact with many people we would otherwise never have touched—and they were so grateful and co-operative" (Jellicoe 40). The social purpose of community plays is made clear through these testimonies, and seems at odds with the concept of Immersive Theatre where spectators are considered as individuals, especially in the creations of Punchdrunk, as Felix Barrett, the artistic director of the company, explains to Rose Biggin:

> The whole thing with Punchdrunk is it's always for the individual. So even if it was a larger scale show, an audience of two thousand people, it's still about each one as an individual, and we'd still want to make sure every single one of them had their own experience they had ownership of, and there were enough beats of intimacy and that panic-inducing alone time. (201)

The lexical field of individualism is here prevalent, and goes along with that of Capitalism as the participants are meant to own their experience. On the contrary, the community play is a shared property. If this quotation seems to contradict Machon's "strong sense of

community and shared experience," one may also note that we have so far been concentrating on the community of actors, or participants in the community play, whereas Barrett comments on the spectator's perspective. We shall now look at the reception of Community Plays and try to assess the degree of immersion for the audience.

One of the main aspects shared by community plays and Immersive Theatre is the fact that they are site-specific: performed in barns, schools, factories or castles, they reject the traditional space of the theatre building and reinvent well-known spaces, turning them into heterotopias, to take up Michel Foucault's analysis. Where Foucault defined theatres as heterotopias, spaces cut from the real world while utopias are localised physically, community plays and immersive theatre conquer real spaces, devoted to social activities throughout the year, and transform them for the spectators into heterotopias through the experience of the performance. When their children's school or their church is turned into a performance space, they acquire a new and long-lasting meaning for the spectators of the Community Play, a feeling which is shared by the spectators of Punchdrunk's play *Kabeiroi*, who saw the familiar streets of London differently after their experience.

Both forms also follow the principles of environmental theatre as defined by Richard Schechner: the audience and the actors share the same space constantly, and follow the action in a promenade production. Participation is therefore almost unavoidable, as the spectators walk about and around the actors and interact with them. As early as 1978, Ann Jellicoe had understood that a moving audience tended to make spectators more active:

> [T]his audience was locked into an extraordinary experience, *The Reckoning* was a promenade production which was still very rare at that time. […] [W]e found a physical form which reinforced the idea of involvement. The audience was part of the action, even those who were seated became a backdrop. (5)

Quite tellingly, Jellicoe here writes about the spectator's "experience," a term which recurs in the description of Immersive Theatre,

and which corresponds, according to Patrice Pavis, to site-specific performances:

> Lorsque le théâtre est "hors de soi" : sorti de son lieu traditionnel, fermé et institutionnel, lorsqu'il déborde sur la rue ou dans n'importe quel cadre non spécifiquement créé pour lui, il devient *site-specific*, c'est-à-dire : *in situ*. Il est alors conçu non comme un lieu à remplir, une tâche à accomplir, mais comme une expérience qui part des conditions concrètes du lieu. (263)

The only time when the more traditional form of staging, with a proscenium arch, a curtain, and sometimes a fourth wall, appears on stage in a community play is for plays within the play: then the actual spectators find themselves on the same level as the characters-turned-spectators, discovering the entertainment meant for them all. In Immersive plays the separation of audience and actors is sometimes underlined by the masks: it seems that in both forms, more traditional separations of audience and actors sometimes reappear, the better to emphasise the difference with moments of communion and bonding. In community plays, the play-within-the-play is usually situated at the beginning. In *FH*, "[t]he play proper starts with music that draws everybody's attention and establishes a rhythmic beat. Cast leave off from their improvising and focus on the imminent entrance. A masked and costumed carnival procession enters to the rhythm" (2). Here "the play proper" is not the community play but the procession within the Community Play. The cast had been improvising as stallholders of a merry fair organised before the play itself, as some sort of half-real half-fictional frame, and had then played the part of spectators to the procession.

But if the form definitely leads to the immersion of the spectators, the content, or message of community plays shares the same goal. As the action travels back and forth in time, the spectators become archeologists. Déborah Prudhon, when describing the immersants' experience in *Kabeiroi*, also uses the metaphor of archeology: "Les participants, au cours de leur aventure, remontent le temps, traversant une à une les strates de différentes époques – et de différents lieux – dans ce qui évoque un procédé archéologique" (323). The beginning

of *ES* plays on the same confusion between past and present: "Good evening. My name is…, and I'm a real person. There are photocopies of various documents concerned with the characters in the play you're about to see" (13). The action of the play, which starts in 1984, jumps backwards in time (1870-1850-1828) and forwards again to the time of the performance. What is more, the characters are all actual people who lived in Dorchester, some of whom may be the ancestors of the spectators, of the actors, or of people they know. *ES* set a precedent, which Stephanie Dale followed in *SM*. Her play focuses on the Trenchards, a noble family of Dorchester in the 16th century whose well-known descendants still reside in the same Manor today.

Thus blurring the line between reality and fiction, past, present and future, actors and spectators, community plays immerse their audience into a world whose boundaries are difficult to define. Very often, and as was the case in *FH* quoted above, fairs are organised before the show, creating a liminal space where the spectators progressively enter the world of fiction. In *RS* the composite quality of space is symbolised by the objects which are turned into props: "Many of the cast are involved as stallholders or punters. […] [I]n the booths are lots of bits and pieces from the rest of the show" (1). At some point, as one of the stallholders begins complaining, an activist shouts: "Can someone from the community play please sort this out?" (2). The spectators are left to wonder whether the play has begun or whether there really is a problem delaying it. Spectators of immersive plays very often share those feelings, mistaking "real people" for characters in the play, or spaces meant to be out of bounds for spaces to be explored. In Community Plays, these liminal passages are also occasions for the spectators to participate in the action. In *TK* for instance:

> [D]uring the interval, the audience becomes gradually aware that everything on sale from costumed SALESPEOPLE—drinks, snacks, merchandise—is contraband. In addition, selected members of the audience are approached and asked to "look after" items. At the end of the interval, EXCISE MEN raid the refreshments and merchandise stalls, dragging the salespeople away […]. They also arrest costumed CITIZENS who have

> received contraband items to "look after". None of the real audience with contraband will be arrested, but they don't know that. (75)

Nevertheless, a striking difference appears between Immersive Theatre and Community Plays: when the former aims at entertaining the audience and sharing powerful emotions, the latter also tests the ethics of the spectators.

Of course, the sheer number of participants in community plays is bound to arouse strong feelings in the audience. Just as in a stadium when thousands of fans sing together to boost their team's morale, the hundreds of participants who mix with the spectators, telling them terrible stories of deprivation and death or expressing their joy at weddings or victories after deadly wars and epidemics, will quite effectively share strong communal pain or elation. The spectators of Immersive Theatre similarly recount feelings of fear or bliss because the plays address their bodies and not their intellect: as Déborah Prudhon describes, "[l]'immersant, gagné par un sentiment d'insécurité et d'appréhension plus ou moins important, se recentre sur lui-même et, de manière instinctive, devient plus conscient de son propre corps" (312). But the community plays go further, testing the moral limits of the spectators. Jon Oram thus asks:

> How would you react under pressure? Do you change in extreme situations? What can you discover about yourself as you respond to a threatening event? You can only make these discoveries inside the events. These are the boundaries I want to push—where the audience learns something about themselves because they are placed inside situations, rather than watching other characters respond in theirs. (Oram in Dale and Edgar 132)

This difference between Community Plays and Immersive Theatre springs, we argue, from the fact that community plays aim at politicising the spectators. Born in the 1970s, in the wake of a strong second wave of political theatre in Britain, the form was seen as a means not only to spread a message or an ideology well to the left of conventional politics, but also to test it directly on the audience, through their connection with the actors.

The will to belong to a community, even to create one, is in itself an ideological statement, which materialises when the professional team starts living in the city, as the creative process begins. Some immersive plays work along the same lines. In their conversation with Josephine Machon, Bill Mitchell and Sue Hill describe how their company worked for 6 months prior to the performance of the immersive play *The Passion* to collect stories and images in the city where it was set:

> WildWorks collaborated in the streets, malls and social clubs of Port Talbot, finding stories, memories and images of the place. [The play] resonated with the past and present narratives of the place and its inhabitants […]. Over 1200 community members took part as writers, musicians, singers, performers, makers, stewards, messengers, angels and demons. (17).

The term "community members" here is certainly not random, and once more underlines the links and filiation between the two theatrical experiments. Community plays embody in their very form and creative process the idea of an immersion of all participants. This is even more striking during the performances themselves, and has led Jon Oram to create the concept of the "social actor": "a social actor somehow has permission to implicate the audience in the drama, *because* this is their home territory; the actors and audience are neighbours" (Oram in Dale and Edgar 131, my emphasis). The conjunction here underlines the causal link between the formal characteristics of the community play and their consequences in terms of reception: because all participants have known each other for years, empathy is easy, and spectators become involved participants almost seamlessly. Both cast and audience are equally bound to become participants: spectators who discover the plot are thereby invited to get involved as people other than themselves, as a jury, a mob, mourners at a funeral, revellers at a wedding or Quakers at a meeting. The cast must work as a collective, an ensemble (especially as the plays are interspersed with songs), not only among themselves but also with the audience (who will invariably be asked to sing along). The play here is a catalyst which allows the community to come together, and the energy released in the process is quite mesmerising. But does the community thereby formed have a uniform political stance? The work of Immersive

Theatre has recurrently been deemed conservative and individualistic, working towards a fragmentation of society and embodying the values of Capitalism. But how can we take for granted that the feelings and political views of the community of Dorchester are more progressive than those of the individuals who participate in an immersive play? In a conversation I had with Stephanie Dale in January 2019, the playwright explained how the Community Play Committee made sure that the play would not alienate part of the audience who are, in this relatively wealthy town of the South West of England, predominantly conservative. On the other hand, the participants in the plays themselves are mostly liberal and left-wing, as are invariably the playwrights. The play-texts will nevertheless consistently avoid being too confrontational, and will voice different views on contemporary issues, always resorting to light humour and circumventing issues that are too divisive. The last play *SM* for instance expresses both anti- and pro-Brexit views and the ending is consensual: after having laughed together at their neighbours' adverse political views, all the citizens will sing along and join in the chorus.

The ideology of Dorchester Community Plays is indeed at times conservative and at times liberal, blending the traditional Christian values of the country and the vision of a more inclusive, multicultural and multi-confessional future. The play *FH* is a good example: taking place in the first decades of the 17th century, the first act seems to take sides with the Puritans as the new vicar, who wants to reform the city, finds himself expressing universal values of compassion and wishing for a more equal distribution of wealth:

> Mr. Gould we have a Christian duty to provide for our neighbours—the elderly, the sick—those who are unable to look after themselves. What I've seen is offensive. Children are starving. Beggars line the streets- and don't tell me they are all just work shy-I'm no friend to the idle but what I see in Dorchester is extreme- there is great wealth and great poverty—I am suggesting that some of that wealth should go where it's needed most—in caring for our own- to do otherwise is ungodly. (24)

The fire of the title is seen as coming from heaven to punish the inhabitants for their dissolute habits. But the second act then coun-

terbalances this ideological stance by showing the hypocrisy, duplicity and selfishness of supporters of Puritanism as Royalist troops enter the town. The Civil War is depicted from the perspective of the people of Dorchester and their local and individual interests. This is not to say that individualism is upheld as a moral stance or political philosophy, but rather that by looking at History from the point of view of people's stories, or people's History, the spectators may identify and understand the complexities of conflicts, whether they be between families, political parties or countries. But beyond teaching a lesson, are community plays more effective than traditional politically committed theatre as an instrument for sensitisation and mobilisation?

Both immersive plays and community plays have been criticised for their lack of political backbone, the first considered as a commercial product and the second as amateur and bland. We argue on the contrary that community plays, and indeed Immersive Theatre when it is communal and not intent on one-on-one experiences, may be political in content, but are certainly political in form, because of, or thanks to, their immersive qualities: when the audience is considered not as an outsider but as an insider, an active participant, and a co-producer of the work of art, not merely someone who comes to learn something, or be entertained by others, but someone who creates alongside the actors, then the political content and impact is not merely potentially in the message, but in the form, in the process of creation.

Far from separating and excluding the outsider, as is often claimed, the form of the community play, because it is immersive for the spectators, transforms them from passive viewers into active participants and co-creators complicit in the action. As boundaries between insiders (actors) and outsiders (spectators) are blurred, the spectators are not only responding to the play or to the actors, but to themselves. This is how Sarah Weston, who is not from Dorchester and felt first at odds with the rest of the audience, describes her experience:

> In *Drummer Hodge* there was a scene where women passed through the crowd asking for donations to the war effort. Watching, I realised that I myself was part of this general 'crowd', the general mass of Dorchester

> was also me, and the women came to me directly and asked for donations. In this instant, I did not feel like an audience member targeted for some tokenistic audience participation, but a conscious person being asked a moral and political question about whether I should donate to this cause. (9)

Thanks to two staging conventions, the promenade systematised by Ann Jellicoe and the concept of the "social actor" as theorised by Jon Oram, the spectators of the community play become gradually involved in the community and placed in situations where they have to take sides and act. The role granted to the audience follows Jacques Rancière's definition of an emancipated spectator: "That is what the word 'emancipation' means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body. […] It was the reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time, work and leisure" (Rancière 2009: 19). Even further, and as Rancière suggests, form takes precedence over the message in terms of efficacy: far from preaching to the already converted, the community plays reach out and meet the spectators on their own ground, and rather than confronting them, physically and politically guide and accompany them towards a shared perspective on the world. In Rancière's words, in a chapter entitled "Les paradoxes de l'art politique" which is not part of the English version of *The Emancipated Spectator*:

> Le problème alors ne concerne pas la validité morale ou politique du message transmis par le dispositif représentatif. Il concerne ce dispositif lui-même. Sa fissure laisse apparaître que l'efficacité de l'art ne consiste pas à transmettre des messages, donner des modèles ou des contre-modèles de comportement ou apprendre à déchiffrer les représentations. Elle consiste d'abord en dispositions des corps, en découpage d'espaces et de temps singuliers qui définissent des manières d'être ensemble ou séparés, en face de ou au milieu de, dedans ou dehors, proches ou distants. (Rancière 2008: 61)

The very formal characteristics of community plays, and their particular immersive techniques, are probably why they are politically

effective. If we follow Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of "art relationnel," we understand how Immersive Theatre can be effective not only in revealing individuals to themselves through emotional and sensitive experiences, but also in revealing them as part of a society. Theatre outside the limits of theatre buildings and traditional staging methods can become a place where alternative forms of social interaction are built, where moments of constructed conviviality are enjoyed live, where audiences find a voice, a role, an identity within the new community that is built through and by the performance itself.

Ann Jellicoe's own words certainly best express that wish:

> If I were to sum up the work of the Colway Theatre Trust and what I hope it is trying to achieve, I would say that it has allowed us to glimpse a vision of theatre and art which is part of life, not simply set aside in some special building which we walk by and ignore. We are beginning to value and indeed look for excitement, reassurance, insight, sensitivity that art can offer us, and in experiencing these things together, becoming more friendly and open towards each other (5-6).

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[1] David Edgar's *Entertaining Strangers* is referred to as ES throughout this article, Ann Jellicoe's *Under the God* as UG, Andrew Dickson's *Running Still* as RS, Rupert Creed's *Fire from Heaven* as *FH* and *Drummer Hodge* as *DH*, Stephanie Dale and David Edgar's *A Time to Keep* as TK, and Stephanie Dale's *Spinning the Moon* as *SM*.

Engaging the audience through immersion and displacement. A Case Study of *domaine nomade* by Laurent Pichaud

Séverine Ruset

Abstract: *Domaine nomade* at the Lesdiguière Hotel-School is a site-specific artwork by choreographer Laurent Pichaud that was programmed in March 2019 in Grenoble by the Centre de Développement Chorégraphique National Le Pacifique. It is a hybrid piece, at the crossroads of promenade, site-specific and participatory performance, where audience members experience a series of "intermittent immersions." Based on a joint analysis of the artwork, its production context and the choreographer's words, this paper adopts a socio-aesthetic perspective to investigate the conception of the relationship between artist, oeuvre and audience that is defended through this way of "plac[ing] the audience at the heart of the work" (Machon 21). The objective is twofold: on the one hand, to define the ends to which Laurent Pichaud alternates techniques to immerse and displace; on the other hand, to see how these ends fit with the values usually associated with the subsidised sector of French performing arts, where immersion and participation are increasingly used to draw out relational dialogue.

Résumé : Création *in situ* du chorégraphe Laurent Pichaud, *domaine nomade* au lycée Lesdiguières a été présentée par le Centre de Développement Chorégraphique National Le Pacifique à Grenoble en mars 2019. C'est une œuvre hybride, à la croisée de la déambulation, de la danse située et de la performance participative, qui implique les spectateurs dans une série d'« immersions intermittentes ». Fondé sur une analyse conjointe de la proposition artistique, de son contexte de production et de la parole du chorégraphe, cet article adopte une perspective socio-esthétique pour interroger la manière singulière dont le chorégraphe « place le public au centre de la création » (Machon 21), ainsi que la conception des relations entre artiste, œuvre et spectateur qui sous-tend sa démarche. L'objectif est double : il s'agit d'une part de

cerner les enjeux de l'alternance entre procédés immersifs et « déterritorialisants » orchestrée par Laurent Pichaud, d'autre part d'examiner comment ces enjeux s'accordent avec les valeurs du théâtre public français, qui recourt de plus en plus à la participation et à l'immersion pour refonder sa relation au public et à la population.

Keywords: Site-specific dance, Public Theatre, participatory art, immersion, promenade performance

Mots-clés : Danse *in situ*, théâtre public, art participatif, immersion, déambulation artistique

The present paper focuses on *domaine nomade*, a site-specific artwork by choreographer Laurent Pichaud, as it was presented at the Lesdiguière Hotel-School in Grenoble in March 2019. Laurent Pichaud is an experimental artist, whose practice explores perceptual experience, and whose creations often root themselves in spaces that are not specifically dedicated to dance or theatre. *Domaine nomade* is the generic title of a recurring project of his, mixing dance and visual arts. At the Lesdiguières Hotel-School, it was developed through an artist-in-residence program hosted by the Centre de Développement Chorégraphique National (CDCN) Le Pacifique in Grenoble, during which Laurent Pichaud immersed himself within the hotel-school and workshopped its corporealities with some students, who then became the performers of the piece. The result is a hybrid art form, at the crossroads of promenade, site-specific and participatory performance, where audience members experience a series of "intermittent immersions" into interwoven worlds that are all inextricably linked to the hotel-school.

While sharing decisive qualities with the range of work embraced in the term "immersive theatre," starting with the fact that it is both experiential and audience-centered (Freydefont), *domaine nomade* differentiates itself from the strand of practice described by Josephine

Machon as "*fully* immersive" (57) in a key fashion, in that it regularly breaks the moments of immersion it creates, thus preventing the absorption of its audience into the piece. At the same time, by "staging" non-artists, it reduces the gap between the piece and the audience.

Based on a joint analysis of the artwork, its production context and the choreographer's words, this paper adopts a socio-aesthetic perspective to investigate the conception of the relationship between artist, œuvre and audience that is defended through this particular way of "plac[ing] the audience at the heart of the work" (Machon 21). My objective is twofold: on the one hand, to define the ends to which, in the creative process and the resulting art piece, Laurent Pichaud alternates tactics to immerse and displace, the latter both physically and metaphorically; on the other hand, to see how these ends fit with the values usually associated with the subsidised sector of French performing arts (known as *théâtre public*, even though it includes non-theatrical organisations). It is indeed my hypothesis that *domaine nomade* is indicative of a growing trend in this sector, that shakes up both the ways in which the performing arts are produced and presented, and the criteria by which their quality is measured. By questioning the discrepancies that exist between Pichaud's legitimizing discourse and the principles that have underpinned the definition of artistic value in French public theatre up to now, I will be discussing the development of a new vision that uses immersion and participation to draw out relational dialogue.

Immersive Approaches to Nomadic Aims

Laurent Pichaud's residence at the CDCN Le Pacifique in Winter 2019 gave him the opportunity to produce an artistic piece at the Lesdiguières Hotel-School with a class of 15-year-olds whose teachers had responded favourably to Le Pacifique's proposal to develop artwork with the choreographer. A few resident volunteers were also involved. Every time he had the opportunity to work with the students, which was two days a week for three months, Pichaud immersed himself within the hotel-school. That allowed him to get fully acquainted with

its different facilities, which include the training spaces, the residents' boarding house and the comfortable student-run hotel. He would sleep in the boarding house, eat in the canteen, attend practical classes, and thus share some of the daily life of the students, to get a better understanding of the site and the ways it is "inhabited" by its users. Taking in the Lesdiguières Hotel-School in such a manner requires a state of perceptive openness which Pichaud has come to describe as a key skill in his practice. An important part of the choreographer's work does indeed take part outside of conventional venues, in spaces which become the very subject of his work. He does not just create within them, but with and from them, which makes it necessary to assimilate altogether their physical and architectural qualities, their sociological dimensions and the memories and perceptions attached to them. In keeping with the definition of site-specificity given by Mike Pearson, this strand of his work is "conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars" of its site and the people it finds there (Pearson and Shanks 23).

That such work relies, during the creative process, on the immersion of the artist within a milieu he does not belong to, before inviting the audience to enter that milieu, albeit for a short time, during the performance, does not suffice to make it wholly immersive. According to Josephine Machon:

> Immersive theatre is discernible as that practice which actually allows you to be in "the playing area" with the performers, physically interacting with them. […] The direct participation of the audience member in the work ensures she or he *inhabits* the immersive world created. (67)

Domaine nomade does introduce the audience into the same "playing areas" as the performers, and physical interaction does indeed take place, as we will see, between performers and audience, but the production does not compose a consistent world, with its "own order and logic" (Machon 27), that could give the audience a sensation of dwelling. Among the factors that prevent the audience from feeling like "inhabitants" of the hotel-school, one of the most decisive is their "freedom" (or lack thereof); while the activity of the school

continues unchanged during the performance, and they are able to circulate among the students moving between classes and the hotel guests themselves, they are not at liberty to wander where they wish. They are collectively guided, in what could therefore be described as a promenade performance. In the choreographer's notes, the piece is even introduced as a "guided tour through dance" allowing "to explore emblematic sites within the school." By offering a selection of viewpoints on the objects they intend to unveil, traditional guided tours do not easily lend themselves to immersive experience, insofar as they maintain a distance between these objects, the guides and the visitors, while providing insights through verbal explanations instead of "sensual engagement" (Machon 75). *Domaine nomade* does however strictly differ from that traditional guided tour model. First of all, the guides are, along with the choreographer, the students who were involved in the creation of the piece. They are not in a position of exteriority, but integral parts of the site, which they give "an understanding of through a variety of sensitive bodily states—as students, cooks, receptionists, waiters, adolescents" (Le Pacifique). Secondly, the "tour" makes no attempt to explain anything; it mostly reveals the site through choreographing it, allowing the audience to see and experience it in ways which are intended to free the imagination attached to it. Through the different stages of the promenade, the activities the school is usually dedicated to are not shown *per se*, let alone reconstituted; they are poeticized, as the programme "in seven movements" distributed to the audience upon their arrival indicates, presenting the sequences to come via a blending of culinary and choreographic imagery. The "movements" do not aim to stage the inner workings of each location, but merely to translate them into new forms of corporal experiences. For example, in the "kitchen-lab," the audience surrounds the kitchen counters, where a choreography with hands and flour unfolds, playing off the expressive and sensory possibilities of the technique and rigorous discipline at work within kitchen brigades. In another sequence, the audience are led in small groups into the intimacy of a hotel room, where they are told the story of a couple of clients who soon join them in the room through haunt-

ing shadow casting. The audience's relationship with the action is thus reinvented from space to space, while systematically being framed in a tight proximity. Performers and audience members stay generally very close, sometimes brushing against each other, sometimes mingling. The audience are therefore given great access to the performers' small movements and facial expressions. Their attention is drawn to the mutual dimension of proximity, as they become aware that their reactions and moves are in turn equally perceived by the performers and can have an impact on the performance. The audience are all the more conscious of it as the performers are non-professionals; they have not learned to control what they convey to the audience, so that their attitude sometimes betrays their discomfort and nervousness. We will come back to this uncontained dimension of the artwork. For the time being, I would like to underline the fact that those moments of fragility bring the reality of the school and the context of the production to the forefront. They keep the audience from being fully immersed in the piece, but they do not impede interaction. On the contrary, they tend to encourage it, as they make the audience aware that the performance is not "locked" but permeable to the audience's reactions.

At other moments, the distance between audience and performers is obliterated. Indeed, in several sequences, the audience members become part of the action, the performers treating them as if they were hotel guests. Such fictional interaction is obviously informed by the actual location of the piece, as it refers to the professional realm of the school, but it nevertheless takes the audience by surprise; nothing in the publicity has prepared them for being entertained as clients of a high-class hotel. They are plunged into this fictitious situation from the second they enter the school building, where they are greeted and taken care of by a personal guide, who accompanies them to a sweet buffet. This experience is continued intermittently throughout the play, at the end of which they find themselves comfortably seated in the lounge bar, sipping a cocktail, while a concert of glasses and other diverse objects takes place around them. An immersive set-up thus structures *domaine nomade*, one that "draw[s] the individual audience

member into the process of becoming aware of the full scope of the senses" (Machon 75)—with special emphasis, in an environment largely dedicated to catering, on the sense of taste. Although this immersive set-up is activated on many occasions, it is however regularly interrupted. The moves between the different "stations" of the promenade are indeed not dramatized, so that the audience members regularly revert to the status of outside visitors, free to talk to each other, to comment on what they have just been part of, if not to discuss the project with the choreographer, as I witnessed during the performance I attended. No attempt is made to "engross" the audience throughout the performance, as could be expected from a fully immersive production. This is prevented by the highly ambiguous nature of the piece, which is a choreographic performance programmed by a significant institution in the field of French dance, a guided tour of a hotel-school, an immersive experience in a hotel and the presentation of an arts and cultural education project all rolled into one. It regularly displaces the audience by shifting them between the different postures those situations bring about, allowing them to feel successively, and sometimes concurrently, like tourists, hotel guests, participant observers of a social environment, participants in an artistic process and of course audience members. In doing so, it fully integrates them into the artwork that would not be the same without them, while taking them on a "nomadic experience," both physically and perceptively, as it makes them move between different locations and "different ways of being a spectator."

A Risky Venture from a Production Point of View

If Pichaud's piece is nomadic in nature, its production model is sedentary. The six pieces so far gathered under the banner of *domaine nomade* are site-specific in the strictest sense of the term: they are bound to the place they have stemmed from, and therefore cannot be re-presented in a different location. Although they are underpinned by a unifying ambition to engage the audience, and all undertake to do so through a promenade performance, each of them is unique, with very

different choreographies, so that their production means cannot be pooled together. Having said that, production costs remain relatively modest, as they are devised exclusively with the resources available in situ. In the case of the Lesdiguières Hotel-School production for instance, the choreographer used the bare minimum of lights and technical equipment. Neither did he work with professional artists, using the students as his only performers. However, this cost-cutting is not enough to encourage, economically speaking, these types of projects. Not only can these pieces not be toured, but they cannot have a long run either, since neither their location nor their performers can be made available for more than a short space of time. All in all, *domaine nomade* at the Lesdiguières Hotel-School was only performed six times in the course of three days. Its format also imposed a very limited audience capacity of twenty-five people per performance. Eventually, due to the pedagogical framework it was linked to, Le Pacifique decided, in agreement with Pichaud, to make the tickets free. Needless to say that such a production model would hardly be compatible with the profit-driven mindset of commercial theatre. Yet, as we will see, it is not necessarily in keeping with the kind of projects French public theatres have been favouring in their programming either, although that reality may be undergoing a shift, which I will discuss later on in the paper. For now I would like to investigate the aspects of the piece that could trigger reluctance from public theatre institutions, the exception of Le Pacifique notwithstanding.

In the subsidised sector of the performing arts, productions are very much expected to tour, both for economic reasons and outreach purposes. That is the condition on which they can be widely seen. Many of the immersive proposals that have been developed in public theatre networks recently, such as *Artefact* by Joris Mathieu or *24/7* and *Céto* by Collectif INVIVO, are compatible with theatre black boxes and can therefore circulate around conventional distribution channels. Most of the off-stage work that is currently gaining ground in the programming of performing arts institutions is also conceived in ways that make it possible for it to tour. That also applies to site-responsive productions, inspired by particular places, that can be

adapted to different sites. This is for example the case with Mathilde Delahaye's "landscape theatre" play *Maladie ou Femmes modernes*, which was first performed in May 2019 in the commercial port of Valence (France), but which was then recreated for an old train storage facility near Tours in June later that year. Strict site-specificity is not however absent from the seasons of French public institutions, as it appeals both to their taste for unique events and their growing penchant to be more connected with their surroundings. This can be illustrated by the fact that situated tours or promenades by artists such as KompleX Kapharnaüm, Julie Desprairies, Philippe Ménard, Opéra Pagaï, BIÖffique théâtre, etc., are regularly commissioned by theatre and dance institutions. This quick survey suggests that the form of *domaine nomade* in Lesdiguières is not uncommon; it is therefore unlikely to act per se as a deterrent for performing arts programmers, so long as public subsidy permits to take it on. The same statement cannot be made about the fact that it is closely related to an arts and cultural education project.

Educational programs, and more generally actions related to audience development, obviously constitute a large part of the activities of public theatre, in accordance with its mission to contribute to cultural democratisation. Since the development of cultural mediation in the 1980s, practices to create a closer connection between artworks and audiences have taken a strong hold in the day-to-day of subsidised institutions. Artistic creation however remains their primary focus, as does their claim to be hubs for professional artists thriving for excellence. French performing arts institutions have indeed been cautious to differentiate themselves from socio-cultural approaches that have been, as Laurent Fleury highlights in *Du Théâtre amateur* (Mervant-Roux 51), largely discredited since the Ministry of Cultural Affairs distanced itself from popular educational organisations in the 1960s, creating a rift between amateur and professional practices. As a consequence of this cultural heritage, artists associated with performing arts institutions (or willing to be so) only involve themselves in work with amateurs or residents to a certain extent. Investing in them "too" often and in "too" conspicuous a way exposes them to

the risk of being downgraded from the status of "artist-creator" to the one of "artist-animator." Though this is gradually changing through the influence of artists such as choreographers Jérôme Bel and Boris Charmatz or theatre makers Ahmed Madani, Mohamed El Khatib and Didier Ruiz, who have been developing significant work with non-professionals, art produced with non-artists, particularly within a pedagogical framework such as the one provided by the Lesdiguières Hotel-School, has long been, as Pichaud pointed out in an interview, "either devalued by the artistic field, which considered them as third-rate work, or appropriated by institutions, which treated them as tools to encourage artistic appreciation." For the choreographer however, *domaine nomade* in Lesdiguières is first and foremost an artwork that draws its value from its aesthetic qualities and the way it engages the audience. He is fully aware of how the students can benefit from such an experience as they develop their body awareness and deconstruct their physical habits, all the more as their immersion into the creative process mirrors his immersion into the world of the school. But the pedagogical dimension of his work is not what motivated him first, even though it was a substantial corollary to his creative approach. His primary motivation was artistic, which paradoxically helped him overcome the impediments related to the pedagogical framework he had chosen to operate within. Those impediments are not insignificant. In our interview, Pichaud particularly stressed the time constraints he had to deal with. While most of the students involved in the project did not have artistic training, which presumably called for reinforced support, the time allocated to the project in their school planning remained limited. Each of the seven sequences of *domaine nomade* thus only benefited from fifteen hours of rehearsals each, half of which were dedicated, as highlighted by the choreographer, to "motivating the students." Contrary to professional or even amateur dancers, students have not been predisposed to collaborate with a choreographer. They can be reluctant to do so, as Pichaud experienced in the *domaine nomade* that took place in the Georges Lamarques vocational high school in 2014, in association with the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rillieux-la-Pape. In that venture, which is the closest to

that of Lesdiguières in its process, the choreographer experienced very strong resistance from some students, whose comfort zone seemed particularly breached, and a few of whom ended up dropping out of both the project and the school. Within a very short time-frame, he had to revise his choreographic project, while watching over the well-being of the remaining students. As this can be seen as resorting to default options, one can only wonder why Pichaud would develop his artistic gesture in such a risky environment—and then repeat the experience in Lesdiguières—particularly when the constraints he embraces not only jeopardize his control over the piece, but also the recognition of it as a work of art. I will now analyse the reasons he provides and question how they play with the system of values at work within French public theatre.

Displacing Oneself, the Audience and Public Theatre Values

Pichaud justifies the risks he takes as an artist with projects such as *domaine nomade* at the Lesdiguières Hotel-School with two main arguments. First of all, he insists on his appetite for experimentation, which he considers to be at the core of his artistic identity. It is indisputable to him that working as an artist requires shifting one's grounds, displacing oneself, so that one can bring about what cannot be anticipated. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *déterritorisalisation* appears to me particularly apt in describing the artistic process he seeks to engage. In a way that is somewhat reminiscent of the two philosophers, Pichaud is indeed quite interested in the influence that a territory—the environment shared by a group of people—can have on what bodies are able to do, because the "codes", that is to say the rules, habits and logics by which that group secures a certain stability, inform their movements. What appeals to the choreographer in artistic creation is its ability to upend those codes and open up new possibilities for the body. This necessitates a *déterritorialisation*—a destabilisation of the environment, an evasion of its codes—which Pichaud provokes by moving away from the dance stage and immersing himself into new territories. He thus confronts different "codes,"

which in their turn get "decoded" (destabilised) in the process. This is what encourages him to develop site-specific work, co-created with non-professionals, in the uncomfortable conditions described above. As the choreographer would have it:

> Pure experimentation reveals things which are unfathomable. With these kinds of participants, in these kinds of risky projects, no one can anticipate the result. It is difficult, sometimes laborious, sometimes very painful to work like this. But it is the strength of the creative act.

If the means chosen by Pichaud, to deterritorialise—before "re-territorialising on the plane of [artistic] composition" (Deleuze and Guattari)—are specific to him, one can see that they are underpinned by an attachment to originality and unconventionality, which take from the "singularity regime" that has been defining the status of artists in our Western societies since romantic times (Heinich 2005). Those very values feature as decisive criteria in the appreciation of artistic quality in the world of French public theatre, which was built in the 20th century with the intention of producing high-quality performing arts for all, and which progressively established its artistic legitimacy on the premise that its relative independence from the market forces made it the place to encourage artistic risk. In the world of public theatre, excellence is very closely linked to artistic audacity (Ruset and Folco 19). On that basis, the values asserted by Pichaud are perfectly aligned with the ones officially defended by French performing arts institutions.

The second argument brought forward by Pichaud is fuelled by a distinctive concern for the audience. Whereas avant-garde experiments are often perceived as insulating the artists by cutting them off from "common sense expectations" (Heinich 2007), the choreographer is adamant to extend the benefits of the displacements he experiences, not only to the non-professionals he co-creates with, but also to spectators. Convinced that pulling himself out of conventional arts territory has allowed him to improve his bodily presence and stimulate his creativity, he aims at opening up similar possibilities for the audience. This fully determines the artistic stance of *domaine*

nomade. Firstly, it justifies the heterogeneous nature of the piece, that favours immersion, but in a discontinuous fashion, so that it is regularly interrupted. The "nomadic experience" thus created is intended to constantly unsettle the relationship between the performance and the audience, so that the latter question their position:

> My big horizon of expectations since I started doing in situ projects: how not to reproduce theatre, which is a reflex we all have, whether as an artist or as an audience member. As soon as someone starts dancing or acting artistically in a public space, a frontal rapport or a circle are formed; some kind of spatial predisposition immediately reproduces what I call the theatrical code. It is to this end of disrupting inbuilt reflexes that I create arrangements that call for different states of being a spectator, through intermixing immersivity, frontality if necessary, mobility. It is a way of enriching the experience of being in a location. […] The body of the visitor-spectator becomes decisive: he or she has to develop their own viewpoints, and therefore find their own place.

Secondly, Pichaud's ambition to engage the audience informs his choice not to collaborate with professional performers. The choreographer has come to believe that virtuosity and expertise tend to freeze the audience in a spectatorial posture. As he explained in our interview: "If I want to avoid recreating a theatrical code, I need to lower the spectacular tonicity of the performers." This has led him to advocate an "equivalence principle" between the performer and the audience, which is very much at work in *domaine nomade*, where he both creates with non-artists and resists the temptation to magnify the expertise they are developing at school. If his choreography feeds upon the professional gestures they are acquiring through their training, he offsets those gestures by framing them in sequences that erode familiarity, so that they do not appear as expert. This is intended to reinforce intercorporeal connection, which is already stimulated by the spatial proximity between audience and performers. As some studies suggest (Wildschut), sharing the same space as the dancers and grasping the variety of their movements up-close tends to accentuate kinesthetic empathy. By choreographing widely accessible movements, Pichaud intends to make the audience even more engaged. As "everything you

saw the performers do in Lesdiguières you could have done yourself: it brings the visitors back […] to their own corporeality and physical ability." In a display that is manifestly intended to encourage the audience to re-appropriate their bodies, despecialising movement, in the sense of making it accessible to non-specialists, appears a governing principle. That very principle however can be seen as running counter to a criterion for artistic quality that has been an integral part of the development of public theatre in France, that is to say the display of exceptional scenic presence. The performer, in the fields of theatre and dance alike, is expected to demonstrate mastery over his art both in skill and execution; the art itself depends largely upon this condition. With *domaine nomade* at the Lesdiguières Hotel-School, Pichaud renounces this "arti-centrism," as he ironically calls it, and welcomes the aforementioned "uncontained dimension of the work" which working with non-professionals unearths.

In spite of that non-conventional stance, *domaine nomade* in Lesdiguières was fully supported by the CDCN-Le Pacifique, not on educational terms, but as an oeuvre. This can be seen as an indication that the "social turn" in contemporary art (Bishop) is gaining ground within public theatre, in keeping with the trend analysed by Jen Harvie in *Fair Play:* "In performance and theatre, practices of immersing audiences within theatrical worlds and inviting them to participate there are no longer principally confined to their usual manifestations in applied performance contexts such as theatre-in-education" (1). Although some French performing arts institutions may program the pieces born from those practices at the tail-end of their seasons, mainly because they remain lukewarm towards approaches which they fear place social relevance over artistic quality, there are others, such as Le Pacifique, which give them a central place in the work they present and produce. The fact that Pichaud, who became an associate artist of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Grenoble in 2020, is benefiting from growing recognition in the French subsidised choreographic landscape after having been somewhat sidelined for many years can be seen as an illustration of that evolution. As performing arts institutions are increasingly urged by public authorities,

civic bodies and art-world professionals alike to revise their position in society and make more space for the people, they grow more and more open to taking audiences outside of their walls and to boosting participation, not only among their public, but among local residents at large. The recent surge of artistic forms claiming to be participatory, immersive, or both, has given rise to a proliferation of calls from the venues encouraging people to "plunge in," "engage," or "participate."

Whether one can conclude from those facts that a change of paradigm is under way within public theatre is a question that largely exceeds the remit of this paper, as it calls for a large-scope observation of the artworks programmed in the institutions and of the value systems they are both based and assessed upon. However, with the case of *domaine nomade*, we witness a change in the way the performing arts are considered; a change which may well impact their modes of production and presentation, but does not imply a radical reversal of the defining values of public theatre. Pichaud does not prioritise the creative process over the finished product, nor does he invalidate the question of aesthetics as some socially engaged artists tend to do (Bishop). He still stands for singularity and artistic quality – and his work is still valued for those reasons by Le Pacifique and the Centre Chorégraphique National de Grenoble. *Domaine nomade* urges a redefinition of the criteria by which artistic quality is gauged, by placing the emphasis, not on the polished delivery of the art form, but on the nature of the relationship created between the space and the participants (performers and audience alike) by combining immersive and displacing experiences. Performing arts institutions that open up to such aesthetic proposals do not overthrow the standards attached to public theatre. Like Le Pacifique and the Centre Chorégraphique National de Grenoble, who, incidentally, recently both pledged to "shatter the frontiers between genres and disciplinary boards to open wide our imaginary and make space for the immense possibilities of the collective" (La Trilogie, my translation), they nevertheless widen

the field of practices to which those standards are applied, in a direction that currently favours participatory endeavours.

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Immersive Shakespeares: Dive into Suspense and Macabre

Estelle Rivier-Arnaud

Abstract: While Shakespeare's plays are of course not the only reference in immersive theatre, they have particularly interested immersive theatre over the recent years. Triggering new perspectives of scenography and interpretation, immersion has proved to be a way for companies to reimagine Shakespeare's world while keeping the seventeenth-century language alive and "authentic." Quite blatantly, the productions tend to indicate that tragedies, particularly *Macbeth, Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet,* are more regularly explored. Why are these plays more fashionable than others? What are the conventions requested for these theatrical performances? Are these often-ephemeral installations an efficient way to approach Shakespeare's theatre, both structurally and aesthetically? With the help of the archives of the companies, this paper tries to account for the assets of immersive productions in Shakespearean adaptation today.

Résumé : Bien que Shakespeare ne constitue pas la seule référence dans ce domaine, ces dernières années, il a particulièrement intéressé le théâtre immersif. Parce qu'elle offre de nouvelles perspectives de scénographie et d'interprétation, l'immersion s'est avérée une façon pour les compagnies de ré-imaginer le monde de Shakespeare tout en conservant la langue du dix-septième siècle vivante et « authentique ». De manière frappante, les spectacles tendent à montrer que les tragédies, particulièrement *Macbeth, Hamlet,* ou *Roméo et Juliette,* sont plus régulièrement explorées. Pourquoi ces pièces sont-elles plus « à la mode » que d'autres ? Quelles sont les conventions requises par ces performances théâtrales ? Ces installations souvent éphémères s'avèrent-elles une façon efficace de mieux cerner la structure et l'esthétique du théâtre de Shakespeare ? À l'aide des archives des compagnies, cette étude tente de relever l'intérêt que présente le théâtre immersif dans le champ de l'adaptation shakespearienne aujourd'hui.

Keywords: Shakespeare, tragedies, Colab, Rebel and Misfits, Punchdrunk, macabre

Mots-clés : Shakespeare, tragedies, Colab, Rebel and Misfits, Punchdrunk, macabre

Introduction: All this "Place" is a Stage

While Gareth White writes: "Immersion implies access to the inside of the performance in some way […]" (221), Marcel Freydefont and Catherine Bouko define theatrical immersion as a specific category involving various processes and various audience responses. Freydefont subdivides theatrical immersion into four spatial categories—hermetic loci, playhouses, digital spaces and Augmented Reality scenes, and finally the theatre-within-the-theatre (10)—all of which triggering audience participation in distinct ways. All these spaces however share a common feature: they situate the audience at the heart of the action while favouring their relations in an altogether singular and communal experience. As for Bouko, she focuses on a single immersive theatrical expression including two intertwined approaches: one sensorial, the other dramaturgic. In each case, the "immersant"[1] must be fully receptive.

The notion of immersion should also be assessed in relation to other concepts. In another article, Bouko questions the "interactive" potential of immersive theatre (Bouko 2015: 29). She notes that the two notions—interaction and immersion—seem to have been misused by most critics over the recent years (Sekoff n.p.). Indeed, some of their principles are incompatible. For instance, the way information technology (I.T.) is used in an interactive process or the nature of the spectator's choice which is often computerized and formatted, are entities that theatrical immersion ignores, or considers very differently (concerning the notion of choice at least as we see later in this study). However, whether in interactive or immersive experiences, there is an active participation of the audience.[2] This federative function in par-

ticular will be taken into account in the analysis of the Shakespearean immersive productions discussed hereafter.

If the word "immersion" is not immediately evocative of early modern traditional theatre, it seems however that theatres' architecture, back in the sixteenth century, would initiate the oxymoronic *shared* and *individual* experience because of the audience *participation* in one way or another. Back then, the proximity between the audience and the actors was permanent. The position of the groundlings within the round-shaped open-air theatres, but also in more intimate indoor halls, led to a communication between the actors and the spectators who went in and out the theatre-space, reacted to the actors' words, thus potentially influencing the dramaturgy. Although being physically clear-cut, the separation between the fictive and the real worlds could eventually vanish because of the spaces (acting *vs* listening) encroaching upon each other. As Andrew Gurr explains, the conditions of performance, often disturbed by a number of pests like pickpockets and prostitutes but also by noisy eating habits and by gallants sitting on stage, modified the audience's perception of the dramatic action and their response to it:

> The most obtrusive habits were to be seen in the hall playhouses by the conspicuous gallants who sat on stools on the stage and added comments on the play, and in all the playhouses by the nut-cracking which was a favourite exercise for everybody. […] In fact nut-cracking was the only regular complaint apart from the prologue's customary plea for silence. (278)

Such features are not immediately reminiscent of those of twenty-first-century immersive performance, but at least they attest that attending a play was originally no restful entertainment. If Shakespeare's canon has become a suitable pool for exploratory production—let us but refer to digital or 3D experimentations[3]—this may partly result from the buoyant ambiance inherent to early performances, but also from today's popular knowledge of Shakespeare's major plays that, compared to his contemporaries', demand a constant and challenging renewal of its artistic embodiments.

As the following brief account highlights, the themes developed in Shakespeare's plays have increasingly triggered the interest of companies worldwide over the past decades. In June 2016, for instance, *As You like It* was turned into a promenade performance in Windsor Park, combining immersion, circus and music (Watch Your Head Company). In 2019, the same play was performed in the Abrams Planetarium hemispherical projection dome in Michigan University. The concept was entitled "Shakespeare Under the Stars" and plunged the audience into a highly visual production in a starry environment.[4] Yet, despite this apparent interest for Shakespeare's comedies, the tragedies and histories have recently inspired more recurrently the companies. The famous adaptation of *Macbeth* named *Sleep No More* by Punchdrunk that toured in the world between 2003 and 2019 has definitely engaged a new way of comprehending Shakespeare's theatre today. In 2017, a *Macbeth* "under the Stars" was set in Dubai (Constellation productions / UAE Ministry of Culture). The year after, *Macbeth, Come Like Shadows* (dir. Sean Patrick Higgins and Kelly Hummert, Rebel and Misfits) was performed with a cinematic scope in the dystopian ruins of a Scottish castle. Hummert had already staged a *Hamlet* called *See What I See* in 2016 as part of an Immersive Theatre Project including five Shakespearean plays. Two years later, in France this time, Léonard Matton set a version of *Hamlet* in a former factory well-named "Le Secret" situated in the heart of Paris.[5] Last but not least, *Romeo and Juliet* (Colab Theatre) was also a major performance held in London in 2017.

This non-exhaustive inventory leads us to a first question: why are the companies—whether amateur, academic or professional—so recurrently attracted by Shakespeare's dark plays? This acknowledgment triggers further interrogations that this paper will try to answer while leading the reader to a promenade into some of the productions here above mentioned: are immersive performances sufficiently challenging regarding Shakespeare's drama, both structurally and aesthetically? What are the new audiences' responses when early modern drama is at stake?

Towards a Revival of an Active Shakespearean Audience

The open-air round-shaped theatres of the early modern period—of which we have several copies in the world today[6]—used to entail a dynamic performance in which the audience members had a part to play. Firstly, because some of them were standing close to the thrust platform, if not sitting on it (Gurr 278), they could see the actors' faces very well, and possibly touch their garments.[7] Secondly, as revealed by historians, the actors' partitions could be altered according to the audience's reactions: "It is even possible that some of the more obscure jokes in Shakespeare's plays may be the result of impromptu remarks which became incorporated into the written script" (Hartnoll 81). The actors—more often under the guise of a prologue—requested the attention of all in order to moderate the noisy audience: "Still be kind, / And eke out our performance with your mind" (*Henry V* Chorus 3.0.34-35). Even though the audience was physically present in the playhouse, the Chorus's cue indicates that the most important participation needed from them was mental. Indeed, they had to imagine hard what was not shown by stage decoration nor performed by the actors. Interestingly enough, in Histories like *Henry V* involving many battles, the audience could serve as a make-belief. In scenes that suffered from the absence of number, the "thousand heads" of the audience members (*The Roaring Girl* in Gurr 277) could create the illusion of an army. Thus, early modern theatre was irremediably a shared space within which the success of a play lay on various criteria: the quality of the script and of the actors of course, but also the audience's spontaneous response to both.

The various quartos of Shakespeare's plays are another proof that the play-scripts were regularly amended according to audience's response. Words and actions would differ from one performance to another depending on the onlookers' commitment. Furthermore, the daylight that made the movements of the actors and of the props visible throughout the performance, limited illusionistic effects and consequently blurred the separation between public and private spaces.

Now, if we look closer at the features of immersive theatre, we can clearly acknowledge how it shares some of the characteristics of the Elizabethan theatre:

> [Immersive theatre] designate[s] a trend for performances which use installations and expansive environments, which have mobile audiences, and which invite audience participation. [It may include] performances that are intensely intimate, […] [some] that allow a little distance between spectator and performance […]. The work may contain a coherent narrative […] or may be […] dream-like […]. There may be [some] kind of technological mediation […] or advance communication with spectators […]. The work may take place in everyday spaces […] or in other found spaces, theatres or galleries. It is likely to be multi-sensory. (White 221)

From one of Josephine Machon's studies, we should also keep in mind the following characteristics: the immersive audience is "physically surrounded by another world. You are intensely aware of your habitat and the details of the space. […] You are upright, active, engaged in action with the artist with whom you share the space […]" (Machon 2013: 55).

Even if all the above-mentioned features were not exactly similar in Shakespeare's theatre, the multi-sensory component of the immersive practice and the impression of a shared experience with the actors were already present. Indeed, even if the audience was not required to touch the actors nor the set, they were so close to the latter—some invading the stage-space, others reacting to the characters' cues, all of them smelling the others around and being disturbed by the close presence of their fidgety neighbours—that they felt to be *within* the show.[8]

Today, immersive theatre often (though not always) invites the audience to walk into different spaces where they do not only witness but also physically take part in the action and may have to make drastic choices.[9] In the Dubai *Macbeth* in 2017, the audience was warned at their entrance: "Do not expect to be seated facing a stage. This is a promenade and immersive production: moving from scene-to-scene, finding random corners of action and corridors of madness." If, as we

have noticed before, Shakespeare's drama needs an active audience, we should wonder how immersion further challenges their response to it. Indeed, the active audience of the Renaissance has progressively been replaced by a more silent one over the centuries. In a traditional theatre experience, "you will sit and wait for the event to begin. […] The lights dim, you become quiet. The curtain [is] raised revealing another world" (Machon 2013: 55). Yet today, there is an apparent renewed need to experience a play from within in order to share the characters' ordeals differently, to grasp possible new meanings of the *praxis*, and to tackle theatrical life in odd and unexpected ways. In this context, Shakespeare's blood plays have undoubtedly triggered an increasing fascination if we consider the productions listed previously. In Shakespeare's time, people would also long for such fascination. Elizabethan theatregoers were attracted by sensational leisure like bear baiting or cock fighting. They enjoyed stories that involved noise, tears and battles even though they were made "[w]ith four or five most vile and ragged foils, / Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous" (*Henry V* Chorus 4.0.50-51). Still, while Shakespearean audiences implication was mental, the immersive audiences' involvement has now become physical.

In plays like *Macbeth,* the macabre is pushed one step further because it is deeply connected with the supernatural, which is an element that is prone to inspire theatrical creativity in spectacular venues. The atmosphere is awe-inspiring. Audiences feel excited by the sense of discomfort that overwhelms them. Such a feeling maintains their attention, compelling them to be on their guard. The notion of insecurity is paramount in an immersive experience. The reassuring and comfortable limits separating the theatrical space from the public one are wiped out. The performance space is everywhere. In *Macbeth, Come Like Shadows* (Rebel and Misfits production), the sense of the macabre was an apparent source of motivation for the company. On its website, one could read:

> Due to the dangerous nature of this piece, we ask that you not touch any of the props. We will be using real weapons and there will be a LOT of

> blood used during the show. We want you to remain clean and safe. (Rebel and Misfits n.p.)

Being immersed in a play eventually reduces the distance between times and places, as was Shakespeare's very purpose in telling stories of the past with the costumes of the present, within a theatrical architecture that mingled the mass and the singular. For Higgins and Hummert, *Macbeth* offered an opportunity to connect the distant story of the Scottish warrior and their own chaotic world. Among the many thoughts that the production planted and invoked, the following questions were raised: "[W]hat can the human soul bear? What splinters it? What can the soul of America bear?" (Rebel and Misfits). Such issues show the extent to which *Macbeth* remains a challenging tool for debate in a collective experience, but it also translates a sense of emergency. This sense of emergency, which expresses the need to struggle against the evils of our time, was already present in early modern days, and Shakespeare used tragedies to share the ambivalent feeling intertwining dread and excitement.

Hearts Beating in Unison with Tragedies

The various recent immersive productions of Shakespeare's plays have shown how the concept particularly fitted tragedies and how they appealed new audiences. In the following part, we shed a light on macabre and suspenseful scenes of three immersive adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies to reassess the adequacy between them, and to explore audiences' experiences.

Sleep No More

Despite key publications about *Sleep No More* (Koumarianos and Silver; Machon 2018; Prudhon 2018), it is impossible to avoid mentioning here this renowned adaptation of *Macbeth* that has influenced many other promenade productions since. The various scenes of the play were choreographed and mimed in an often impressive way that held "erotic and aggressive elements in breathless tension" (Koumarianos and Silver 169). First, the murder of Duncan was done

with a pillow and showed the king painfully struggling to escape from his doom. If such a scene is not unusual in a Shakespearean play (Desdemona is smothered to death in *Othello*), the proximity between the immersant and the actors in an intimate and dark room strengthened the tension. Later, when the macabre reaches its climax in the original play, i.e. when Lady Macduff and her children are slaughtered (4.2), Macbeth and the pregnant Lady Macduff danced a violent *pas-de-deux* whereby Lady Macduff ended smashed against a wall and was raped by her aggressor. The audience members did not know how to respond: both the regicide and the assault on Lady Macduff aroused a sense of distress among them who felt unable to intervene in time because they had not anticipated the actions. Such scenes definitely question the usual norms of spectatorship, the latter being no longer simple observers but witnesses and, in this context, potential accomplices of a murder. The word "immersant" acquires its full meaning: immersants are *in* the performance, and because of this *role* they have been endowed with, they take part in the action, whether it is a delightful or a dreadful one. In *Sleep No More,* the immersants had to wear a white mask (as is often the case in Punchdrunk's productions), which deleted their differences and made them feel effectively *inside* the tale under the cover of anonymity. Yet, it seemed that they had no real choice but to let Macbeth follow his murderous plan, which undoubtedly raised ethical dilemmas. Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of Punchdrunk explain how the actors' bodies and dances in this kind of context help build up the sense of communion even when such communion is sinful. "A whole passage of Shakespeare can be condensed to one word through [a] movement," Barret says (Machon 2011: 97), which means that the spell of the narrative is not broken because suddenly the "audience" becomes aware of where they are and of who is around them. "The experience of the ineffable is something which is so present in [Punchdrunk's] work […]. The intangible suddenly becomes tangible, felt, present on a haptic level" (Machon 2011: 98). Such horrific experience explains part of the success of *Sleep No more,* and of immersive *Macbeth* more widely, because a scene whereby the audience encircles the action, feels it and

even takes a malicious delight in attending its gore, were common features of early modern performance. Immersive and Shakespearean performances meet and match. The aim of immersion in that case is to "[empower]" the audience: "They're physically involved with the piece and therefore it becomes visceral" (Machon 2011: 89).

The empowerment that Punchdrunk seeks has however been questioned by some critics: "*Sleep No More* 'immerses' its audiences in a paradoxical practice: we write our individualised plotlines in our own movements, but are constructed within the spectacle as realist voyeurs, watchers, and readers, not agents" (Worthen 96). We rather claim that the ambivalent position of the audience particularly befits a play like *Macbeth* that attracts the attention *because* there is blood, sex, violence, power struggles, battles and crimes. Onlookers are fascinated when watching them, knowing that they will never be the direct victims of those horrid acts. The gore has never ceased to be fashionable overtime in the media; theatre is no exception. With Shakespeare, Punchdrunk responds to the 'audience's obscure expectations.[11]

Romeo and Juliet

In 2017, set in an abandoned warehouse that is the Colab's home, the immersive performance of *Romeo and Juliet* entitled *Montagues and Capulets* promised the audience they would not be mere onlookers but active participants. The participants could "[join] in the fight scenes with rubber pipe lagging standing in for swords" (*Everything Theatre*), and were promised: "the more you engage the more you get from the experience" (Colab's Website). Immediately after entering the warehouse, participants were requested to choose between being either a Capulet or a Montague: "It's part Shakespeare, part *EastEnders*. Juliet delivers her balcony speech smoking a cigarette […], while Father Lawrence wears a cashier's green eyeshade and distributes simulated acid tabs at the masked ball" (*Everything Theatre* Review). Since the plot was supposed to unfold in the 1990s, the rave culture was deeply present as a backdrop to most situations, such as the masked ball. Yet, despite the announcement that participation would be a mere

option for the spectators, the plot and the script (only five percent Shakespeare's text) could not be altered by the sudden intervention of the public. If such partial immersion might have entailed frustration first, it however relieved the most anxious participants. Still, they were very close to the action that took place among and not in front of them.

The space was really well furnished and decorated: Father Lawrence's chapel was mounted on a platform behind an enormous lit crucifix. Side rooms held the respective gang headquarters of the two families. Movement was permanent. The public constantly rushed down and upstairs; noises and voices resonated from various rooms, which however sometimes prevented the lines from being clearly heard, as in more intimate scenes (Romeo writing his love letter to Juliet). As in *Sleep No More,* the intention here was to make the audience feel better concerned by the Shakespearean characters and ordeals. It even strengthened their sympathy for the house to which they belonged, whether the Capulet or the Montague, and could even beget a feeling of physical communion. Modern costumes and sets incorporated both immediacy and proximity within the space shared by the cast and the onlookers, while they also accentuated the ambiguous separation between reality and fiction.

Undeniably, *Romeo and Juliet* is a play that has been so often adapted by various media (e.g. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, 1996) that theatre needs to reinvent its codes if only to show how the star-crossed lovers' tragedy still expresses the passionate turmoil of young generations. Immersion is a way to push the limits of representation further. Hence, the Colab's purpose was to encourage participation while sparing their audience possible feelings of disgust, unease or incomprehension that fight scenes and a final stage strewn with corpses might arouse. The rave-party context was particularly appropriate to create a sense of community for the younger audience who easily identified with the heroes of the tale and felt involved in the action. The Colab's strategy managed to fuse Shakespearean traditional audiences' and contemporary immersants' demands for if the former

were requested to "sit and see" (*Henry V* Chorus 4.0.52), they—just like our contemporaries—were eager to move and talk, i.e. share an experience.

Hamlet

Finally, with *Hamlet, See What I See* (Rebel and Misfits), Kelly Hummert aimed at challenging Chicago and New York's daring immersive creations. As a regional theatre, St-Louis would be the "trailblazer" in adapting a tragedy, notably because most of the original text was kept. Hummert said: "I believe immersive theatre […] is going to push our theatrical art form forward" (Semko n.p.). The play was set in a modern era, at the Barnett on Washington in Grand Center, and a special emphasis was made on the women's roles—Gertrude and Ophelia (performed by Hummert)—because of the female involvement in the company. One by one, the participants were led through little corridors and secret rooms where the story was performed before their eyes. Most of the time, the actors asked the viewers a piece of advice or played a game with them. No restriction was given. The viewers' engagement had to be maximum even if they could answer their cellar-phones, chew gum during the show, even take Snapchats, Instagram, and use their Facebook. All of these were not incompatible with their feeling to be involved in the heroes' actions. Hummert added: "I want people in my room, […] and I want people racing to follow Hamlet because they're so fascinated by what he's doing […]. I want them to feel comfortable in this world doing so" (Semko). If the word *comfort* might sound rather improper when attending a play like *Hamlet,* its implication in the immersive context was however much different. Because immersion literally shakes the "comfort" zone of the audience, the latter's experience is not submissive. If they cannot really alter the plotline and are, irremediably, led to witness the hero's doom, they may however be given the impression that they can thwart the natural course of the action. The Shakespeare tragedy no longer sounds as the remote tale of a Danish prince; on the contrary, it is a story in which the protagonist's ordeal is directly recognizable, never disconnected from today's society (so prove Snapchats, Instagram and

Facebook), but rather intimately part of it, authentic to the point that it may almost look ordinary.

Though the majority of the action took place in the main hall, the audience moved with the story, even outside for the burial of Ophelia. The outdoor context suddenly drew an obvious link with Shakespearean performance and the audience felt the palpable emotion of the actors. The similarity with the Elizabethan space became even more vivid when some onlookers viewed the closing swordfight from the balcony, offering a fascinating perspective on the fight choreography. The octagonal platform on which the final scene was performed looked tremendously alike early modern apron stages.

Concluding remarks: immersing in Shakespeare, uniting times

With *Hamlet, See What I See,* the macabre was probably not as disquieting as in other immersive Shakespeares, like *Sleep no more* but also like *Macbeth Under the Stars* (Dubai, 2017) featuring an all-female cast whose promise was to surround the audience and make them feel closer to the hero's madness to the point of suffocation. Because of their plot, the tragic momentum of immersive *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* targets different disturbing emotions. A participant of *Hamlet, See What I See* remarked: "I found the deconstructed script delightfully enigmatic and the forced focus on the visceral impact of the story completely captivating […]." Words like "visceral" and "captivating" immediately summon others: immersive experience that "bleeds into the real world" (Machon 2013: 55) and Shakespeare.

Adapting early modern drama is nothing new: stage professionals have long perceived in Shakespeare's themes and structure a fantastic embodiment of their own times (Prescott 269-284). But the various examples tackled above prove that, by re-inventing the codes of performance, immersion offers a new critical insight and expands the participants' imaginative effort. To be part of the show is more attractive and more challenging in an era when video games, 3D cinematic-experiences, always push the fourth wall further away. Twenty-first-century audiences' flickering attention needs constant stimulus.

They seldom endure watching a three-hour-long play uttered mostly in iambic pentameters.[12]

Hence, most immersive productions delete part of the text or transpose it into modern and technological languages. The words are replaced by images, action and dances during which the participants are led into new rooms so that they themselves remain constantly in motion, both physically and cognitively, their brain needing to be permanently solicited.

Furthermore, immersion and Shakespeare's tragedies naturally match because they both request multiple loci, complex installations, and tensed experiences whereby the public has the opportunity to observe the characters and grasp their motivations. Immersion provides Shakespeare's works with what was absent in the past and what the cinema has offered since, yet with non-theatrical devices: the realistic incarnation of a place.

While penetrating the unexpected locus to live an immersive experience, the onlooker possibly excavates the hidden side of a play. Indeed, tragedies still hold veiled secrets and hidden nooks that mazy buildings may enable to unlock. Such exploration implies the audience's suspension of disbelief, just as in Shakespeare's time. Yet, immersion involves an unconditional surrender from the participants who feel exhausted when leaving the building. The past and the future of a text fuse through this tacit agreement. Immersion deletes time-gaps, erases the sense of unfaltering conviction that we know all of Shakespeare. Indeed, because we have been *inside* the plot and because, like an Elizabethan audience, we have heard the lines of doomed heroes, we feel they belong to our own environment.

Finally, should we assert that immersion is a more appropriate way to approach Shakespeare's theatre, structurally and aesthetically, in our societies today? Assuredly, immersion invites new audiences to approach Shakespeare's drama from a more subjective angle despite the collective experience they are often plunged in. The recent performances have also proved how they efficiently explored Shakespeare's depth further. Tellingly, early modern drama more and more (co)

responds to pluri-culture and mass-productions; Shakespeare's works have evolved with the new generations for the latter to continue feeling attracted by the classics. The multi-media also use this material: "Scholars have explored the potential of new virtual locales for innovative, interactive teaching, and comparative research and pointed to some of the meanings generated when 'Shakespeare' is produced and consumed in digital form [for instance]" (Rumbold 313).[13] Furthermore, drama becomes more "participative" because of the citizens' need to feel more involved in the very process of creation: "[T]he aim of an immersive and participative theatre [is to] confer on the spectator a particular place that increases his/her artistic sensitivity" (Weber 3. My translation).

Because everyone can become the "actor of the theatrical moment" (Weber 4) Shakespeare's dramaturgy sounds even more appropriate in immersive contexts. He, who praised the stage as a space including the singular within the universal ("*Totus mundus agit histrionem*") and knew how his art was ephemeral ("Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" [*Macbeth* 5.5.24-26]), would probably have congratulated immersive initiatives. And indeed, his intentions are respected there: first, immersion singles out the spectator, asking him/her to take part. Second, each immersive event is unique: venues change, actions vary according to the audience's response. The paradox however is that through the constant reinvention of acting conventions, Shakespeare's plays are preserved, never on the wane: "[A] play [by Shakespeare], for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring stability, is *not an object* at all, but rather a *dynamic process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (Kidnie 2). However radical immersive Shakespeares may be, they have proved how *dynamic* their dramaturgy is.

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[1] On the word "immersant," see Davies in Prudhon (2020: 34).

[2] Interactivity is defined according to four levels: "navigation, *participation,* conversation and collaboration" (Bouko 33; Dickson 563).

[3] See Doran's cooperation with Intel Pentium in his production of *The Tempest* in 2016 (RSC) or the exploration of our world through Hamlet's psyche in an all-computerized set (*Hamlet's Lunacy,* Crew and Platform 0090, 2019).

[4] The website of the Michigan Theatre department invited the audience to enjoy "a star show on the Abrams Planetarium hemispherical projection dome" while listening to "the live performance of Shakespeare's [play]."

[5] The play, rechristened *Helsingør*, was a success as the audience really felt enthused by this novel experience in which they had been quite unexpectedly "*spec*-actors." The term "spec-actor" is used in the title of a French headline (Toulemonde n.p.). This portmanteau word is made of "spectacle" and "actor" but also of "spectre" and "actor," best fitting *Hamlet.* The word "spectator" is however not fully appropriate in the context of immersion since, by definition, to be a spectator—i.e. to look at—implies physical inactivity as Jacques Rancière underlines, "first, to look at is the opposite of 'to know'. […] Secondly, it is the opposite of 'to act'. […] To be a spectator means being separated from one's capacity both to know and to act" (8. My translation).

[6] The New Globe Theatre, London; Allen Elizabethan Theatre in Ashland, Oregon; Hardelot theatre, Condette, France; Schwäbiscsch Hall and The Globe Theatre in Neuss, both in Germany; a pop-up replica of Shakespeare's Globe, Sidney, another in Odessa, Texas.

[7] See the description of the audience by one of the characters, in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*: "Within one square a thousand heads are laid / So close, that all of heads, the roome seems made, / As many faces there (fill'd with blith looks) / Shew like the promising titles of new bookes (…)" (1.2. in Gurr 277).

[8] See Eric Dunnum's *Unruly Audiences and the Theater of Control in Early Modern London*, and the Chorus in *Henry V* who repeatedly asks the audience to stay put ("sit and see" [4.0.52]); the Prologue to Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*: "The Charmes of silence through this Square be throwne, / That an un-usde Attention (like a Jewell) / May hang at every eare, […] These wonders sit and see" (1-3).

[9] "Emphasis on going along an individual path and choosing what to look at is intended to be a liberating freedom rather than a constricting one—but choice paralysis could be a barrier to immersion" (Biggin 91 in Prudhon 342). //

[10] "Elizabethan audiences clapped and booed whenever they felt like it. Sometimes they threw fruit. Groundlings paid a penny to stand and watch performances, […] the fine rich people paid the most expensive ticket price *to*

actually sit on the stage. The place was full of pickpockets and prostitutes […]. Theatre was not only a major social occasion; it could often feel like a competition for attention" (Tichenor n.p.).

[11] In Punchdrunk's adaptation of the play, the numerous references to other artistic trends, especially to cinematic productions also explain its success: Hitchcock's films, the film noir, Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, Christopher Nolan's *Inception,* the TV series *Lost*, and even the Haunted Mansion in Disneyland experience.

[12] "The popularity [of Punchdrunk] stems from the success of a similar phenomenon: dynamic story-based video games" (Thiel 61).

[13] She mentions a list of various paramount works in the field such as Richard Burt's introduction in *Shakespeare after Mass Media* (2002), to name but one example.

Putting VR Technology into Documentary:

Reflections and Speculations on a New Immersive Theatre Genre in Britain

Cyrielle Garson

Abstract: As VR technologies develop and start to infiltrate British theatre venues and companies, and even spectators' homes with LIVR—the world's first virtual reality theatre content platform—, they also seem to have simultaneously injected a new "immersive" vigour and vitality into the flourishing field of contemporary documentary theatre. Whilst documentary methodologies are commonly used by site-specific and immersive theatre makers, their recent association with VR has to this date been relatively ignored. Through a close study of the National Theatre's *Home: Aamir* (2016), an immersive 360 verbatim documentary about a Sudanese refugee who lived in the Calais "Jungle" camp, and Jayisha Patel's *Notes to my Father* (2017), narrating the true story of a survivor of child trafficking and her father, this article will attempt to address this gap and evaluate the capacity of spectators to be "affected" by this new breed of immersive and politically-engaged documentary theatre.

Résumé : Dans un contexte actuel marqué par le développement croissant des technologies de réalité virtuelle sur la scène britannique, allant parfois jusqu'aux domiciles des spectateurs avec la plateforme LIVR (la première entreprise de théâtre de réalité virtuelle à la demande), on voit poindre un nouveau genre de théâtre documentaire plus immersif et technologique que ses prédécesseurs qui fera ici l'objet de cet article. En effet, si les méthodologies documentaires sont désormais l'apanage des praticiens du théâtre immersif et *in situ*, l'utilisation récente de la réalité virtuelle par ces derniers est quant à elle relativement ignorée par la critique. À travers l'étude des spectacles *Home*: *Aamir* (National Theatre, 2016) et *Notes to my Father* (2017) de Jayisha Patel, cet article permettra ainsi de poser les premiers jalons théoriques de ce nouveau théâtre immersif qui se veut à la fois politique et documentaire.

Keywords: VR, immersive theatre, documentary, politics, technology

Mots-clés : réalité virtuelle, théâtre immersif, documentaire, politique, technologie

> [T]he true transformative nature of VR is based on just how immersive an experience it can provide. (Mealy 254)

In the twenty-first century, immersive experiences represent one of the fastest-growing cultural practices in the UK. Whilst it is true that today's immersive performances within the UK's cultural industries largely derive from the early experiments with space in the 1960s, the current boom differs greatly in both nature and form from these past practices. For one thing, immersive theatre is now increasingly moving into the tech field, as it undergoes a digital transformation that is changing both the way it is created and distributed. Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality, and Virtual Reality have clearly expanded the range of immersive theatre experiences on offer.[1] VR in particular, which will be the object of this study, was identified by the Arts Council in 2018 as being especially rich for development.

VR is an emerging technology. It is arguably comparable to the personal computing in the early 1990s or smartphones in the early 2000s. As a tech, it will likely become omnipresent (Ainley 2020; Dunn 2017), but at present there are early adopter costs, and both head-mounted display (HMD) or headsets and controllers are still rather cumbersome. Currently, one of the main obstacles with VR as a technology is the data requirements. File sizes can be huge and have equally huge bandwidth requirements. For example, to stream a 2k file in VR will require a network connection of 5-7Mbps per device. If one has 10 units in any given space, then the requirement is 70mbps broadband. It has meant that while immersive technology could be a superb tool for the field of theatre and performance, it

has not been a feasible multiple user option to this point. In VR, the aforementioned bandwidth issues also restrict how many people can have this experience at any one time while streaming the content. To return to the comparison with personal computers in the early 1990s, content and experiences have been made for immersive media with an individual in mind rather than a collective. This is analogous to PCs' pre-internet. Once it was possible to connect computers, the experiences and tools that were developed exploded in both range and use. In other words, the point that immersive media is currently missing is the ability to reliably deliver group experiences. Once this is in place, people may start to see the technology in different ways and look at new and innovative uses for it.

However, these caveats aside, numerous practitioners all over the UK have already explored this new "wearable theatre" medium. Curious directive incorporated VR sequences into their 2018 play *Frogman*, whilst the influential Punchdrunk company also experimented with tracking and haptic technology, as well as VR, most notably in their 2016 Research and Development piece *Believe your Eyes,* in partnership with Samsung Electronics America. The VR experience can be gigantic with the creation of total environments as in *enter wonder.land* (a part-VR experiment drawing from Damon Albarn, Moira Buffini and Rufus Norris' 2015 musical *wonder.land*), or very small and intimate one-to-ones such as *Draw Me Close*, Jordan Tannahill's new memoir-play (a co-production of the National Theatre and the National Film Board of Canada) with an emphasis on visual, sound and the sensory. In some VR theatre pieces, the audience is invited to change camera angles, sit in the middle of the stage, and even influence the story's outcome. More importantly perhaps, VR has slowly but surely found its way into the most celebrated British theatre institutions including, among others, the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Opera House, the Barbican, the Young Vic, National Theatre Wales and National Theatre Scotland. Famously, one of the first things Rufus Norris did when he took over at the National Theatre in London was

to create the Immersive Storytelling Studio—a studio pioneering the use of VR technology and 360-degree filming in a theatrical context.

Unsurprisingly, documentary and verbatim theatres, which have a propensity for innovation and experimentation with remarkable incursions into the field of immersive and site-specific theatre in the UK and further afield (Look Left Look Right, Jericho House, The Paper Birds, Rimini Protokoll, etc.), are now starting to engage with VR in various shapes and forms. Another related point that may have become a determining factor in the current intersection of VR and documentary theatre lies in their shared interest in what Janelle Reinelt calls "[its] promise" (6), as regards to the latter. Indeed both VR and documentary theatre sometimes strive to reach a level of unmediated authenticity that is so compelling that audiences are often reported to experience a stronger emotional response. In that infinite search to fulfil the promise of the "real," VR technology can be perceived as a strong candidate to bridge the gap between the "real" (outside the performance) and the "real" within the frames of the performance. The first case study, *Home: Aamir* (2016) directed by Rufus Norris at the National Theatre, is "an immersive verbatim documentary" in which actor Sule Rimi plays the voice of Aamir, speaking his exact words taken directly from an interview subsequently shaped by verbatim writer Suhayla El-Bushra. As in most verbatim works, we are told at the end of the piece that "all words, sentences and context are Aamir's own." In 360-degree imagery, we experience Aamir's journey by foot: through the desert, via Libya, over the Mediterranean and to the inhumane conditions of the Calais "jungle." It is more or less a hybrid piece at a crossroads between VR films and theatre, described by Mark Atkin, curator at Sheffield Doc Fest, as "an entirely new type of documentary." More exactly, the piece combines the production processes and storytelling techniques of theatre with 360 film to create a deeply affecting and immersive virtual reality experience that takes us to the heart of the ongoing humanitarian tragedy that is the refugee crisis. The second piece in this study, Jayisha Patel's *Notes to my Father* (2017), is a different case in point: it is not made in partnership with a theatre, but by Oculus VR For Good and My Choices Foundation.

However, this VR experience also uses a mix of verbatim theatre and documentary storytelling techniques and is the world's first live-capture VR experience about sex trafficking. More specifically, the entire script—the voice-over in the VR piece—is verbatim, based on the transcripts of hours of conversations between director Jayisha Patel and the real Indian people whose arresting story she is conveying here through the medium of VR. The piece tells the true story of Ramadevi, a mother in India, as she navigates her painful memories of being sold to a brothel as a young girl, through the prism of a letter to her father who inadvertently played a role in her trafficking. The main characters—Ramadevi and her father—are portrayed by the real Ramadevi and her father who now work in solidarity with their local community to help prevent sex trafficking.

The Immersive Affordances of VR

For practical reasons, this article cannot claim the kind of extended space within this special issue on immersive theatre that a full-fledged panorama of the state of research in VR (within theatre and performance) would require. Nonetheless, a few reflections shall offer insight into current discussions regarding its engagement with immersive theatre practices, as well as a comprehensive view of its remit. When we say "virtual reality," what often comes to mind is some sort of goggles, or helmet that immerses the wearer in three-dimensional computer-generated graphics that respond to the wearer's movement. In other words, this is an immersive show that is all in the audience's head. However, this is in effect an atomistic picture of virtual reality, one in which an individual person is put in a digitally-generated false world, a picture that does not take into account our case studies, or VR journalism, to name only two examples from a very rich and expanding field of practice.

VR—the technology—is actually three things: it tracks your physical movements, redraws them depending on what you do (it redraws a world based on that movement) and it is display: showing the wearer's eyes, their ears and sometimes their skin, what the world is like based on

that movement. VR—the immersive theatre experience—is also three things: live, pre-recorded (first-person video) or computer-generated (computer game avatars). More precisely, VR theatre pieces tend to fall within the last two categories. There are either 3D VR experiences that take place in a completely computer-generated world, which allows the user to interact with the virtual environment, or 360-degree video experiences which have captured something in the real world. In the latter case that will constitute my focus throughout this article, the user or spectator can only consume the content. In other words, in this scenario, the content is fixed and cannot be altered by the spectator, adapted to reflect the spectator's engagement with the VR experience. To help think through the limitations of that analysis, I want to consider that there are currently four main ways in which theatre practitioners are using immersive video and audio technology.

First, there are 360° videos. These are 100% VR pieces that are not live theatre pieces in the conventional understanding of the term, even though in some cases the experience of shows like the VR musical journey *All Kinds of Limbo* (2019) at the National Theatre could arguably be considered as 'live' in the sense that the audience had to buy a ticket, had to be there at a specific time in a specific location and were never left alone to their own device with the VR headsets. The performance could welcome a certain number of audience members and the experience started at the same time for all participants or "immersants." In fact, to be more precise, there are now at least two ways of making these 360 videos in the realm of immersive theatre. Either, similar to LIVR—the world's first virtual reality theatre content platform—, a live theatre piece is recorded and the experience of being there with the audience is therefore recreated, or practitioners create an actual piece of VR, that is to say, in the context of this article, immersive pre-recorded VR experiences based on the words of real people as are both *Home: Aamir* and *Notes to my Father*. Second, VR can mean interplay between visceral and virtual worlds as in the aforementioned Young Vic's 2019 *Draw me Close* and Punchdrunk's *Believe your Eyes* (2016), which both integrate live actors into the VR performance. Third, there is a practice of intermittent use of VR

during a live theatre performance, as is the case in curious directive's 2017 piece *Frogman*. Fourth, VR immersive pieces can be more social in nature when one becomes an avatar and does things in a virtual world (the audience does not even need to be in the same room, or even country to engage in the experience), but it is not at present the main activity of VR theatre-makers.

Hardware aside, I want to argue that VR performances can be said to correspond to textbook immersive performances in that they put the spectator in the middle of the story always using sight and sound, and sometimes even touch and smell. In other words, they create a sense of intimacy. As in all immersive performances, there is no fourth wall to be broken and the audience is mobile. As Saikrishna Srinivasan and Gareth Schott have explained, VR helps to "bring audience 'onto the stage' and transform their status and role from non-participatory witnesses outside the play to co-presence" (478). However, VR also has some notable limitations to be reckoned with. These works never exceed 20 minutes for various reasons including the fact that they are very intense, and not recommended for use for a prolonged period of time. VR also blocks light and sound from the physical world, which contributes to the immersion, and, in that sense, it differs from conventional and analogue immersive theatre. Indeed, the spectators are not sitting, they are typically standing (or more accurately, they are walking, grabbing, and pivoting their head to see behind them, etc.), they are not able to see the other audience members and engage with them during the performance, and their experience is solely predicated upon their movement and is therefore very likely to differ from what other audience members have experienced.

Looking at the broad spectrum of VR performances, one must also recognise the specific immersive affordances of the medium, which rethinks the informal contract with audiences. Arguably, VR goes a step further than conventional immersive theatre when it aims to reinforce the qualia—the phenomena of feeling present. Typically with these shows, including both *Home: Aamir* and *Notes to my Father*, the nature of the invitation is predicated upon reaching the "affirmation point",

which is the point where a given audience member accepts the virtual environment as "real." In *Home: Aamir*, this moment may happen when we are first hearing the agrammatical and poignant sentences of *Aamir* and are transported into a replica of one of the Calais Jungle shelters, replete with detritus, dirt and chaos. In *Notes to my Father*, this moment is likely to happen after the delicate sounds coming from a cello start to fade, and the 360-degree camera takes us to what resembles a filthy brothel in India. From a technical standpoint, the quickest way to get a spectator to that point is by making the VR experience as seamless as possible. Under these circumstances, the brain cannot necessarily always tell the difference between compelling VR and reality. While it is possible to add extra detail or dressing to VR performances (for example allowing audience members to jump from one location to another), this is very rarely done as it increases the probability of a mind rejecting the experience as "artificial." Instead, the lion's share of time is spent in post-production making sure the playback experience has no noise and is properly graded.

However, as Johan F. Hoorn, Elly A. Konijn, and Gerrit C. Van Der Veer have jointly claimed, in VR, "there is always a contextual cue (e.g., the head-mounted display unit) that makes the user aware things are not real" (21). That being said, as in headphone-verbatim theatre—"a paperless form of performance featuring the faithful reproduction of speech patterns whereby actors are required to wear headphones and speak along to a sequence of carefully edited audio interviews" (Garson 51)—which saw the cumbersome headphones stop functioning as alienating device to eventually become a convention accepted by spectators (Cantrell 168), we can anticipate that audiences in VR may experience a similar process. Interestingly and in a similar fashion, Janet H. Murray, in her pioneering essay "Immersion" on the future of narrative in the 1990s, equates the immersivity in VR to the "sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (98). This idea of otherness is precisely one of the subjects of contention in VR, as it pertains to political significance and efficacy.

The Politics of Virtual Reality

> Must we, in fact, be overwhelmed to some degree in order to have motive for action? We only act when we are moved to act, and we are moved by something that affects us from the outside, from elsewhere, from the lives of others, imposing a surfeit that we act from and upon. (Butler 136)

What can VR do that cannot be achieved within a live, immersive documentary performance? Besides some undesirable side-effects such as simulator or motion sickness, eye strain and even reality blurring, the major difference is that these immersive VR pieces create like never before that sensation of being there, they make us briefly feel as if we were there with Aamir in *Home: Aamir* and Ramadevi in *Notes to my Father*, as if we were walking in their shoes. Indeed, with virtual reality, the gap between the real experience and mediated experience in the context of immersive documentary pieces is getting a lot narrower. In *Home: Aamir,* for instance, we are at some point immersed in a lorry representing Aamir's horrifying journey into England with twelve other migrants, which, in his own words, "felt like the last forty minutes" of his life. This might seem in line with Kate Nash's claim stating that VR "invites a distinct mode of engagement" (97). As such, we might simply conclude that VR's specific mode of immersivity heightens the way the performance is received, even though the presence of the voice-over in both pieces—the actors standing in for Aamir and Ramadevi—inevitably draws our attention to the constructed nature of the VR experience.

But what is exactly happening, affectively, in the experience of such immersive VR verbatim and documentary pieces and what is the spectator's body invited to do in that context? Do the exact words of real people—here those of Aamir and Ramade—resound more deeply in a VR context, thereby coinciding with more powerful identification and empathy processes in the audience? How exactly might these works be said to activate the audience's affective system at a time when, arguably,

for Julie Salverson "the ability to feel— ourselves, others, the world we live in—is disappearing" (143)? Conversely, is there not an irony of sorts in knowing that technology, which typically creates distraction and depletes our attention by constant solicitation and demand, is here portrayed as doing the exact opposite, that is to say making us pay more attention and care more about precarious lives?

More surprisingly perhaps, claims regarding its potential and transformative properties have grown exponentially. For virtual reality scholar Jeremy Bailenson, for instance, VR creates an environment that sets us for empathy with "the potential similar to experiences in the real world to enact profound and lasting changes" (2018). In effect, VR is raising our heart rates when we are in it, engaging us in ways we have not been engaged before in immersive and documentary theatre. It follows, therefore, that when the stakes extend to "real people" some different experiential correlates enter into friction that may be argued to yield a heightened affective impact. Put another way, they erode the sense of non-consequential safety typically associated with the conventional (fictional) immersive theatre-going experience. In addition to these, particular aesthetic choices shape the potential of documentary material to rouse audiences. In *Notes to my Father,* for instance, some of the harrowing words from Ramadevi's story appear in the VR piece, at the same time as we are hearing them, making them ever more potent.

But does representation in VR documentary theatre pieces ever acquire the affective power of the represented as Jeremy Bailenson seems to suggest? It may also be argued that, contrary to the alleged shorter-lived and more transient Aristotelian emotion, the strategic harnessing of such affects by theatre-makers may assist in the activist transference of experience to real life. Indeed, at the very end of *Notes to my Father*, Ramadevi addresses both her father and the spectators when she utters the following words: "We can learn from this," suggesting that the phenomenon in India, which tragically led her to a brothel can be halted with a better awareness of its societal ramifications and blind spots. Similarly, in *Home: Aamir,* the protagonist,

halfway through his story, as if conscious of who may listen to this, utters the following words: "You couldn't imagine." Arguably, such a moment of direct address can be said to encourage a deeper engagement with the predicaments of Aamir, and by extension, of asylum seekers more broadly.

However, scholars such as Paul Bloom have expressed more nuanced views, arguing that VR "isn't the moral game-changer that some make it out to be" (2017). Indeed, a self-administered VR experience, however real and immersive it may feel, is not necessarily transformative in itself. In the same vein, but without specific reference to VR, Patrice Pavis argues that immersive theatre "is not really comparable with the immersion of the ethnologist, which is necessarily a more long-term and cautious affair […] [i]n the theatre, it is rapid and limited, fictitious and superficial, remote-controlled by the team of the 'host' actors" (100). But is VR a mere trick for our brains, a mask of seductiveness to inspire pathos, as when Aamir in *Home: Aamir* shares the harrowing story of the death of his younger sister or is it an earnest means (against the reported current waning of affect) to move an audience to affectively and critically engage with perceived injustices such as those that happen in the Calais "jungle" (*Home: Aamir*) and in India (*Notes to my Father*) and to also interrogate how that reality/status quo has come to be experienced as true by audience members in the first place?

In VR, to affect members of the audience profoundly at a sensory level, this type of theatre strives (with varying degrees of success) to break up the conventional cognitive boundaries of realist theatricality and phenomenologically emphasise (or "manufacture") a correspondence between theatre and the real world: the felt intensity that what we are witnessing has an existence beyond the theatrical and VR frames. That being said, exposure to a VR documentary piece, however 'real' it may feel, does not guarantee that it will affect an audience, even on "a small scale" to reprise British playwright Dennis Kelly's 2012 words on the ability of theatre to change the world, nor that, even if it does, it will automatically translate into political activism or trigger

a transformative experience for everyone. In other words, the desired emotional response might never be achieved. Similarly, no firm conclusion can ever be reached about how and who a VR documentary performance or any kind of immersive theatre affects, due to the impossibility of archiving the transient experience of "being there." Arguably, such VR works might paradoxically reinforce dominant epistemological and affective frames by reproducing in virtual reality what Judith Butler calls the "tactical distribution of precarity" (148) currently casting certain groups as culturally, politically and socially "other." But these works may also be enabling in the way they challenge the affective frames underpinning mainstream narratives, what Bryoni Trezise calls "the 'feel-ability' of certain bodies over others" (3). Indeed, what these works can do effectively is allow audiences to spend time with unfamiliar thoughts, feelings and perspectives, thus enabling affective encounters between seemingly separate segments of the population that may not be possible otherwise.

Immersive Theatre of Crisis: A Preliminary View of VR's Potential for the Art Sector during the Covid-19 Pandemic

On 16 March 2020, the British Government responded to the pandemic by issuing guidance that "everyone should avoid gatherings and crowded places, such as pubs, clubs and theatres," prompting UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) to advise their members venues to close, as well as face-to-face performances to stop across the whole of the UK. Clearly, Covid-19 has been a whirlwind that has severely curtailed many theatre practitioners' ability to create and showcase performances, including those immersive productions at the cutting edge of the sector. For an industry still reeling from the "first wave" and the consequences it has had on theatre attendance and ticket sales, the ability to offer a VR immersive theatre experience in perceived safer environments could be vital. Indeed, now nine months into a global pandemic with theatres closing again in the midst of a "second wave" and the backdrop of an economic crisis, it may be time to investigate anew the potential of VR and how issues relating to the

crisis may have moved on or changed for the field of immersive theatre—and whether any new problems or concerns might have arisen.

Undoubtedly, the recent crisis has significantly highlighted the lack of digital contingency plans, as well as the growing need for immersive audio and visual technology like VR, which has the capacity to give the spectator the experience of being in that front row seat with the complete agency to watch the performance where, when, and how they wish. For theatre companies that are attempting to produce live and recorded digital theatre whilst working remotely, VR constitutes not just a means to share creative content across borders, but a technology that can be deployed to safeguard access to theatre in the future, including both national and international reach and various levels of audience engagement. This would therefore seem to support a certain line of analysis surrounding VR: the seductive idea that this "new tool" will solve problems that we did not have in the "old normal," neglecting the fact that VR audiences are still a relative minority and that the makers of these VR technologies did not have theatre in mind. These considerations aside, there are some fascinating ongoing projects using VR, not least among them the "Livr cross border Rosebox project," which is seeking to create an immersive experience network. More specifically, this innovative European project between the London-based company Livr and several venues across the UK and Europe, aims to build a VR enabled network that has the capacity to share theatre and performing arts across borders virtually. Put another way, the system would allow audiences in one area to put on VR headsets and experience performances from other regions as if they were there. This supplements the idea that the immersive theatre experience through a VR unit is only in its infancy.

Once one drills down into VR's technical execution, as I have done in this article, it becomes clear that immersive technologies, and in par-

ticular 360 video content, bring with them a whole palette of new and innovative possibilities for the performing arts. More immediately for our purposes, VR performances are making important interventions in the field of immersive theatre and it can be argued with some force that the days of the Punchdrunk shows with mask-wearing audiences have almost certainly passed. My point here, however, was not that VR technology will start to replace theatre and immersive performances as we have come to know them, but that it is a worthwhile opportunity that has the capacity to augment these performances in fascinating ways. And we can only imagine what the immersive theatre scene will be like when VR eventually becomes mainstream, when the hardware increasingly melts away and becomes more affordable, and when new theatre-makers will have graduated from their "Virtual Theatre" training programmes. As the use of VR in immersive theatre performances grows, and theatre-makers understand better how to tap into its unique affordances, we can expect to see more affecting performances and stories that open our minds and hearts. In the hopeful words of scholar Shane Pike:

> [T]ools of AR and VR will soon be used to enhance live, embodied narrative through dramatic storytelling and together these forms will generate a new style and technique of immersive theatre that takes artists and makers to the next stage of human creativity. (120)

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[1] Augmented Reality is referred to as AR, throughout this article; Mixed Reality as MR; and Virtual Reality as VR.

The Politics of Participation in Immersive Theatre and Participatory Art. The Spectatorship Between Role Reversal and Narcissistic Self-Exploitation

Marilena Borriello

Abstract: This article examines the ambiguities and contradictions that may result from the spectator's involvement in participatory and immersive performances. Although audience participation is not a recent aesthetic concern, the collaborative practice has become an ever-increasing tendency that requires a new understanding and critical approach. The interaction with the performers and the reversal of roles does not always succeed in making the spectator an independent agent. As this paper will demonstrate by analysing the oscillation of spectatorship between a sense of community and narcissistic participation, the promise of temporary immersion in a new different reality is not a guarantee of democratic participation and the emancipation of the spectator. In some cases, the increasing attention to the aesthetic of immersion and participation may provoke a capitulation to "presentness," with the risk of falling within the pitfall of a cynical market of presentism and narcissistic self-exploitation at the expense of the overall performance aesthetic value.

Résumé : Cet article examine les ambiguïtés et les contradictions qui peuvent résulter de l'implication du spectateur dans la création des performances participatives et immersives. Bien que la participation du public ne soit pas un phénomène esthétique récent, la pratique collaborative dans les arts est devenue une tendance croissante qui nécessite une nouvelle compréhension et approche critique. L'interaction avec les performers et le renversement des rôles pendant le déroulement de la performance ne rendent pas nécessairement le spectateur un participant indépendant et non manipulable. Comme cet article le démontrera à travers l'analyse de la flexibilité du spectateur entre un sens de communauté et la participation narcissique, la promesse d'une immersion temporaire dans une réalité différente ne garantit pas la participation démocratique et l'émancipation du

spectateur. Dans certains cas, le fort intérêt pour l'esthétique de l'immersion et de la participation risque de succomber au marché cynique du présentéisme et à l'auto-exploitation narcissique au détriment de la valeur esthétique de la performance.

Keywords: Participatory art, immersive theatre, performance, participation, narcissism, self-exploitation, radical subjectification

Mots-clés : Art participatif, théâtre immersif, performance, participation, narcissisme, auto-exploitation, subjectivation radicale

Introduction

Over the last decades, the inclusion of the spectator in the sacred frame of art has become a common feature of non-traditional theatre and contemporary art, with the result that participatory strategies can be identified neither exclusively with one nor with the other. Nevertheless, the collaborative and participatory tendency of immersive theatre and participatory art is not a recent phenomenon. The activation of the audience as well as the collapsing distance between performer and spectator have been a crucial concern of artistic productions since the early Romantic era, when poets, artists and theatre directors expressed the need to involve the spectator to transform—or even to eliminate—the fundamental condition of art, that is to say the separation of artists and their public. Richard Wagner, for example, affirmed that the artist had to abandon his/her individuality and egotism in order to promote the establishment of a participatory community to forge an ideal society (78).

It should be noted that the Wagnerian theory is part of a larger narrative on participation that traverses the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continues to the present day, preserving both revolutionary significance and ambiguities. If on the one hand, the emphasis over the decades on participation in visual arts and in theatre has proved to be a privileged way to introduce socially-oriented projects, as well as to rethink the artistic traditions, on the other hand it appears to be a precarious and uncertain medium that, as Claire Bishop

points out, "needs continually to be performed and tested in every specific context" (2012b: 45). Indeed, the aesthetic of participation and immersive theatre do not necessarily imply a social or political engagement (62-3).

In some participatory and immersive projects, the principal artistic goal appears to be the manipulation and overexposure of the spectator, or rather his/her self-exploitation. With respect to this, the purpose of this paper is to trace the ingrained paradox of spectatorial activation in participatory art and immersive theatre, and therefore its Janus-like nature: the relational function on one side, the radical subjectification of spectator on the other. Indeed, its intrinsically political nature—which especially during the 1960s aspired to produce new social realities as a reaction to the alienating effects of capitalism—now seems to have more to do "with the populist agendas of neoliberal government" (Bishop 2012a: 277).

In this vein, by analyzing some historical performances, we will first consider the most crucial aesthetic and political motivations behind some artistic events and theatre productions. In the second part, by avoiding the unproductive binary of active/passive spectatorship, we will aim to trace some ambiguities related to the presumed reduction of artistic power and the transformation of the spectator into a participant or co-producer. Finally, we will evaluate the radicalization of the process of reception, by analyzing the spectator's self-exploitation.

Historical Background: The Social Dimension of Participation against the Traditional Notion of Art and the Divisive Effects of Capitalism

The necessary precondition of art is to be seen, experienced, and reflected upon by a spectator. The same can be said for theatre, given that a performance can only take place through the encounter between spectators and actors, through their bodily co-presence.

As Erika Fischer-Lichte maintains, performance is an autopoietic process, since "whatever the performers do has an effect on the audience, and whatever the audience does has an effect on the performers"

(2014: 19). To put it differently, both theatre and visual arts are the results of the dialogue between "two poles": on one side, the creator of the work, on the other, the person who experiences that work. It follows that the creative act, as Marcel Duchamp pointed out in his polemic text, *The Creative Act* (1957), is performed also by the spectator, since they he/she contribute to determine "the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale, by bringing it in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications" (138). Therefore, if the act of interpretation is a form of participation *par excellence*, spectatorship can never be passive or totally autonomous in the aesthetic process. Similarly, Jacques Rancière has debunked the binary of active/passive spectatorship, describing the emancipated spectator as one who is viewing, but also acting, by comparing, interpreting, selecting and observing. The philosopher maintains, indeed, that it is the distance between performers and spectators that allows one to experience the freedom of interpretation and to make connections between real life and staged reality. Nevertheless, Rancière acknowledges that the paradox of the spectator—"there is no theatre without a spectator, being a spectator is a bad thing"—, which prevailed among the critics of theatrical mimesis, is an anti-theatrical presupposition that paradoxically has provided theatre with the stimulus to re-examine itself (2). It is, indeed, undeniable that the changing identity of the audience over the past century has stemmed from the need to question the traditional systems of production and reception. During the 1960s, for instance, the experimentation of new opportunities for physically engaging the viewer in works of art represented a revolutionary tool for questioning the common sense of authorship and the *specificity of medium*—that is to say, the idea that each art form has, by virtue of its medium, its exclusive domain of development. The trajectory was moving from producing art works for spectators to creating experiential events for spectators. It was the case of "happeners," who introduced the audience into the sacred frame of the event in order to express their reluctance towards the conventions that ruled the art world and to show their willingness to eradicate them. Allan Kaprow, in his seven principles collected in *Assemblage,*

Environments, and Happenings (1966), stated that "for anyone once involved in the painter's problems of unifying a field of divergent phenomena, a group of inactive people in the space of Happening is just dead space" (Huxley, Witts, 264). In other words, for Kaprow, the integration of audiences in the space of action implied their entire elimination.

Moreover, the progressive refusal of narrative, interpretative, and aesthetic closure, for example, has made the contribution of the spectator necessary in the construction of meaning, thus paving the way for new aesthetic approaches. Michael Fried, in a polemical tone, recognized that the "presentment of endlessness," the blankness as well as the physical extension in space of minimal art throw back at the beholder the awareness of his/her presence or rather of his/her role in the meaning-making process (1967: 15). According to the Modernist art critic, this intrusion threatened the autonomy of art because whenever a self-consciousness of viewing exists, art ceases to be self-referential and self-sufficient, falling thus into theatricality—that is to say, into the lack of differentiation between the work of art and the experience of viewing it. Fried's critique of Minimalism exemplifies how the spectator's heightened consciousness of being a constitutive element of the aesthetic process is one of the main aspects of the evolution of spectatorship as an art form. Nevertheless, it is essential to underline that at the beginning of the genealogy of participatory aesthetics, the recognition of the importance of spectatorship subscribed, first and foremost, to a sociopolitical goal.

In the mid-19th century, the collectivization of performances aimed essentially at achieving the democratic and liberal political ambitions of the 1848 Revolution through aesthetic means. In this sense, the anarchist idea of Richard Wagner is a representative example. His firm intention to depart from established buildings to new spaces, by transforming the theatre into a festival, was an attempt to forge an egalitarian community. To fulfill this goal, the artist had to abandon his/her social isolation, overcome the boundaries between different artistic media and recognize that "Folk"—that is, the community—

was the only true artist. In other words, artistic talents had to satisfy and express the artistic desire of the people (*Kunstwollen*) and the subjective authorial power had to be reduced in the name of common good – or, as Wagner puts it in his seminal work, "The Artwork of the Future," of a communist society.

Although the Wagnerian theory is rooted in the Revolution of 1848, the principal aspects of its socially oriented projects—authorship, sense of community, and participation—are part of a larger narrative on the activation of the spectator. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, many radical avant-garde movements followed the path taken by Wagner, with the aim of creating a new synthesis between politics and art, and activating the concealed energy of the masses. The Italian Futurists, the Zurich Dadaists and the Surrealists adopted the dissolution of artistic authority and the activation of the audience as their principal aesthetic and political concerns. Among the most representative manifestations that anticipated the collective projects in a public sphere there is *Dada-Season 1921*, a series of visits to selected spots throughout Paris, starting from the church of Saint-Julien-Le-Pauvre. In the early twentieth century, therefore, for many artists and practitioners, discovering spectatorship represented a significant move towards a decisive artistic revolution that was supposed to cure the ills of Western culture of the time, that is to say, rationalism, individualism, and logocentrism. With the arrival of the 1960s, the social dimension of participation, the changing identity of the audience, the intermediality of art, and the supposed self-sacrifice of the artist became the central aspects of a new aesthetic movement aimed at offering a repertoire of alternative responses to consumerist capitalism in Europe, or at proposing participatory actions as a reaction to the rising tide of authoritarianism, especially in South America (Bishop 2012a: 4). Although geographically distant from each other, Guy Debord, the French philosopher and co-founder of the Situationist International, and the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica had very similar aims in different cultural contexts. Debord usually resorted to the concepts of resistance, community, and activation to express his critique of the subjugation resulting from capitalism and to

invite the spectators to reconsider their position towards society. In his opinion, the construction of situations and the transformation of the spectator in *viveur* represented a way to move beyond the dehumanizing and alienating effects of capitalism and consequently to realize a renewed society. The interest which Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica took in interactive art is generally understood in the context of the increasing political repression in Brazil. In 1964, the year the Brazilian military launched a *coup d'état* with the support of the United States government, Oiticica developed *Parangolés*, taken from the Brazilian slang for an agitated situation and sudden confusion or excitement. The artistic project consisted of capes of different materials and colors that were intended to be worn by dancing participants. Some of these "experiential garments" contained poetic or political statements, such as *I Embody Revolt* (*Incorporo La Revolta*, 1967), which would enable the wearers to become aware of their capacity to rebel against the repressive military regime. Although different in their artistic approaches, Oiticica and Debord both resorted to the combination of ethics and aesthetics to engage the audience as collaborators, to forge a co-authoring social body in the creative process.

The Reversal of Roles and the Distribution of Power. The Spectator as Participant or Co-author?

The social dimension of participation adopted by many visual artists and theatre directors—especially in the 1960s—was focused on the creation of temporary communities, through the fusion of the aesthetic (performers) and the social (spectators). In fact, the fulcrum of this social and political trajectory was the experience of a work of art resulting from collective involvement. In other words, the work of art was no longer conceived as an abstract aesthetic expression and commodifiable object but rather as an engine for social and political change. Considering the continuities between the participatory impulse of the 1960s and today, we would like to draw the reader's attention to two crucial interrelated elements that represent two critical issues of the aesthetic of participation. The first is the presumed

reduction of authorial power, or rather the merging of the artist's individualism into a heterogeneous group with the spectators, as a means by which to empower audience participation. The second is the transformation of the viewer or spectator into a participant or co-producer through the reversal of his/her traditional role.

Both elements stemmed from the need to encourage the recuperation and reconstruction of social ties through art and to overcome the traditional relationship between performers and spectators. The relinquishing of authorship was indeed conceived as a positively democratic and non-hierarchical model that would create, even temporarily, a dynamic and elastic community of equal co-subjects, through a continuous redefinition and redistribution of power and roles. In this respect, Erika Fischer-Lichte maintains that the role reversal is "a process that transforms the conventional subject-object relationship"– that is, the traditional binary of spectator-performer opposition—making the exchange between these two poles more complicated than the one who acts and the one who watches (2008: 40). In other words, the shift of roles creates an elastic interdependence between performer/artist and spectator/beholder since both operate as co-creators of the event (Carlson 2004). Consequently, it is possible to affirm that the redefinition of roles occurs when subjects and objects are no longer clearly defined and distinguished. In fact, throughout the performance the distinction between the members of the temporary community may appear shifting and vague as they react constantly to each other, opening up to the possibility of a "collective action" with unpredictable results (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 55). According to the German theoretician, it is "an interplay of disempowerment and empowerment which applies to both artists and spectators" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 50). In other words, it is a democratic power-sharing process that enables the spectator to use the authority that the artists have relinquished to control the progress of performance, to become the producer of his/her aesthetic experience. Fischer-Lichte describes this process by taking as an example *Dionysus in 69,* the first performance created collectively by Richard Schechner's the Performance Group, which was played in1968 and 1969. As Schechner himself affirmed in

his *Environmental Theatre*, the performance—based on *The Bacchae* by Euripides—was essentially realized by using the entire space of a converted garage in New York City's Soho, furnished only with a high platform made of wooden boards, so as to create an organic spatial entity. The purpose was to forge a charged atmosphere that recalls a religious rite and to facilitate the interaction and proximity between the players and the audience. With regard to the transformation of the spectator into co-subject, Schechner made two observations. Firstly, the participation occurred when the performance "stopped being a play and became a social event" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 44) and the spectator felt free to enter into the play like the performers, that is to say as equals. Secondly, the involvement of the spectator in the performance occurred democratically since the people could move freely in the whole space and act in the same way as the performers. This allowed the performance to advance spontaneously through the free flow of actions, instead of following Euripides' text. As Fischer-Lichte points out, the free interaction between subject and object made the demarcation line between performers and spectator indiscernible, turning the latter into an essential component of the creative process, and the former into a collaborator.

Nevertheless, as a result of protests and disrespectful behavior towards one of the actresses, Schechner revised some details in *Dionysus in 69*, trying probably not only to control the development of the play but also to foresee and manipulate the actions and reactions of spectators. Thus, equality was broken, and the hierarchic control re-established. In this vein, the attempt to stem and contain the empowerment of the audience looks like a contradiction in terms that belie and question the concept itself of role reversal and democratic co-authorship. This perspective induces us to think that the artist's decision to be part of an egalitarian group does not necessarily imply the death of the artist or the relinquishment of his/her creative power. It is, indeed, always the artist's authority that preordains his/her demise and abdication, with a view to controlling and using the audience participation-collaboration as new aesthetic material. Seen from this perspective, the redefinition of roles appears to be an extension of

authorial power; paradoxically, the harder the author tries to reduce his/her creative role, the more his/her myth imposes itself. Therefore, the question that Fischer-Lichte herself poses remains open, which is to ask "whether role reversal establishes a community of co-subjects or merely recreates the old relationship in a new guise" (2008: 40). The repositioning of the spectator as co-producer or participant and his/her subsequent presumed empowerment appear to be more "powerful as ideals than as actualized realities" (Bishop 2012a: 2). Indeed, over the years, the belief in a close connection between audience participation and political emancipation has become an orthodoxy in theatre as well as in the visual arts. Behind this sort of dogma, there is a explicit judgement attributing a positive connotation to the active spectator/viewer and a negative value to the passive one. From this perspective, participatory performances propose a romantic perception of their democratic and emancipatory potential, which inevitably opens itself up to observations and objections. First of all, it should be stressed that the spectator's mobility and interaction with the performers do not necessarily imply activation, or rather, do not exclude passivity. In this regard, Martin Barker says that the term activity "actually includes a great deal that is definitively not active in literal senses" (124). Indeed, performances may imply various degrees of participation, not all of which are emancipatory in the same way. It follows that a distinction between collaborator and participant must be made since they represent two very different conditions. The first implies working with someone to create something, the second merely assistance. The socially engaged collective performances and installations that Franco Vaccari developed in the mid-1960s exemplify the vagueness of the spectator's role. Using a functioning photo booth as a social and democratic device in a context of increasing social tension and general disaffection towards the Italian government and state institutions, Vaccari tried to involve his spectators/beholders in communicative and civic action. In *Esposizioni in Tempo Reale* (*Exhibitions in Real Time*, 1972), for example, visitors freely took their photo strips and displayed them on the walls, apparently exercising total control over their identity as citizens. However, although the Italian artist saw in

the *détournement* of technology the possibility for a critical collective reflection upon the crisis of the very notion of subjectivity, as well as an instrument for a temporary emancipation of the individual, the people involved in these collective projects can hardly be considered co-creators. The reason lies in the twofold nature of Vaccari's "exhibitions in real-time." With these projects, the Italian artist is, on the one hand, the precursor of relational and interactive work in progress, and on the other, an unintentional narrator of what we could define today as a society of show, that is to say a society based on media control and addiction. From this perspective, Vaccari's collective photography could be read as a symptomatic landscape of society's expectations in the communication age, or rather as people's desire to be recognizable and recognized, to be protagonists. But being a protagonist is a very different condition from collaboration since being a co-creator does not necessarily imply visibility, but rather awareness of taking part in a project, a clear understanding of and adherence to the purposes at its base. It is the combination of all these factors that breaks down the conventional sense of individual authorship, thus overcoming the distance between the "creator" and the "beholder." The black-and-white unknown faces in Vaccari's works appear, indeed, less as conscious co-authors than as participants involved in an anthropological experiment, eager to honor the "here-and-now" moment.



Franco Vaccari, Photomatic d'Italia, 1972-174.
Photo credit: The Artist & Galleria Mazzoli, Modena

The Radical Subjectification of Reception and the Narcissistic Self-exploitation of Spectator

The trajectory of audience involvement in visual arts projects and theatre performances, considered here, shows two crucial points: firstly, the strategies of participation that were consolidated in the 1960s—inclusion, interaction, cooperation—are not enough to undermine individual authorship and actualize political and sociological emancipation. Secondly, as we will discuss in a moment, the belief according to which everyone is the creator and producer of his/her own aesthetic experience risks turning participatory art and immersive theatre into a promotion of the narcissistic presentism or rather, into what we would define as the radical subjectification of reception.

As many scholars and researchers have remarked over these last years, the questioning of individual authorial power as a means by which to criticize capitalism and enhance social consciousness can assume the form of a fashion trend deprived of any subversive or revolutionary potential. In other words, participatory art and immersive theatre have to deal with the specter of recuperation, a term that Guy Debord and Situationist International (SI) used to identify the strategies that capitalism deploys to sterilize subversive discoveries. Likewise, Rosalind Krauss pointed out that even art that tries to subvert capitalism may end up serving it. Indeed, according to the American art critic, "the master of detournement (subversive appropriation) turns out to be capitalism itself, which can appropriate and reprogram anything to serve its own end" (33). It is a perspective shared even by Claire Bishop, who points out an emerging paradox in participatory art: even if many artists claim to be against neoliberal capitalism, their projects show many elements in common with the "populist agenda of neoliberal governments and its forms (networks, project work, affective labour)" (2012b, 39). Indeed, the principal

core of many participatory and immersive projects is the promise to position the participant as a co-subject of the experience and as a co-creator of transient spaces into which he/she can be immersed by stepping beyond conventional rules of behavior. The tendency in both participatory art and theatre to offer to the spectator a radical subjectification of his/her reception is, indeed, a point that deserves consideration. It is undeniable that whenever the spectator crosses the threshold of the stage or the sacred frame of visual arts, a disjuncture may occur between the figure of the audience as a collective entity and that of the spectator as a narcissistic "consumer." Being aware of this demarcation allows us to evaluate the profound difference between the notion of community—considered here as a group of people who share something that is happening—and that of individuals willing to participate and expose themselves with the aim of experiencing momentary pleasure.

The spatial organization of performance can undoubtedly be considered as an aesthetic element affecting the process of perception as well as the dynamic of participation. Indeed, the possibility of moving freely through space allows the spectator to rediscover his/her subjectivity and consequently amplify his/her own individual sphere by establishing a personal relationship with the space and the performance. In cognitive science and in neuroscience, for instance, the same principle—which is defined as spatial thinking—is recognized as the foundation of abstract thought, since mental concepts arise from the experience of the body in the world. According to Barbara Tversky, Professor Emerita of Psychology at Stanford University, thinking is nothing but finding relations between things, reasoning with the body in space. From this perspective, the immersive theatrical events and participatory projects that imply an ambulatory audience might be described as a meeting between material and sensation, that is to say, thinking through matter, thinking through space.

The radical subjectification of the process of reception, therefore, can be considered as a result of the deviation from the conventional theatrical as well as artistic norms and semiotic systems, such as

the conventional use of language and space: the fluctuating spatial conception and the discontinuous sequence of moments replacing the continuity of time invite spectators to wander between different points in space so as to *produce* their own performance or theatrical reality (Fischer-Lichte, 1997: 69). In this way, the spectator becomes physically and actively present and central to the very existence of the performance (Aronson 204). Such a productive participation entails the introduction of two crucial principles for the reconfiguration of the role of spectatorship in immersive theatrical events, which are the autonomy and absorption of the spectator. A sense of this subjective creativity is clearly evoked in *YOU-The City*, a walking performance created by Fiona Templeton—the Scottish artist and co-founder of the Theatre of Mistakes—in New York in 1988 and subsequently held in Ljubljana, London, the Hague, Zurich, and Munich. The project entailed a private experience, or rather a solo tour of over two hours in which one person at a time was guided through multiple locations of Manhattan—such as a church, an apartment, a basketball court—meeting about fifteen individuals along the way, who each seemed to know something about the spectator, or rather the client, as he/she was called. This work seems to be a further development of *The Street,* the performance created in 1975 by the Theatre of Mistakes, which took place on Ascham Street in London with the participation and collaboration of residents. But unlike this trigger-based pedestrian choreography, *YOU-The City* allowed more interactive associations among actors, audience, settings, and text. During his/her walking experience, the solo spectator/participant underwent a series of encounters that explored the line between the personal and the anonymous in everyday urban interactions, as well as the ambiguity of the self and the other, the internal and the external (Fuchs, Chaudhuri 105). Templeton's piece placed an emphasis on the existing environment and foregrounded the individual's engagement with that network of relations (Aronson 206). In other words, by extending the stage and the play into the living urban surroundings and by appropriating the city itself as a theatrical *milieu*, Templeton's play sought to defamiliarize the cityscape, so as to make the audience-member client explic-

itly self-reflective about everyday "urban encounters and journeys he would probably make without particular notice" (Harvie 1993: 54). The client was thus invited to reconsider his/her relationship to the city and reflect on how his/her responses and actions might affect the perception of the urban environment.

From this perspective, therefore, Templeton's project could be defined as an experiment in consciousness-raising. Indeed, the artist's aim was to stimulate awareness of one's collaborative engagement in a network of beings, so as to help society understand the interrelated conditions of the planet threatened by climate change. *YOU-The City* entails becoming engaged in a community, or rather being involved not as spectators but as performers in events that provide tools to address social or political issues. However, although Templeton reworked the shape of theatre through the audience member's autonomy of action and an absorptive theatrical/spatial experience, it should be noted that the spectator/client actually had few opportunities to intervene in the performance's textuality. Indeed, the spatial journey the spectator undertook was both choreographed and in large measure scripted. In this case, it is possible to assume that *YOU-The City* hinged, finally, on voyeurism and simulated experience (Kershaw 1999: 195).

It follows that in participatory performance the spectator's agency could be superficial or even illusory. Consequently, if on the one hand the aesthetic of total immersion—defined by Josephine Machon as "a total engagement in an activity that engrosses [...] the participant in its very form, a transportation of the audience to the otherworldly-world"—makes new sources of collective empowerment possible, on the other hand it also has the potential to manipulate and disempower spectators, to shape their responses by emphasizing the *principium individuationis,* which is to say the *sense of the self* or rather narcissistic participation (62-63). This twofold aspect is identifiable within Punchdrunk's aesthetic. Their main feature is the "empowerment" of the audience, which is—to use their words—the creation of "a raw and physical response in spectators, in order to make their mind and body fully present in a way which is in antithesis to the

conventional theatre." Indeed, according to Felix Barrett, the founder of the company, in order for theatre to make an impact, audiences must be at the heart of a narrative and have agency over what they experience. The use of masks during some productions—such as *Sleep no More* (2003), for instance, offered spectators both liberation and empowerment, anonymity and a sense of role-play. But, by Barrett's own admission, these spectators remain watchers, or rather ambulatory readers who cannot manipulate the trajectory of the show. Therefore, the use of masks seems to give the audience a sense of uniformity onto the audience and restore a certain hierarchical relationship between performer and spectator. Indeed, the homogenization of the spectator's identity makes him/her easily recognizable and thus manipulable by the performers.

As Gareth White points out, it cannot be denied that the feeling of making choices within their performances can be important to spectators' overall sensations, but the question is whether any apparent agency is real (37). The impression is that an audience-centered aesthetic approach entails "compulsory conduct as primary pleasures of performance and self-absorption as a primary mode of experience for spectators" (Zaiontz 407). The possibility and the implicit promise of physical contact or interaction with a performer and being assigned certain tasks or roles could encourage a narcissistic approach, and justify a sort of voracity of feelings. In other words, the desire for an intense experience and the spectator's self-preoccupation with his/her reception and intense emotions could overshadow the importance of the performance experience itself. Yet, such a productive engagement in Punchdrunk's productions seems to recall neoliberalism's political and economic structures; the more productive you are, the more you gain from the performance. Punchdrunk's invitation to take your own path allows you to not only experience scenes the way you prefer but also to gain or discover some other aspects and situations that are not generally accessible to everybody. Some spectators, for example, seek out user-guides, bloggers, and useful tips to take the most advantage of the performance (Alston 137). From this perspective, as Jen Harvie explains, the audience member seems more like a "prosumer," to

use the term coined by the sociologist Alvin Toffler, referring to a combination of "consumer" and "producer" (2013: 50). Moreover, in these participatory performances, the use of unusual and disused locations—such as railway arches for *Tunnel* (2008), and a warehouse for *The Tempest* (2003) and *Faust* (2006)—seems to be a strategy to satisfy the desire to be inside the drama and have the feeling of being behind the scenes. Indeed, their performances are not based on a dialectical relationship with the site. There is no activation of or engagement with the narrative of the site, which is a significant component in the creation of performance meaning (Pearson 35). On the contrary, together performance and space seem to restore a sort of narrative interdependence, again transforming the space into a by-product of theatre and into a fictional world that the spectator crosses, losing sight of the everyday world. The aim, therefore, is not to develop modes of thinking and models of action within the existing reality—as Fiona Templeton in *YOU-The City* tried to do – but rather to let the audience disappear into the work.



YOU-The City, 1988. Photo credit: Zoe Beloff, Fiona Templeton

It is what Rancière defines as a form of consumerist hyper-activism or rather as the triumph of capitalism (21). The audience members,

totally immersed in the performance, are no longer able to critically approach the performance. They imagine having choice and power while in reality they are manipulated to the point of surrendering their freedom, participating in an experience without conflicts and divergences, turning the momentary pleasure into consensual contact. The oscillation of spectatorship between a sense of community and narcissistic participation that has been considered here shows that the destruction of frames does not always succeed in absorbing the spectator (Aronson 212), making him/her an independent agent. To put it differently, the separation between performers and spectators cannot be abolished by getting rid of the traditional topology of theatre, that is to say by collapsing the distance between the stage and the assigned seats. Even if the space of performance can be contorted, modified, or compressed, spectators and performers can never be totally isolated or merged into one (Fischer-Lichte, Wihstutz 2015: 4).

Conclusion

As each case mentioned here shows, the elastic relationship between subject and object—in both theatre and visual arts—is exposed to contradictions as it lacks any fixed rules. Indeed, the false dichotomy according to which participating is associated with active agency and spectating with passivity—which over these last decades has infiltrated many aesthetic discourses on participatory events—does not seem to offer an effective critical perspective. The promise of temporary deep immersion in a new different reality is not necessarily synonymous with democratic participation and even less with the guarantee of critical emancipation. Art that obliterates spectatorship as it is conventionally understood requires a new understanding and a new critical approach that allows us to see the difference between the participatory performance that resorts to audience engagement as a means—not as an end in itself—and those promoting the consumption of the self as a primary pleasure.

In addition, we should not forget that the ambiguity of participation is also due to its extra-aesthetic nature; although audience in-

volvement has been an important concern in art since Romanticism, the answers cannot be found exclusively in orthodox aesthetics. The challenge is, therefore, to stress new ways of critiquing that are able to reveal possible implications with the new liberal economy that do not make any difference between art and entertainment; to elaborate an inter-artistic and transdisciplinary perspective capable of thinking of Participatory Art and Immersive Theatre as a sensitive measurement of social feeling and political action instead of as a form of art exclusively linked to visuality or textuality. The challenge is to refocus attention on the quality and meaning of what participatory aesthetic produces and on the critical thinking it inspires.

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"A Way Not To See": Immersive Dramaturgies of Migration and Displacement

Szabolcs Musca

Abstract: This article looks at dramaturgical practices within a recent visual and immersive migrant theatre and refugee performance initiative that questions both the politics and representations of memory. Drawing on Caroline Williams and Reem Karssli's recent performance work *Now Is The Time to Say Nothing* (2018), I examine emerging dramaturgical models that deal directly with both lived and witnessed memories of war and refugeedom today. The article maps new aesthetics created through visual and immersive dramaturgical practices and explore the ways in which such aesthetics might challenge and shape existing testimonial narratives of migration. This production is an important work among a growing number of visual and participatory initiatives that build on activist aesthetics. I will argue that such explorations are increasingly important as they challenge dominant media portrayals and foster a re-evaluation of complex identities and ideologies amidst recent shifts in global politics and economics.

Résumé : Cet article examine les pratiques dramaturgiques dans le cadre d'une récente initiative du théâtre visuel et immersif des migrants et des réfugiés qui remettent en question à la fois la politique et les représentations de la mémoire. En nous appuyant sur les récents travaux de Caroline Wake et de Reem Karssli, *Now Is The Time To Say Nothing* (2018), nous examinerons les modèles dramaturgiques émergents traitant directement des souvenirs et témoignages de guerre et des réfugiés contemporains. Cet article dressera la carte des nouvelles esthétiques créées par des pratiques dramaturgiques visuelles et immersives tout en explorant les façons dont ces esthétiques pourraient remettre en question et façonner les récits testimoniaux existants sur la migration. La présente production est un travail important parmi un nombre croissant d'initiatives visuelles et participatives qui s'appuient sur l'esthétique activiste. Nous soutenons que cette exploration est de plus en plus importante, car elle remet en question les représentations

médiatiques dominantes et favorise une réévaluation d'identités et d'idéologies complexes dans le contexte des changements récents de la politique et de l'économie mondiale.

Keywords: Immersive dramaturgy, refugee performance, migrant theatre, activist aesthetics, memory

Mots-clés : Dramaturgie immersive, performance des réfugiés, théâtre des migrants, esthétique activiste, mémoire

In their article on *Performing Translocal Memory: Testament and Testimony in Contemporary Theatre and Performance*, Donia Mounsef and Mai Hussein identified a "memorialist turn" in contemporary productions that deal with trauma and migrancy (Mounsef and Hussein 140). Reflecting on Marvin Carlson's concept of "memory machine," the authors position theatre, and arguably theatres of migration, as "a space of exploration between living and telling, memory and forgetting, 'speech and survival'" (144-145).

Indeed, recent works by migrant theatre makers in the UK and beyond reverberate such renewed engagement with memory, especially in the context of ongoing war(s), displacement and difficult journeys. Recent examples include the National Theatre Wales' *Tide Whisperer* (2018), a large-scale immersive and site-specific performance staged on the shores of Tenby (Wales, UK) that tackled experiences of refugeedom; Nick Makoha's *The Dark* (2019), produced by Fuel and Ovalhouse theatre centred on the author's and his mother's migration journey fleeing dictatorship and conflict in Uganda; and British-Rwandan Dorothée Munyaneza's *Unwanted* (2019, UK premiere) that focused on the stories of the survivors of the genocide in Rwanda (especially raped women) and their forced displacement.

In this article, I hope to map new aesthetics created through immersive dramaturgical practices and explore the ways in which such aesthetics might challenge and shape existing testimonial narratives

of migration. In particular, I will discuss some of the dramaturgical practices that address issues of "witnessing of trauma" and the "trauma of witnessing" (Mounsef and Hussein 157) in Caroline Williams and Reem Karssli's *Now is the Time to Say Nothing*, a recent immersive performance installation developed in the UK. How can we perform traumatic memories of war and difficult migration journeys in ways that would enable a sense of shared recognition and collective embodied memory? Or—as the production I am about to discuss asks—"How do you make a story where everyone thinks [it] is about them?!"

Caroline Williams and Reem Karssli's *Now is the Time to Say Nothing* is an instruction-based performance installation originally developed at the Young Vic Theatre (London) as part of the Young Vic Taking Part programme (2015). The installation is currently produced by MAYK, having been reworked for Mayfest Bristol in 2018, and recently presented at the Victoria and Albert Museum (June 2019) and Battersea Arts Centre (October 2019) as part of extensive touring in the UK and Ireland.

Created over a five-year period and co-authored by theatre director Williams and Syrian film maker Karssli, the performance builds on interactive video and immersive soundscape and is usually staged in studio spaces involving a small number of audiences of around fifteen people at any given time, audience groups changing hourly throughout the day. For Williams, the production analyses the "semantics of screens in relation to the war in Syria" (n.p.), exploring how we observe and connect to representations of war and refugee experiences. Against the backdrop of increasingly polarised debates on migration, this production makes space for both reflection—creating "an experience which attempts to connect a UK audience to the human story behind the news"—and *action* as a "provocation against armchair passivity" (MAYK 2019). Key to both is the audience's participation. In fact, this performance installation is produced in close collaboration with audience-participants and meaning is forged through interaction and dialogue between individual audience members and the work.

Participation and dialogue are central in Williams' previous theatre works as well, forming the base for social and environmental activism through artistic means in dialogue with ongoing political issues. Her *You Do Not Have to Say Anything* (The Yard Theatre, 2018) for instance was a collaboration with residents of Tower Hamlets and looked at issues of policing after several deaths in police custody in East London. *Can You Hear Me Now?* (2017) was a translocal live performance that took place in Bristol (UK), Kampala (Uganda) and Kigali (Rwanda) simultaneously and featured teenagers from each location exploring digital connectivity and their relationship to it. In *Make Yourself At Home* (Nuit Blanche Brussels, 2016), Williams offered yet another immersive experience with migration, in this case via a one-on-one performance installation inside a cardboard box, bringing together audience members with migrant performers.

All three productions mentioned here seem to build on immersive dramaturgy for mapping important socio-political and cultural issues. Beyond their focus on creating a unique, individual encounter with the performance work and the issues they present, Williams' works aim to reach beyond the individual and towards collective solidarity. Certainly, in the case of *Now is the Time to Say Nothing,* an intimate exploration of connectedness among destruction—as young Londoners connect with Karssli via Skype—is expanded towards a more collective exploration of the politics and representations of memories.

As I will argue in the following part of this article, *Now is the Time to Say Nothing* is a powerful work that fosters activist aesthetics through the elaborate use of visual, immersive and participatory practices, forms that are increasingly important in challenging dominant media portrayals and in facilitating a re-evaluation of complex identities and ideologies amidst recent shifts in global politics and economics.

"A Way Not to See": Capturing Memories



Now Is The Time To Say Nothing at Mayfest 2018,
Photo by Paul Blakemore

The audience follows Reem Karssli's life from the comfort of armchairs set in front of television screens equipped with headphones. Each audience member is isolated within his/hers armchair during most of the fifty minutes running time, almost solely focusing on fragmented images as Karssli captures her everyday life on camera amidst war, and then in Germany after a difficult sea crossing. As Aphra Evans observes: "this arrangement fragments and isolates each audience member as if they were alone in their own front rooms" (n.p.). The screening starts with untuned TV images then moves on to raptured news footages, extracts from parliamentary debates, images of streets, and aerial bombings. We are reminded of the strange physicality of video footage via instructions to touch the screen in front of us and feel the tingling sensation of electrons interacting with our fingers. References to the materiality of television broadcasting interweaves the performance installation as audiences are invited to reflect on the

physicality of screens and screening, for example through imagining the photons criss-crossing the air in the studio space. Clearly, the production is (self)aware of the complexities around connecting or disconnecting to difficult experiences. As Williams explains:

> Disconnection to global conflicts through screens was part of the fabric of being in the West and in the modern world. We look after screens as if they are toddlers, never out of our sight, and yet they often leave us feeling distant from the very thing we've just been shown. (n.p.)

Karssli's video-captured memories of everyday life in war-time Damascus are presented here as almost tangible flashbacks due to the high-quality soundscapes created for this performance. Williams explains in an interview for the Ministry of Counterculture that she was deeply inspired by Reem Karssli's documentary film, *Every Day, Every Day* (2013), a video diary documenting the life of her family in Syria during the period when the revolution turned into a civil war. Excerpts from the documentary—characterised by Williams as "so quiet and yet full of acute restlessness and claustrophobia" (Healey 2015)—form the dramaturgical spine of this production. As a carrier and diffuser of memories Karssli's video merges the personal and the collective.

Memory, as Mounsef and Hussein remind us, is constructed as "a dual process of retrospective spatio-temporal narrative accounts, combined with physically re-enacted mnemonic flashbacks" (141). Indeed, Karssli often returns to feelings, smells and to "things that used to be": the family home, the family-owned shop—things that no longer exists, but are very much alive in her memory. She also forgets things, like her "fantasy world," her inner thoughts, drawings, project plans. This is an ongoing war and she reflects on the chaotic nature of remembering. In fact, the creators of the production are conscious of the incompleteness of memories and the importance of forgetting.

Khalid Amine gives an important analysis on how painful personal memories can(not) be performed and/or conveyed publicly. He looked at public testimonies as performative acts and performing memories in Moroccan theatre after the so-called "Years of Lead" (from around the

1960s until the late 1990s), pointing out that: "[M]emory narratives of trauma, as manifested in testimonies and other representational forms, are never complete entities […] in so far as they are full of gaps and silences, edited in and out" (126). Reflecting on the limits of representing testimonies, he concludes: "Testimony is inhabited by the impossibility of telling, as it is mostly composed of bits and pieces of an overwhelmed and disrupted memory and acts that can by no means be articulated as knowledge per se" (126).



Now Is The Time To Say Nothing at Mayfest 2018.
Photo by Paul Blakemore

For Karssli forgetting is survival, echoing Theodule Ribot's observation—from his late 19th century *Les maladies de la mémoire*—that forgetting is "not a sign of malady, but of health of memory" (in Mounsef and Hussein 142). In this context, Karssli's filming everything was a desperate attempt to hold on to her personal memories, but also a way to critically distance herself from reality. As she puts it in the production: "It was a way not to see how the world is cruel. To see things from outside, to be like a viewer."

The wartime reality that transpires from Karssli's story positions the young Londoners—connected with her via Skype—not only as viewers, but as witnesses. Part of the Young Vic's youth programme, the original production (2015) involved London-based teenagers reaching out to Karssli, trying to understand the nature of the conflict beyond the news footage. Their connection evolved over time and the conversations prompted the group to organise a public intervention in Hyde Park, London, to raise public awareness about the Syrian conflict, however this moment of activism vanished as passers-by were reluctant to engage. In fact, the performance can be read as a response to this failed attempt to challenge public narratives. Occasionally, recordings of the Skype conversations intervene in the screening, shaping our perception further and away from the news and the screens. As Lyn Gardner remarks in her review, the performance "reminds how sitting in the dark watching a screen only distances us, and actively tries to bring us together to reach out to the real people, just like us, whose lives are blighted by war" (n.p.).

A few times during the screening, we hear instructions through the headphones to stand up and look around us, make eye contact with our fellow audience members, close our eyes and listen to the Lebanese singer Fairuz's 1970s song *Habbaytak Bissayf* about a girl waiting for her love who never arrived. This moment came as a welcomed interruption. Karssli's footage shows snowing on the streets of Damascus, and inhabitants of the city venture out joyfully after a long period sheltering indoors. Snow is also falling over our heads, in the form of white confetti, interrupting the solitary performance experience. Our reconstruction of the event is often interrupted just as the conflict in Syria interrupts everyday life. The performance accepts the "impossibility of reconstructing the totality of truth" (Mounsef and Hussein 150). The artists give up on constructing a well-defined narrative. Instead the production focuses on affect and with that, questions meaning making.

As Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt's analysis on interactivity and new technologies show us, setting "the audience as 'witness'

rather than spectator implicates the audience members in the making of the meaning" (198). Indeed, as mentioned earlier in the article, meaning, in this performance, is developed in interaction with the audience through close observation, participation and reflection. Hence, witnessing also allows for a practice of critical engagement by "mak[ing] the audience aware of the unfolding process of making meaning through performance" (203). This of course goes beyond the performance work itself. It also challenges our reliance on media representations of war and displacement in line with Mounsef and Hussein's argument on theatres of trauma, which they consider a powerful tool to expose the ideological frames of media production and the devices that construct the illusion of the "real" (146).

In this sense, Williams and Karssli's installation critically intervenes in meaning making and disrupts mainstream media narratives on migration, at least at specific places and regional geo-cultural contexts where the performance installation is set up while on tour. Arguably, the direct contact with the audience (via the instructions, for instance) enables a dramaturgy that interrupts fiction, confronts audience-participants with experiences of war and displacement, and brings audience members together in building common narratives (Amine 134-138). Williams explains: "We knew we wanted the audience to have a journey from the normal screen where you might sit and watch the news to then being in the space, connecting with each other, with this war and with someone in Syria" (n.p.). Besides offering a visual and sonic encounter that aims to transforms a distant conflict into an experience easier to relate to, the creators also draw attention to our involvement, "challenging us to examine the ways in which we identify, produce, and respond to circumstances as 'real'" (Turner and Behrndt 202).

What are the ethics and the aesthetics that emerge from such an engagement? How does digital technology—at the "meeting point in-between the performers, observers, and the confluence of media involved in a performance at a particular moment in time" (Chappel

and Kattenbelt 12)—enable a political responsiveness and an ethics of recognition moving beyond the performance?

I will now turn to the immersive dramaturgy employed by Williams and Karssli in the key part of their performance installation to think about representation, political agency and the possibilities as well as the limits of activism.

Sharing Memories: Immersive Dramaturgy towards Activist Aesthetics

Karssli's film stops abruptly as she prepares for the crossing through the Mediterranean. We are asked to move away from our screens and take a seat on a rug in the middle of the circle delimited by our armchairs in the studio space. Then, moving closer to each other, to sit together facing the same direction in the dark performance space. Through an elaborate sound montage, we hear people rushing through pebbles, then the loud sound of a boat engine shaking the floor beneath us, the dramatic sound of the sea, waves, different voices and shouting. We soon realise that we are on the boat, taking part and witnessing this particular refugee journey. Later, images appear—projected to a large screen in front of us—of a crowded dinghy followed by close-ups of refugee arrivals at the shores of Europe.

"The experience becomes visceral," as Aphra Evans rightly observes (n.p.). The visceral nature of the experience—demonstrated by Gareth White's analysis on the concepts of immersive theatre—is the result of a combination of proximity *to* and interaction *with* the "multi-sensory" mechanisms of the performance. White reflects on Josephine Machon's concepts of "(syn)aesthetics" and "visceral performance" explaining that the spectatorial experience "entails that the subject that makes sense of its experience is constituted by those bodily senses, rather than distinct from them" (229). He argues—through the works of Punchdrunk and Shunt—that "bodily sensing is vital to sense making" in immersive theatre productions (229). The "corporeal character of [the] audience experience" allows for an immersive encounter, establishing "a space that is replete with associations and which becomes

performative in new ways in consequence of the audience's presence within it" (230, 225).

In the present case, the immersive soundscape and participatory dramaturgy of the performance allowed for a quasi-lived experience and a close encounter with displacement and dispossession through an almost tangible digital "reality" built up throughout the performance, but especially in the approximative ten minutes-long "scene" detailed earlier. Immersive works, as White shows, have "a special capacity to create this kind of deep involvement" with the performance, but can this be extended towards a sustained and meaningful engagement with issues of refugeedom beyond the performance? Or can such immersive performances engender an ethical engagement that would act on the "political potential inherent in the reordering of audience–performer relationships" (225, 222).

In an interview for the Irish RTÉ Radio, Williams and Karssli assert that the performance is not a reconstruction of her or any other particular refugee's journey, for that would be abusive. The audience needs to imagine their own journey, they add (RTÉ Radio 1 2019). Indeed, in this core moment of the performance, just before the sea crossing, Karssli asks us: "I would like you to come with me on a journey, if you can, if you can imagine it." Her decision to share this refugee sea crossing that keeps only a loose referential connection with her own journey, echoes Mounsef and Hussein's important statement that "direct re-telling runs the risk of re-traumatizing the 'other'" (152). In the same vein, Karssli also acknowledges the audience's position as witnesses of such a traumatic journey, saying: "Thank you for taking this journey with me. I know you didn't really have a choice, but sometimes in life we don't."

Reflecting on the Moroccan context, Khalid Amine contemplates the transformational capacity of publicly shared testimonies as sites of "participation, transmission, production, and reproduction of knowledge" that "require[s] the presence of both the 'I' located in the space of trauma and the 'we', at the scene of narrative performance"(127). In this performance installation fragmented refugee memories are not

only retold and listened to by the audience, but they are (re)imagined and "re-enacted." The communal "re-enactment" of the sea crossing forms the basis of a shared collective recognition and memory of the thousands and thousands of sea crossings during the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. The creators are clear that this is not a re-living of a refugee journey, but rather an "imagining" of our own journey. The "pedagogical and liberating premise" (127)—to use Amine's wording—stems from the immersive practice employed here by the performance makers. Mounsef and Hussein quote Karen Malpede's observation that:

> [A] theatre of witness increases the individual's and the society's capacity to bear witness. […] provides its audience with the knowledge, the courage, the time and the community in which to contemplate and affirm its engagement in actual, private and public acts of witness. (155)

Now is the Time to Say Nothing recognised what Mounsef and Hussein describe as the problematic "relationship of performance to language and its insufficient expression" to capture the "effect of violence on shattered people" (140)—hence the title of the production. In this key scene of the performance Williams and Karrsli moved away from language to activate an audience experience beyond words and (story)telling. Immersion as a dramaturgical and aesthetic practice—based on the audience's close interaction with the space, Karssli's story, and each other—serves an affective political goal: to facilitate a shared embodied understanding of displacement and refugeedom.

This is of course in stark contrast with recent, and indeed current political narratives and media portrayals of refugee arrivals in the UK (Malik 2014). As Emma Cox shows, when looking at processional aesthetics in the context of the so-called European "refugee crisis," we often see that "the aestheticization and narrativization of arrival feed a contemporary politics that places the volitional subject […] within a condemnatory frame" (485). Her examination also demonstrates how, by lacking political agency "refugees remain most acceptable within contemporary paradigms of humanitarianism when they appear passive and recipient" (485). Karssli refuses such a positioning of

her story as the performance switches focus away from her and on to us audience-participants.

In light of the above, what this performance offers is an intervention in public representation of migration, triggering a rethinking of societal dichotomies of hostility versus hospitality. It merges the personal and the collective in order to counter political and media strategies of "othering." As I discussed elsewhere (Musca and Corrêa), such dramaturgies of suspension and re-appropriation of otherness may prove useful in fostering "political transformation through subversive performative practice" (Amine 125). Khalid Amine writes that Moroccan testimonial performances often acted as "counter-agents to official historiography" intervening into public memory formation (127). Alongside this formative approach, Karssli's of sharing her narrative is also a means for resistance and agency.

Throughout the performance she is in control of the representation of her memories and her journey from Syria to Germany. She takes ownership over her own narrative on and off stage. As in publicly shared testimonies of trauma, her narrative "become[s] a means of empowerment when other forms of power are denied or are beyond reach" (Amine 133). Notwithstanding the "profound political violence" (Cox 485) of refugees across the globe, this performance remains an "important means for regaining agency" (Amine 139).

In the first part of this article I discussed how, by moving away from a metaphorical treatment of migration, Williams and Karssli created a multi-sensory exploration of the refugee experience in performance. I have argued that the immersive practice the performance makers employed formed the basis of an ethical-political engagement. Firstly, this provided agency to Karssli to assert her identity and her own narrative *vis-à-vis* dominant media portrayals; secondly, it cultivated an

empathy driven encounter that encouraged audiences to re-evaluate their own perception of what it means to be a refugee.

I would argue that the aesthetic emerging from this immersive engagement is an activist one. Reflecting on migrant activism in Paris, Emine Fişek points out two key aspects of what she calls "immigrant aesthetics": resistance against stigmatisation and rendering migrant experiences visible (42). She defines activism through theatre and performance as "building new aesthetic categories around the performing immigrant body, while nonetheless participating in the wider world of cultural resistance" (42).

It is reasonable to claim that Williams and Karssli's performance fostered political responsiveness through its activist aesthetics, while promoting a representation forged by and with a Syrian refugee rather than different media outlets. However, the production remained limited in exposing the economic, political and socio-cultural legacies and contexts that contribute to forced migration and displacement. This is because of the performance close focus on sharing a human story beyond the headlines. As Evans formulates:

> *Now Is The Time To Say Nothing* explores the many ways in which screens might be used to meaningfully connect audiences across the globe with the suffering of everyday Syrians—and, in doing so, highlights how little they succeed in achieving this today. (n.p.)

Arguably, screens and media representation reflect the established "power hierarchies that maintain injustice" and precarity (Zaroulia 187). In order to understand migratory identities and to cultivate a collective recognition, we would need to engage with ideologies and cultural legacies (e.g., colonialism) beyond the performance. According to Marilena Zaroulia: "If migration exceeds our limits of rationality and reason, it follows that performances that engage with migration should also interrupt the logic or expectations of the European sovereign I" (187). Zaroulia proposes a "spatial reorientation, new ways of mapping the shifting hierarchies of our world" (190). Perhaps building solidarity could be one of the first steps in addressing systemic failures, and this is what Williams and Karssli's immersive practice engenders.

The performance creates a forum for audiences to ethically encounter, explore and discuss migrancy. As Stefan Bläske *et al.* write: "[S]paces of art can be places where we pre-enact, where we can search for and rehearse alternatives […] speaking is a social action and language never only describes the world, but also creates one" (11).

By connecting to the political potential of immersive theatre, and by "function[ing] as a site for public discourse rather than spectacle" (Marschall 161), this performance installation not only moves its audience to reach out, but it also fosters alternative imaginaries that are inclusive of migrants and migrant cultures.

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Eating for Victory: Making Small-Scale Immersive Theatre in the UK

Sarah Sigal and Katharine Fry

Abstract: What are the dramaturgical challenges posed by making small-scale immersive theatre? This article will explore how we made the immersive performance dining event *Eating for Victory* (2015), charting the ways in which we wove together text, choreography, devised performance, audience interaction, design and food. In London, from 2013-2015, we ran Hush Hush Hoopla, a small, experimental company specialising in immersive performance events involving food and storytelling. As audience-participants at many immersive shows by companies such as Punchdrunk, Secret Cinema and Gingerline HQ, we watched the rise of these companies that created heavily designed, atmospheric events with little narrative or character-driven content for the newly-minted experience economy. We conceived our company in order to create intimate but affordable performance events with food, designed to entertain, provoke, engage and nourish our audiences. This article will deconstruct and provide an insight into the process of making *Eating for Victory*, as well as the challenges posed by making small-scale immersive theatre in the UK.

Résumé : Quels sont les défis dramaturgiques posés par la réalisation de théâtre immersif à petite échelle? Cet article explorera comment nous avons créé l'événement de performance immersive *Eating for Victory* (2015), tracer les façons dont nous avons lié ensemble texte, chorégraphie, conception de la performance, interaction avec le public, design et nourriture. À Londres, de 2013 à 2015, nous avons dirigé Hush Hush Hoopla, une petite compagnie de théâtre expérimental spécialisée dans les événements de performance immersifs impliquant nourriture et narration. En tant que spectatrices participant à de nombreux spectacles immersifs de compagnies telles que Punchdrunk, Secret Cinema et Gingerline HQ, nous avons assisté à la montée en puissance de ces compagnies qui ont créé des spectacles à l'atmosphère et aux décors particulièrement travaillés qui s'inscrivent

dans la nouvelle « économie de l'expérience » mais tendent à délaisser le travail autour de la trame narrative et des personnages. Nous avons conçu notre compagnie afin de créer des événements de performance intimes mais abordables avec de la nourriture, conçus pour divertir, provoquer, engager et nourrir notre public. Cet article déconstruira et fournira un aperçu du processus de fabrication de *Eating for Victory*, ainsi que des défis posés par la création de théâtre immersif à petite échelle au Royaume-Uni.

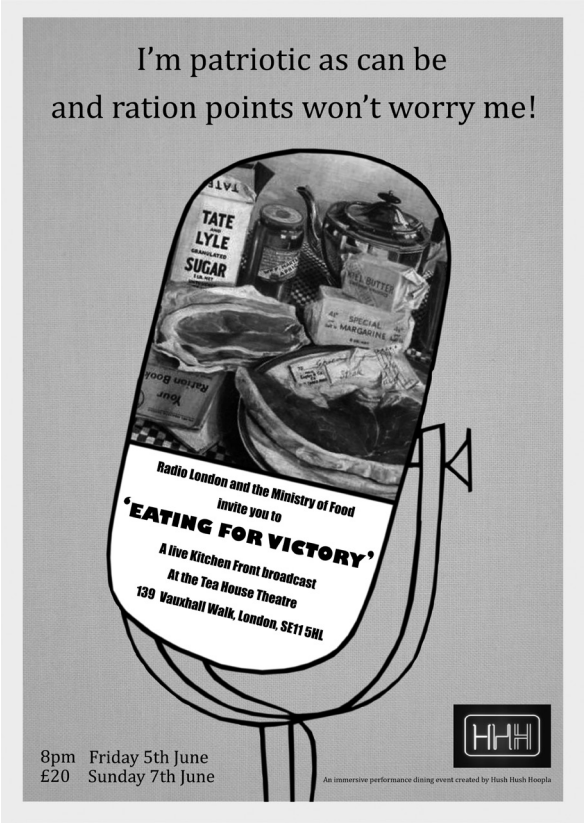
Keywords: Contemporary British new writing, collaborative theatre, site-specific theatre, political theatre, female playwrights, female directors

Mots-clés : Nouvelle écriture britannique contemporaine, collaboration, théâtre collaboratif, théâtre *site-specific*, théâtre politique, autrices de théâtre, metteuses en scène

In London in 2013, as two freelance theatre and performance-makers, we formed Hush Hush Hoopla to make small-scale immersive theatrical events with food, focusing on producing narrative and character-driven content and intimate experiences. Companies producing immersive experiences seemed to be multiplying but we saw a gap in the landscape: events that provided the audience with an affordable theatrical experience created for an unusual space, including a satisfying story and enough food to sustain them over the course of an evening. In 2014, we were commissioned by Russian supper club Russian Revels and Pushkin House to create *The Spies Came in from the Cold* and in 2015, we made *Eating for Victory* for the Tea House Theatre.

This paper offers an overview of the dramaturgical challenges posed by making small-scale immersive theatre by sharing the processes and strategies we as co-directors devised while creating *Eating for Victory*. We chart each step in the creation of this show against the backdrop of other companies offering a range of immersive experiences with var-

ying levels of narrative content, original material, scope for audience interaction and the integration of dining.



Eating for Victory poster. Designed by K. Fry and S. Sigal

Immersive Theatre in London

While establishing Hush Hush Hoopla, we were inspired by the variety of immersive work being made at the time. As both artists and as audience members, we analysed the various choices each production made concerning space, proxemics, design, performance, audience experience and dramaturgy. Looking back from 2021, it seemed the

field of immersive and interactive theatre reached a peak in terms of popularity, visibility and innovation in the UK in 2015, when we were conceiving and making *Eating for Victory*. The rise of experimental theatre and performance converged with the rise of the "experience economy," providing the right conditions for the expansion (in terms of scale, vision and budget) of immersive companies such as Punchdrunk, Secret Cinema, dreamthinkspeak, Coney, Shunt, Les Enfants Terribles and Teatro Vivo (Pine and Gilmore).

When considering what kind of process of performance and event-making we wanted to adopt as Hush Hush Hoopla, we considered the number of models used by contemporary immersive companies which revolved around a distinctive central element. Leading companies include Punchdrunk who focused on creating large-scale, highly-designed, detailed world-building; while Secret Cinema centred film screenings and built the performance experience around the themes in the film; Coney foregrounds immersive technologies as an essential element of their performances. However, we also felt it was important to consider the socio-political implications of these decisions and how the companies positioned themselves as a major part of what Adam Alston terms the "experience economy" (16). Companies like Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema came to depend on a model of using well-known classical literature, popular film or other canonical stories, as the basis for the creation of detailed, immersive worlds. We felt these works had become increasingly expensive for audiences while making merely passing reference to their chosen source, sacrificing the meaningful content of narrative and character development, in spite of their reliance on these works to give their work a *raison d'être*, in the service of what seemed like merely a memorable atmosphere. In *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation*, Alston attributes this trend in immersive theatre production to the adaptation of companies "to an emerging neoliberal paradigm" and a "neoliberal consumer increasingly offered personalised and experiential forms of consumption in an expanding 'experience economy'"(16). He notes that immersive theatre is "preoccupied with the provision of stimulating and memorable experiences,

and an objectification of audience experiences according to a logic that chimes with the commodification of experience elsewhere in the experience economy" (16). In *Immersive Theatre: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, Josephine Machon writes that the Punchdrunk approach "plunders" and "opens up" the "themes, forms and narratives in classic literary, cinematic and visual art forms," using choreography and scenography in order to construct elaborate and multiple audience experiences (3). However, we felt that Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema had become so oriented around the ephemerally visual and the allusive that they missed an opportunity to draw more deeply from and build on the rich narratives and characters within their source material. In this way, we felt inspired as makers to create immersive experiences that provided audiences with detailed, extensive stories and characters.

As Hush Hush Hoopla, we wanted to create a distinctive event that was intimate and affordable and incorporated food into the performance. We looked to companies that created immersive dining events to understand how they worked with scenography, performance and narrative. Established in 2010 by Suz Mountford and Kerry Adamson, Gingerline HQ credits itself as having invented the "immersive dining" experience. Though the format has been adjusted and embellished over their decade in operation, the emphasis is on themed multi-course dining. Their early outings sat firmly within the emerging dining club scene in London—groups of people booked for a sit-down meal, often sharing larger communal tables with strangers to create a convivial atmosphere (Cooper n.p.). Until 2014/15, Gingerline HQ experiences were mostly embellished atmospheres for static diners. Tickets cost £45-£50 for a four-course meal in a themed environment and a limited edition print which also functioned as the evening's menu. In *HMS Gingerline* (2011), the audience dined in a constructed mess hall, on a naval submarine conjured using custom film projections through portholes. Gingerline HQ launched *The Lost Gardens of Gingerline* in 2014/15 with a much greater narrative component than previous works. Guests were invited to a gala celebrating the centenary of the disappearance of Lionel Stirling Grey, first Earl of

Gingerline, gardener, explorer, and flavourologist. The show featured headphones with stories, a performance ensemble and, for the first time, story and performance development were credited roles on the production team (Gingerline Group).

Hush Hush Hoopla Mission: From Russia to Rations

We took these critical observations and applied them to our own projects as we developed the ethos for Hush Hush Hoopla. Our mission was to fuse site-responsive physicality with text-based work and integrated dining, creating engaging characters and narratives that provided our audience with an intimate and memorable experience in which they were invited to explore different approaches to participation and collaboration. We made work that engaged with and responded to contemporary society and the current political climate, using research, drawing parallels between present issues and historical events, avoiding didacticism through a method of association rather than direct representation. Katharine comes from a background in live art, video art and choreography; her process is site-responsive, generating symbolic imagery, performance scores and structures through improvising with an environment or set of objects. Sarah's practice is rooted in text-based work; her process is oriented around collaborative practice that combines text and devised material to produce story and character-driven performance.

The Spies Came in from the Cold (2014) was commissioned by Russian cultural centre Pushkin House in collaboration with chefs Russian Revels. During the event, guests were trained by actors as undercover agents by the KGB and CIA before being sent to gather secrets in agricultural production and food technologies at a 1950s international food expo. We drew inspiration from The Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy (a permanent general-purpose trade show and amusement park in Moscow, built in 1939) and two 1959 exhibitions to increase "cultural contact" between the USA and the USSR following years of tension and an escalating arms race, the American National Exhibition in Moscow and the Soviet Exhibition

at the New York Coliseum. Though the event was rooted in history, we were cognisant that 2014 was the year of the Winter Olympics in Sochi and the Crimean Crisis, the latter resulting in the US imposing sanctions on Russia, and were curious to explore subtle parallels between the two time periods. The audience moved through six areas of Pushkin House. Upon arrival they were either given Russian names and missions relating to uncovering Soviet secrets for CIA, or American names and missions relating to uncovering American secrets for the KGB. Audience members were paired and encouraged to find their spy counterparts through mingling. For example, Nikitichna Yefimova, actually an American PA at Coca-Cola, looking to sell the stolen recipe to the highest bidder, might have met Bobby O'Dell, actually a Soviet factory owner who wanted to launch a Soviet version. The mission began with training. The two groups watched propaganda videos, one series focusing on the crumbling East, the other on the decadent West. The Soviet group met KGB Spymaster Tatiana and Spyrunner Yury to be trained in food traditions and toast-giving in the US, while the American group received similar training in Soviet customs from CIA Spymaster Charles and Spyrunner Rose, with both scenes playing on cultural stereotypes. The trained groups were released into the food expo to sample the wares and gather secrets. Their trainers also appeared, now as their undercover identities running the food stands. The event climaxed in the Valyut Nyj Soviet currency exchange bar where double agent Alice was identified and executed in a choreographed sequence. Her body was dragged away while the audience took to the dance floor.

With an audience of 50 people, a cast of five performers and six rooms to navigate, the *Spies* experience was intimate and involved. With a ratio 1:10, each performer was available to each audience member through the training, food expo, bar finale and their transitional interludes. There was time for 1:1 improvisations where performers could fully disclose their character background while the audience could experiment with their new identities, being as active or passive as they felt comfortable. Each audience member could engage with narrative content through group scenes and personalised 1:1 content.

Through the *Spies*, we established our format and method to realise our mission: making affordable, inclusive, narrative-driven immersive performance with integrated dining that resonates with contemporary social concerns; a total event where everything from initial ticket purchase to the end of the night was part of the experience.



Eating for Victory, pictured (left to right): Annamaria Adams, Hayley Thompson, Oscar Blend, Erin Hutching. Photo by David Monteith-Hodge.

Eating for Victory

We developed *Eating for Victory* in line with our mission and following our established method and format. We wanted to create a politically relevant and thought-provoking experiential and intimate work that was inclusive and accessible, factually-based and story-led with ties between the narrative and the site's history, that gave agency to our collaborators and to the audience, that was connected to the local community and did public good.

Eating for Victory was created for and staged in a former pub, set during the London Blitz where the performers taught the audience how to use their rations through the guise of a popular BBC radio programme "The Kitchen Front," a real BBC programme broadcast during the war where two comedians gave their listeners tips for making the most of their rations. This was our starting point for a flexible and porous storyline that allowed for the insertion of fictional characters, played by professional performers and inspired by real people. The Tea House Theatre, a Victorian pub which had been turned into a cafe, served as a World War II-era BBC recording studio.

The narrative was as follows: Gert and Daisy, two famous comedians who normally hosted "The Kitchen Front," were unavailable for the broadcast, so the BBC and the Ministry of Food (the purported sponsors of the evening) brought in two actors with no previous knowledge of the show or of cooking. As the new actors tried to host the show by improvising recipes, conflicts played out backstage with the alcoholic newscaster, the government minister making money on the black market, his wife secretly having an affair, and his assistant, trying to pull the evening together for the audience. Compounding the drama were the issues Londoners faced during wartime, such as rationing, blackouts, bombing raids and the threat of German invasion. While blackout curtains formed part of the set, wartime issues were discussed in announcements and through characters' dialogue. When they signed up for the event, the audience were given identity cards of wartime Londoners and were invited to dress up in 1940s fashion. Throughout the event, the audience had opportunities to interact with the performers, watch the chorus of servers execute choreographed dances and try the recipes promoted on the radio programme in the form of canapés served in between scenes.

Responding to Contemporary Politics through Immersive Performance

The research and development for what became *Eating for Victory* started with a central question which framed the concept, content and

logistics of making the work: how do we respond to contemporary politics in a "fun" and affordable immersive performance dining event?

We began by establishing a possible ticket price and audience capacity that would allow for the maximum number of people to have an intimate experience, while also providing an affordable ticket price for local residents of the borough of Lambeth, the 8th most deprived borough in London and 22nd most deprived in England. Having felt alienated by the Punchdrunk / Secret Cinema £50 basic ticket model (not including add-ons like food, drinks or VIP treatment), we wanted our show to be accessible to a wide audience while also paying our performers, chef and design team. We settled on £20 for the performance and a small plates meal with a reasonably-priced pay bar. This made the total spend for the full experience less than the cost of food and drink add-ons at larger immersive events, and the cost per head double the price of a value meal deal plus drink at the local Wetherspoons, one of UK's cheapest pub chains. Our pricing was part of our strategy to build an inclusive event, to attract a diverse audience from the local community, encouraging people who might not normally spend on such events to engage with the arts. Next, we looked for a venue with capacity for 30 to 50 people. It was part of our ethos and rationale to let the venue suggest a theme. Creatively, this allowed us to work truly site responsively, unlocking the site's histories through performance rather than fully transposing a completely new world onto an existing space. Practically, this reduced our costs as, by using what was already in the venue, we had less to design, build, install and strike, keeping both our production and hire budgets low.

We chose the Tea House Theatre, previously the Queen Anne pub built in 1886 next to Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens that survived WWII, bomb damage and slum clearance to become London's oldest striptease venue before reincarnating itself as a cafe and arts venue. When we visited the Tea House Theatre and saw its Union Jack flag bunting, chintzy tea cups and cake stands and 'Best of British' vibe (ironic or otherwise), we instantly felt it an appropriate backdrop for a WWII-themed show while resonating with a pressing concern

of the moment. 2015 saw the election of a Conservative majority government led by David Cameron, which followed five years of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, also led by David Cameron. Following the 2007/08 global financial crisis, like much of the world, the UK was in a period of economic recession. Austerity measures were introduced as an apparent remedy, to balance the budget deficit and to reduce national debt as a percentage of GDP. Cameron declared that "the age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity (2009a: n.p.). As a direct result of budget cuts, the Conservative Party also introduced and set in motion the "Big Society," a political ideology that involved reducing government intervention, to be replaced by grass-roots organisations, charities and private sector companies delivering public services more efficiently ("Government Launches Big Society Programme"). It became clear that the government had no intention of increasing public spending once the structural deficit had been eliminated and that the public spending reduction would be permanent (Watt). By 2015, five years into these programmes, the number of children living in "relative poverty" had increased and those accessing food banks had tripled, with over one million people in the UK using a food bank in 2014/15 (Mueller, Butler).

Against this backdrop of real suffering and deprivation, much like the nostalgic décor of the Tea House Theatre, the rhetoric of austerity and the Big Society harkened back to the "*Blitz* Spirit" of World War II. In the face of widening social, economic and geographic inequality, Cameron declared: "We are all in this together" (Cameron 2009b). The term *Blitz Spirit* has no concrete definition, rather suggesting a collective resilience and shared bond between people facing common adversity (Hatherley). It has been invoked by British politicians on both the Left and Right since the late 1970s, evoking memories of the 1940s when "hard choices" had to be made and everyone had to "muddle through" to legitimate claims that, despite appearances to the contrary, resources were scarce and sacrifices had to be made (Hatherley). The turn to the Blitz Spirit is epitomised by the "Keep Calm and Carry On" poster which resurfaced in 2008 and, togeth-

er with its innumerable parodies, imitations and co-options which also appeared, was a notable meme in 2015. Though produced by the Ministry of Information in 1939, the poster was never actually part of the war propaganda machine; it was only to be used in the event of a German invasion to keep the public from panicking (*Keep Calm and Carry On—The Compromise Behind the Slogan—History of Government*).

Instead, its popularity was linked to the fallout from the credit crunch and an attempt in that moment of crisis to tap into a pre-established narrative about Britain's "finest hour." It is an example of what Douglas Coupland termed "legislated nostalgia" in 1991, something that "forces a body of people to have memories they do not actually possess" (Hatherley). However, much as the poster is a kind of fiction, so too is the "*Blitz* Spirit," acting as a weak concealer for the awful reality of being bombed, so the "Big Society" conceals an unequal distribution of suffering. The introduction of "egalitarian rationing during and after the Blitz improved the diet of the poorest while the middle class saw a drastic decline in the quality and quantity of their food, the rationing rules could be sidestepped by the wealthy altogether. Drawing parallels between 2015 and the 1940s regarding austerity and inequality, we used our research into Britain and the Vauxhall area of London during WWII to inform our menu, sound, set and costume design, and the characters' and audience members' names, professions and storylines.

The political parallels we drew were intended to be subtle rather than didactic; we highlighted the similar social divisions and inequalities of both eras. This came starkly into focus with food inequality, from contemporary preventable illness caused by food poverty, poor diets and malnutrition to the historic loopholes used by the wealthy to maintain their pre-war standard of living. To spotlight this link and the social importance of food equality, we asked the audience to bring rations to be used as part of the cooking demonstrations for the evening's menus while making it clear that these 'rations' would be donated to local food banks for distribution.

Scripting, Devising, and Rehearsal

One of the challenges of immersive, site-specific performance was to create a production flexible enough to allow for levels of audience interaction but also provide a storyline and rich, complex characters. In developing *Eating for Victory*, our process was divided into three phases: research, casting and character building; scripting and devising a narrative to develop a show structure; rehearsing the scripted and improvised material while considering possible audience roles.

Researching the period and building characters created a foundation for the project. We began with Britain during World War II, understanding what life was like in London during the Blitz, how people coped with rationing, blackouts, bombings, the evacuation of children and housing shortages. We built on historical research to create a central storyline and subplots and brainstormed ideas for characters, creating character sketches and then developing them with the performers, who were given an overview of the event, dramaturgical character briefs and a general understanding of intended audience experience. In line with our ethos, we incorporated the realities and politics of rationing, hardship and deprivation during WWII; the performers portrayed characters from a range of backgrounds, showing that the British experience during the war was by no means uniform. For instance, while Clarissa, the wealthy wife of the Minister of Food (played by Violet Patton-Ryder), complained about her cook's difficulty in obtaining particular ingredients for dinner, BBC Radio actress Alice talked about the humiliation of having been bombed out of her London flat. We took the performers through a number of character-developing exercises, such as hot-seating (an improvisation exercise whereby the performer is questioned in character by the group in order to flesh out their backstory), so that they could personalise their characters. For example, the character of Michael

(played by Paul Engers) was a BBC radio announcer. We knew that we needed a character who could function as a host for the evening, guiding the audience through the event and explaining the format. Engers helped us build a back-story for the character so that he would have habits, opinions, needs and fears on which the other characters could draw. The role of Michael not only functioned as an emcee but also lent the narrative an element of dark humour. Michael drank to alleviate his fears about bombing raids, so became progressively more intoxicated as the evening wore on, creating moments of comedy for the audience, while also conveying the underlying anxiety of a society at war.

We utilised a highly collaborative process of working, continually incorporating the input of the performers, designer and chefs into the process. We combined scripted speeches with devised scenes that were semi-formalised into a kind of dramaturgical road map, allowing for enough structure so that the show would stay on track each evening, but enough freedom for the performers to improvise elements each night and interact with the audience. This map anchored the event in the overall narrative journey and character arcs, indicating when a scripted speech or scene, dance sequence or course serving unfolded. As co-directors, we continually accounted for the various elements that went into the production, arranged and rearranged them. Sarah focused on the text-centred and dialogic work while Katharine focused on the physicality and choreographed sequences.

As a collective, we navigated the particularities of the venue's architecture and how it would impact the dramaturgy of the piece, and the structure for the show evolved throughout rehearsals as the audience's journey became clear through the process of this collaboration. We utilised the central space by using a platform with a mic stand as the focal point, serving as the area where the actors recorded their BBC programme. The audience were seated in a semicircle with gaps in between seats for performers to move amongst them throughout the show. The performers circulated throughout for intimate audience interactions and choreographed sequences, creating a balance between

performances where the audience could relax as passive receptors and those which asked audience members to engage with the performers in order to learn more about the characters and narrative. Each character was given secrets to be revealed throughout the event, which incentivised audience participation and created a hidden layer of narrative and historical detail. The combination of the show's dramaturgy and the shape of the performance space informed our use of focal points.

The third phase of rehearsal gave performers a coherent idea of the entire event and the way the story would unfold within it, as well as prepare them for possible interactions with the audience. We rehearsed as many moments of audience interaction as possible, preparing the performers to incorporate audience members' questions and provocations. We devised ways to stimulate the audience, each assigned a WWII-era identity, complete with profession, name and identity card, by creating points of discussion and asking questions, using information based on historical research:

- How have you been coping with the nightly bombing raids?
- Do you have an Anderson shelter or do you go to your local tube station?
- Have your children been evacuated to the countryside?
- How have you been using your rations?

Together with the performers, we negotiated which scenes and speeches would be scripted and which would be improvised each night.

Food at the Centre

We chose to make performance centred around food for two main reasons: dramaturgical and socio-political. As the immersive performance format developed, audience members often came to be on site for three hours or more. We found that most events licensed an on-site food truck and bar, meaning the audience had to break from the immersive experience to queue for food that was overpriced and unrelated to the performance. We felt this oversight created a rupture

in the flow of the event and wanted to find a dramaturgical solution to integrate food into each performance, with a single ticket price for everything (no add-ons, no extras, no displays of difference between audience members). Our ticket prices are deliberately low, encouraging diverse uptake; some people who might not usually attend art and theatre events might be tempted to engage as the cost mirrors an average meal out but with a little something extra.

We needed a context and format for *Eating for Victory* where talking about and eating food made narrative sense, during which critical socio-political issues could be debated. Using a radio broadcast with an educational cookery format that taught a live audience how to use their rations, we built an overarching storyline that allowed us to incorporate the dark side of nostalgic culture; a hollow patriotism that contrasted dutiful suffering with the double standard of wealth inequality. We asked our audience to bring their "rations" ready for their cookery and nutrition lessons, making it clear that in reality we were asking for canned goods to donate to two local food banks.

We worked closely with chef David Salt during the R&D, looking at recipes and ingredients from the time, what food would have been available, and how it might have been prepared. The narrative arc and structure of the performance was influenced by the timing and serving of the food courses. There were nine food courses, which necessitated nine sections to the show. Each course was announced by the Minister of Food's assistant Prudence (played by Erin Hutching), who was liaising with the chef backstage to check if the food was ready and had cue sheets for extending moments of improvisation and interaction. The food was served to the audience by a chorus of four servers. Each course was followed by the chorus performing a themed choreography to a period-specific song. Members of the ensemble cast of six performed a sketch, monologue or dialogue, opening out into improvisation and audience interaction while the audience were eating.

Each item on the menu and each stage of the performance was carefully designed; the dishes reflected the WWII rationing diet while

the interplay between the radio hosts, the government officials and their entourage and the chorus served to highlight the disparities between them. The officials were revealed as privileged, out-of-touch and unaware of daily hardships faced by much of the population while they superciliously suggested "we're all in it together." This attitude and slogan echoed the contemporary divisions between the 'have and have-nots' under austerity measures. For example, "Dig for Victory," a raw and cooked summer vegetable garden, was served with sauce and olive 'soil' in soldiers' helmets. The audience learned about the importance of Victory Gardens and growing vegetables (which weren't rationed) while some characters made it clear that not everyone had access to a garden nor the time to tend it. The chorus performed a helmet dance as a locomotive train to Billy Cotton's *Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye*. Each course, its contents and presentation, was treated as an integral part of the narrative.

Designing Audience Experience

We designed the audience experience for *Eating for Victory* so that the immersion would be intimate but boundaried to maximise the possibilities for participation. It was important to create the right balance between the performance (both dialogic and choreographic), use of the space and food, to make sure that the elements complemented each other. We turned the Tea House Theatre, not into what Alston calls an "experience machine," to be swept up in an escapist and artificial environment but rather, a space for safe interaction and exploration for the audience (2). Although we wanted *Eating for Victory* to convey a sense of the inequalities Londoners experienced during the Second World War, we also wanted a tongue-in-cheek sensibility, which we hoped would counter-balance the element of vulnerability inherent in performer interactions. The identity cards sent to the audience implicated and immersed them in the period, anchoring their engagement with *Eating for Victory* and giving them the option of researching their "character" beforehand. Upon entering the venue, audience members were encouraged to engage with the

story of the BBC/Ministry of Food radio show by the performers who approached them with questions. They were treated like characters in the story with their own given circumstances. When Clarissa asked audience members how they were using their rations, they could respond by drawing on their 1940s identities while learning more about her character from the way she responded. Whenever someone asked her how she was using her rations, she would explain disdainfully that her cook took care of meal preparation. The audience was given tacit rules by which to play the "game" of participation as the performers encouraged them to make comments and ask questions by introducing topics and sharing titbits about their characters' lives. We found that by making the audience understand the boundaries of the event and the world in which it was set, we were able to engender a relaxed but creative environment.

Once the more formalised, non-participatory performance began, the audience alternated between moving freely through the space to try the food and buy drinks from the bar, interacting with the performers and watching scenes and dance sequences play out. The event as a whole was divided into scenes that corresponded with the courses, which also followed the general storyline of the BBC broadcast, falling apart under the strain of the participants' wartime anxieties and deprivations. A three-part format was used for the duration of the event: a scene would play in front of the audience that required some audience participation, a corresponding course would be served and then the audience would have a chance to chat with the characters about the scene they had just watched and the food they were eating. At the end, the performers invited the audience to dance to swing music, as a gesture of the celebration of community and survival. The ambiance of London in 1941 was always presented in a spirit that bordered on the tongue-in-cheek, keeping the audience connected to the constructed, performative nature of the event. For instance, the menu featured names of courses such as "Rabbit Run and Mushroom Hide" and "Don't Bubble and Speak." The performers serving the food, playing waitstaff, wore kitschy uniforms and performed Busby Berkeley-style dance routines.

Conclusion

Eating for Victory was created on a budget a small fraction of the size of any event created by Punchdrunk or Secret Cinema. While this posed a number of limitations for us, it also created a number of opportunities for different ways of conceiving an immersive theatre event. We learned that if the budget for an event is limited, it is paramount to begin by choosing an atmospheric but affordable venue, as the venue will likely be the primary expense. We also discovered that small-scale immersive events such as *Eating for Victory* enable more intimate audience experiences and more accessibility in terms of ticket pricing, which had the potential to attract audience members from broader socio-economic backgrounds than would normally be able to afford a large-scale, expensive immersive event priced at £50 or higher. We found that a diverse audience in terms of background and identity enriched the improvisations that arose from the audience-participant/performer interactions. We capitalised on the intimacy of the venue and the social nature of the layout of the former pub to encourage the audience to explore the space and interact with each other, as well as the performers. We designed the structure of the event so that the audience could experience the pleasure of interaction, having the option of minor but meaningful creative input into the stories and the dramatic arcs of the characters, without being obliged to participate.

As producer-directors, we learned that we could capitalise on the resources we had in order to immerse the audience in the stories that played out over the course of the evening, rather than rely on a set, props and costumes to create a holistic atmosphere. One of the advantages of working in the Tea House Theatre was that it already featured a number of interior design elements that spoke to an early-to-mid-20th century aesthetic (wooden floor boards, floral tea cups, bunting), which meant that, apart from mounting a number of wartime propaganda posters on the walls, we didn't have to invest in a great deal of set design. When we were searching for venues for the event, we had a number of possible stories and themes in mind that could be adapted to different kinds of spaces, and our decision

to create a Blitz-era performance was informed by the character of the Tea House Theatre and its resonance with contemporary politics. The choice of London in 1941 proved a fruitful setting to mine for stories and characters for the performance as well as recipes for the menu. Our chef based the menu on ingredients and recipes from the period, altering them to suit the needs of the event. In collaboration with the performers, we created a central storyline with a number of small subplots that the audience could watch but also engage with in solo, pair and small group interactions. In this way, the sense of immersion was created through rich, complex storytelling and character building. This collaboration was perhaps the most important element in the process of making *Eating for Victory*: the creativity, ingenuity and generosity of our performers, chef and designer allowed us to co-create a vibrant, three-dimensional production.

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Immersive Performance and Sensory Stimulation: the Intimacy of Participation in Third Rail Projects' *Then She Fell*

Rick DesRochers

Abstract: This essay focuses on *Then She Fell*, a fully immersive, multi-sensory experience in which only fifteen audience members per performance explore a dreamscape, inspired by the life and writings of Lewis Carroll, promising to offer "an Alice-like experience for audience members." The production by Third Rail Projects, a Brooklyn-based devised dance/theatre company, opened in October 2012, playing 4,444 performances for seven and a half years. As this essay investigates, the success of immersive productions such as *Then She Fell* is due to the sensory stimulation and intimacy of the performer/participant interactions, and the in-person immersive theatrical experiences such connections create. In a world of heightened sensory awareness, *Then She Fell* engages the entire human sensorium, thereby creating a personalized performance experience for all involved. Here performance theorists, such as Josephine Machon and Jacques Rancière, are considered in relationship to how *Then She Fell* illustrates somatic interaction. It is this interaction that bridges the gap between performer and participant, in order to connect and engage all the sensory perceptions that the traditional nineteenth-century proscenium, fourth-wall theatre was not designed to achieve. The value of somatic evaluation in performance is mapped in this essay, as to how immersive performance places both creators/performers and participants in a symbiotic relationship that shares cognitive cultural, physical, and emotional stimulants.

Résumé : Cet article prend pour objet *Then She Fell,* une expérience immersive et multi-sensorielle dans laquelle quinze participants explorent un environnement onirique inspiré de la vie et de l'œuvre de Lewis Carroll. Cette production de la compagnie de danse et de théâtre Third Rail Projects promet au public de vivre une expérience similaire à celle du personnage d'Alice. Depuis octobre 2012, elle s'est jouée 4 444 fois

sur une durée de sept ans et demi. Comme le montre cet article, le succès d'une production immersive comme *Then She Fell* s'explique par la stimulation sensorielle, l'intimité des interactions entre acteurs et participants et les expériences que de telles connexions créent. Dans un monde où la conscience sensorielle se voit accrue, *Then She Fell* mobilise l'intégralité du spectre sensible, créant de ce fait une expérience personnalisée et incarnée pour chaque participant. Les écrits de Josephine Machon et Jacques Rancière sont ici mobilisés pour envisager la façon dont *Then She Fell* illustre l'interaction somatique des corps. C'est cette interaction qui permet de combler l'écart entre l'acteur et le participant, afin de connecter et d'engager toutes les perceptions sensorielles que la salle de théâtre traditionnelle du XIX^{ème} siècle et le quatrième mur n'étaient pas à même d'atteindre. Cet article cartographie l'importance de la corporalité dans la production, afin de déterminer comment la performance immersive génère une relation symbiotique entre les créateurs, acteurs et participants alors exposés à des mêmes stimuli émotionnels, physiques, culturels et cognitifs.

Keywords: Immersive Theatre, participatory performance, popular entertainment, physical theatre, environmental performance

Mots-clés : Théâtre immersif, performance participative, divertissement populaire, théâtre physique, performance environnementale

In September of 2019, at a production of an immersive theatre experience inspired by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* titled *Then She Fell*, I am ushered into a girl's boudoir. A vanity table and mirror sit in one corner. A young actor portraying Alice (Serena Chang) gently takes me by the hand and guides me to a wall of Victorian-era dolls and asks me to choose my favorite one from the seemingly endless variety that line the shelves. After I choose a small doll with dark hair and a white dress, looking not unlike the Alice before me, she asks me questions about love. "When is the last time you got dressed up to

see someone special?" "Recently, actually…" I reply. "Are you in love with her?" "Not sure yet," I say, but "no" should really be the answer. Alice then sits in front of the vanity mirror and invites me in the gentlest of voices to brush her hair. As I hesitantly do so, I am aware of the delicacy and intimacy of this moment. I am overwhelmed by the sweet-smelling softness of her hair as I tenderly brush it per her request. Disarmingly, Alice quite unexpectedly asks me about the pain of being in and falling out of love. This charged emotional and physical moment is sensual, chaste, and uncomfortably intimate all at the same time. Alice then turns to me and asks a final and very personal question: "Did you ever tell someone you didn't love them even when you really did?" I search my memory bank of feelings from past relationships. *Perhaps?* "Most likely," I evasively reply, "but I can't seem to recall when." The intimacy of the moment is broken when Alice stands, turns to me, and says: "It's time for you to go now." She ushers me out of the room where an orderly leads me further down the hallway and, consequently, deeper into the immersive theatre production that is *Then She Fell*.

Then She Fell was produced by Third Rail Projects, a Brooklyn-based devised dance/theatre company. The show opened in October 2012 and ran until August 2020 when it was forced to close due to citywide restrictions on indoor events put in place in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Written, directed, and choreographed by the company's artistic directors Zach Morris, Tom Pearson, and Jennine Willett, the show is a fully immersive, multi-sensory experience inspired by the life and writings of Lewis Carroll. Immersive theatre has come into its own in the last two decades in New York City with the success of companies like the Builder's Association, 3-Legged Dog, and Punchdrunk. *Then She Fell* continues this trend of immersive performance, promising on its website "an Alice-like experience for audience members" ("Then She Fell by Third Rail Projects: About"). Only fifteen people can attend each performance of *Then She Fell.* Originally, the target participants for this immersive piece were twenty-one-to thirty-five-year-olds. The show's appeal, however, proved much broader as evidenced by its popularity over the past seven and

a half years. The success of productions like *Then She Fell* is due to the sensory stimulation and intimacy of the performer/participant interactions and the in-person immersive theatrical experiences such connections create.

Performance scholars tend to examine how immersive theatre practices activate an intellectual, conceptual, or emotional response from participants. In this essay, I wish to trouble and challenge this notion of how immersive performances are presumed to activate participants through a performance as created by theatrical professionals in order to awaken the participants to their own perceptions and understandings. In addition, I would like to question performance scholar Robert Walton's notion that immersive theatrical artists are attempting to create "bewildering behaviours" that somehow shake audiences out of their complacency by actively engaging with participants through "mystifying" theatrical techniques associated with participation and immersion in performance. As Walton states, "many immersive artworks require the audience-participant to instantiate them—that is to activate, enliven, and sustain them performatively" (124). Audiences for immersive theatre come prepared to receive, feel, and experience through the body via "the full range of the human sensorium," as Josephine Machon suggests, even before they enter the theatrical space (110). The theatrical event, however, is not somehow unfinished, as in Robert Walton's estimation, where "the medium of the work is the live relationship between people within an environment rather than a finished art object, film, or play. Without this instantiation, this work itself does not exist" (124). According to Walton, the participants must somehow finish the theatrical performance or artwork for it even to exist at all. However, it could be argued that all live theatrical experiences are unfinished by definition, as theatrical productions do not exist without performers and participants to activate a text or event of any kind.

What these theoretical commentaries on immersive performance still do not explore is what it means for an audience to respond to any given live performance. Individuals' subjective responses *are* their

participation in the performer-participant relationship and are necessary for any live performance event to come into being. Therefore, it should be asked, how is immersive theatre any different than other forms of theatrical production that occur on stage? To this end, I expand on Machon's theories for stimulating the audience through their sensory engagement as a completely subjective experience for each participant. The human sensorium is experienced and responded to individually even though all participants are immersed in the same complete choreographed world. As *Then She Fell* illustrates, somatic interaction can bridge the gap between performer and participant in order to connect and engage all the sensory perceptions that the traditional nineteenth-century proscenium, fourth-wall theatre was not designed to achieve. The value of somatic evaluation in performance exists in the way it places both participants and creators/performers into a symbiotic relationship that shares cognitive cultural, physical, and emotional stimulants.

As I argue here, the nature and purpose of immersive performance as witnessed in *Then She Fell* can and should be accessed by any participant through the somatic experience. The in-person immersive environment engages the senses, and this is what bridges the gap between those who create as performance practitioners and those who participate in the somatic experience: there is a meeting and convergence on both sides of the theatrical valence. With immersive theatre projects such as *Then She Fell*, senses are stimulated as participants are ready *a priori* to receive and engage with the immersive experience through sensory stimuli. Josephine Machon reinforces this notion, writing that "immersive theatres can establish links across sensation, perception, emotion, and moral reasoning in form and content." During the action of immersive performances, the participants or "inhabitants," as Machon calls them, "dwell in time and in space just as they *dwell in the activity* [emphasis in the original] within the duration of the event and equally dwell, attentively, in their own bodies" (142). Therefore, deprogramming predigested and inherited physical and emotional responses through somatic interaction between performers and participants is at the heart of immersive performance.

In order to evaluate and trace how somatic practices operate between performer and participant in contemporary immersive performance, I turn to my experience with Third Rail Projects' production of *Then She Fell*, which I attended on 15 September 2019. *Then She Fell* is evaluated through the experience of this immersive work where the performer/participant relationship is an equal and shared experience and the performer and participant work in a co-dependent way to create meaning in the moment of a live performance. I focus attention on the location of the event—a three-floor, century-old, institutional facility in Brooklyn, New York, named *The Kingsland Ward, St. Johns*—in relationship to how the theatrical space, performances, and dramaturgy, transformed through design and choreography, become a dynamic environment where the participants or "inhabitants […] dwell, attentively, in their own bodies," as Machon points out. Through sensory stimulation in which the participant "dwells" in the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, immersive performance allows the participant to become an inhabitant in the live theatrical experience.

Focusing attention on key scenes that employ sensory stimulation and participants' personal contact with performers, I examine how the production turns the alternative reality of love and madness that Alice Liddel and Charles Dodgson inhabit into a subjective and personalized performance for all participants. I use my own experiences with *Then She Fell* to examine the immersive performance process and the sensorial possibilities it provides. As a participant, I was often the sole person present in a given moment. I draw on this firsthand experience to describe the intimacy of the show's various theatrical components, focusing attention on five specific scenes: the introductory shell game with the Doctor, the Mad Tea Party, the "deflowering" of the White Rabbit in the Rose Room, the Mad Hatter's haberdashery, and the act of the White Queen and participants spying on an intimate moment between the Red Queen and the White Rabbit.

The title of the production, *Then She Fell*, reminds us of Alice's endless fall into the rabbit hole that leads her to Wonderland. Performers

and participants are cross-pollinated, shaping the scenes and events through their presence and interaction with the physical and emotional states of characters from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as envisioned by the obsessive and predatory soul of its creator Charles Dodgson (writing under the pen name *Lewis Carroll*). Dodgson's own sensory stimulations, stemming from his relationship with the prepubescent Alice Liddell, haunts performers and participants alike throughout this immersive landscape. In a world of heightened sensory awareness, *Then She Fell* engages the entire human sensorium, thereby creating a personalized performance experience for all involved. Participants, performers, and stage crew interact in this live theatrical event to create a rich environment of sensual fantasy, dark eroticism, and guilt-ridden desire alongside joy-filled moments of madness and love.



Marissa Nielsen-Pincus as Alice from the original cast of *Then She Fell*, 2012. Photo Credit Adam Jason Photography used by permission.

Then She Fell, with its emphasis on the stimulation of the senses, offers participants a connection to disruptive and affective immersive practices. The immersive experience in *Then She Fell* begins imme-

diately upon the participants' arrival at the former Kingsland Ward in Brooklyn. Participants are randomly placed in groups, which leads to many being separated from those with whom they arrived. This is quite different from a traditional theatre experience in that participants, unmoored from their comfort zone, experience the performance surrounded largely by strangers. The performance itself becomes a journey through various states of physical and emotional volatility. The title of the production captures the fear associated with this condition of unbalance and loss of control. It reminds us of the perpetual state of "falling" (e.g., falling in love, falling as in a dream with no ending in sight, being tricked or falling for a gag or lie) that is at the heart of *Then She Fell.*

The rethinking of the audience as participants and collaborators in the performance event can also be seen in the physical environment of *Then She Fell*. The set design and scenic environments play an important role in stimulating the participants' senses and provoking their subconscious sensibilities. The work is performed in a three-story building nestled in a residential section of Brooklyn's North Williamsburg neighborhood. The former Kingsland Ward, St. Johns has been converted into a theatrical space. When participants arrive, they wait outside on a Brooklyn stoop. Then, entering one and two at a time, participants are greeted by an actor playing the part of an orderly of the Kingsland Ward. The orderly guides the participants to a waiting area and asks them to sit along the edges of a musty room reminiscent of an early-twentieth-century doctor's office. There they wait until all fifteen participants are gathered. The participants are offered a deep red, port-like wine to drink before being asked to give up their personal items, including all communication devices, as one does upon entering a hospital or jail. This serves to redirect the participants' attention away from the distractions of screens and social media devices.

The environment has an eerie, monastic silence to it that produces a feeling of anticipation over what is to come as well as a sense of anxiety similar to what one might experience waiting to hear about life-alter-

ing test results from a physician. Participants sit in relative silence with only a few people occasionally whispering to their companions. Each is being stimulated by the taste and smell of the wine and the scent of the musty room, as well as the physical proximity of the fourteen other "patients." An unidentified doctor (Gierre Godley) enters the waiting area and welcomes participants. He outlines the primary rules of engagement: no speaking to performers, only respond when asked a direct question, and no interfering with performers physically unless requested by them.

The next scene begins in the waiting room where I am chosen by an orderly to go alone to a large open room with a long table where there is a small locked wooden box sitting at one end. I am directed to sit in front of the box at the far side of the table. I am offered another drink of a dark red liquid in a small sherry glass. The orderly leaves me alone in the room where I sit and wait in silence. It feels like a very long time, but in reality, it is probably only a minute or two. Then a "doctor" abruptly appears. He enters the room but does not speak. The entire scene between the performer and me is conducted in silence. Sitting opposite me, the doctor suddenly places three tea cups on the long table in front of him. Under one of them, he carefully places a key. A shell game ensues. The doctor moves the inverted cups in intricate patterns before him, and after several passes, he stops and points, asking me through silent gestures, "Which cup is the key hidden under?" I choose correctly, and he then sends the cup across the table over to me. He suddenly gets on top of the table and crawls down the full length of it like a feral cat. He reminds me through his gestures of the Cheshire Cat who famously tells Alice: "We're all mad here" (Carroll 73). The doctor stops in front of me and looks at the cup and the box. I lift the cup with the key under it. He wants me to open the box with the key. Then as quickly as he entered, the anonymous doctor jumps off the table and rushes out of the room, leaving me alone once again. I am left to unlock the box by myself. In it, I find a letter about love leading to madness written in the form of a poem.

The sudden movements and sheer intimacy of being in a room alone with one sole performer creates anxiety and titillation in the participant. The events and atmosphere engage the non-distal senses and charge the moment in ways that sitting in an auditorium in a traditional proscenium configuration cannot. There is a significant difference between this solitary immersive performance and what occurs in a traditional collective theatre event. The solo participant does not have the ability to read the responses of fellow theatregoers and react along with them in a comfortable "we are all in this together" way. This is another experience entirely. The anxiety of being left alone in a room for a few minutes before the doctor even arrives, and then being left alone again in anticipation of the next event creates an opportunity for introspection. It allows for an evaluation of the senses and a reflection on the feelings that have been produced by the sensorial stimulation. It should be noted that time, throughout *Then She Fell*, appears to be suspended, as neither acts nor scenes are demarcated as one event flows into the next, nor is there a playbill where audiences can track the progression of the action as in a traditional theatrical performance.

The choreography of *Then She Fell* disrupts the logic of narrative dialogue and storytelling. The body becomes the primary mode of communication. This is especially useful for mapping the intricacies of madness represented in the production. The world of Alice Liddel and Charles Dodgson is a labyrinth of mad attractions. The production is a map of consciousness that leads participants through this labyrinth into their subconscious by invigorating their senses. *Then She Fell* is a journey of randomly assigned events where participants must navigate a voyage that brings them all further and further down the rabbit hole into their own subconscious desires and fears. The lack of cause-and-effect connections between scenes in the production stimulates the participants' engagement. Moving in and out of environments as in a fever dream, participants are incorporated into each scene by the performers they encounter. Participants are treated as if they are characters in the unfolding action before them. One event that clearly illustrates this journey into the subconscious is the well-known "Mad

Tea Party" scene adapted from Carroll's original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The Mad Tea Party begins as performers and participants are suddenly thrown together. Sitting silently following my encounter with the doctor and our intriguing shell game of tea cups, three new performers—the Red Queen (Jaime Graham), the White Rabbit (Justin Lynch), and the Mad Hatter (Jessy Smith)—along with three other participants barge into the room. Then a choreographed sequence of manic seduction between the Red Queen and the White Rabbit unfolds. The participants are subsequently gathered around the party table by the performers and encouraged to sit in varying-sized mismatched chairs. The performers quickly and precariously set up mismatched cups, saucers, and spoons along the sides of the table. A frenzied tea ceremony where cups, saucers, and spoons are presented in a choreographed ritual that will spark this iconic event begins in mid-action as performers encourage participants to quickly find a seat. Just as the participants sit down, the performers insist they immediately move one seat to the right. Participants are barely able to rest before they are forced to move again in a mad game of musical chairs. The movement is crazed and intense, as there is a constant circling around the table as participants try to keep up with the rules of the tea party game. The ritual becomes faster and more frantic as the complex choreography of tea-drinking and stirring spoons spins out of control into a collective body-madness.

Unlike the more intimate interaction between me and the doctor, scenes like this one which involve three or more participants become an opportunity to observe each other, and a more playful solidarity forms between participants. These group gatherings provide a much-needed release from the scrutiny of being the only participant who has to engage with performers. Participants in group scenes can observe each other and take cues from the others as in a children's game where the rules are being made up on the spot. A more playful and buoyant atmosphere is created, which stands in stark contrast to the one-on-one scenes of performer and participant. In addition, there

is also a personal and unspoken interaction between performers not directly involving participants that can be observed objectively. As an example, the White Rabbit and the Red Queen appear to be in an adversarial relationship with each other in this moment. This is revealed in the speed by which they carry out the tea cup ritual and in the competitive and compulsive ways they move from seat to seat around the table. The Mad Tea Party ends as abruptly as it began, without warning or transition. The Red Queen becomes frustrated and angry. This is in response to the Mad Hatter, who has been encouraging the frantic competition between herself and the White Rabbit, even as the game was devolving into chaos. When the Red Queen suddenly stops, angered at the defiance of her subordinates, she leaves the room in a fury. Led by the White Rabbit, I am encouraged to follow the Red Queen out the door, chasing after her down a long institutional-style hallway.

The White Rabbit leads me to a twelve-by-twelve-foot room for the next mad interplay between characters. This room feels more confining than the previous ones because the walls and tall ceiling are covered with rose blooms and the floor with dozens of scattered thorny rose stems. The scent of roses is overpowering. The White Rabbit invites me to sit next to a butcher block upon which sits a very sharp and long knife. A single red rose lies next to the knife in a menacing still-life image of potential sacrifice. The smell of roses mingles with my own scent and that of the performer playing the White Rabbit who is in such close proximity. The Red Queen enters with stealth speed and then shuts the door with a quiet but firm hand. There is clearly some combative and sensual relationship between the two characters, signaling to me that this interaction between the Red Queen and the White Rabbit has been acted out in a continual pattern for quite some time. With the precision of a surgeon, the Red Queen picks up the knife from the chopping block, and with a swift, sharp, and shockingly simple movement, she severs the stem from the rose bloom. The Red Queen then delicately places the rose bloom behind the ear of the White Rabbit. In this intimate moment, alternating between violence

and sensuality, I have become an unacknowledged participant in the proceedings of this claustrophobic space.

I am forced to witness at close range the Red Queen silently menacing and titillating the White Rabbit. I am becoming a complicit witness. While maintaining eye contact with the White Rabbit, the Red Queen moves backwards out of the room. The White Rabbit remains seated, enthralled by her. After the Red Queen leaves, the White Rabbit takes the bloom from behind his ear and places it in the wall of roses. The flower joins hundreds of others that have suffered a similar fate. The ritual of the cutting of the stem from the rose, the Red Queen positioning the rose behind the White Rabbit's ear, and the White Rabbit subsequently placing it on the wall of other roses recalls a kind of ritual sacrifice with overtones of castration and sexual desire. Even though I have done nothing but observe this moment of intimacy through my sensory engagement with the Red Queen's and White Rabbit's movements and intentions, I feel like I have participated in this bizarre, erotic, and emotionally violent interaction.

I am left alone in the hallway by the White Rabbit, who then disappears into another room, presumably for his next scene. The Mad Hatter finds me there alone in the hallway of the Kingsland Ward and offers me another strong red wine as if it were medicine. The Hatter then ushers me to the next scenario of madness. As we move quickly along the hallway, the Hatter suddenly stops in front of a doorway and asks: "What did you do before you came here today?" (Morris n.p.). Perhaps it is because of the drinks or the close proximity of the performers or the strange dreamlike world I have been journeying further and further into, I honestly cannot remember anything that happened to me in the outside world that day. The Mad Hatter, sensing my loss for words and baffled hesitation, whisks me into her haberdashery workshop without waiting for an answer.

The next scene happens in the Mad Hatter's workshop after another participant suddenly appears from an alternate door in the room. We two are alone with the Mad Hatter. The Hatter literally climbs the storage shelves lining the walls. They contain an immense variety of

hats, not unlike the rose blooms that lined the walls and ceiling of the room from which I just came. When the Hatter reaches the top of the shelving, she casually lies atop this monument to haberdashery and begins to ask a series of rapid-fire questions, including the famous question from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" (Carroll 77). It is a question for which there are an infinite number of answers. Neither I nor the other participant, however, dares to respond. However, even not responding to a performer becomes a source of dramatic tension as the expectancy of what will happen if a participant is not able to, or unwilling to, respond can be taken as an affront or potential confrontation by a character. The Mad Hatter, for instance, visibly shows her frustration that the participants simply cannot keep up. This exasperation from a performer, especially with a character like the Hatter, whose impatience and manic energy makes the scene even more intense to begin with, provides an Alice-like sense of confusion and embarrassment from both participants and performers alike.

I am asked by the Mad Hatter to pick up an inkwell and plastic dip-pen so I can take dictation for a message she is addressing to Alice. The Hatter dictates the letter so quickly and with constant changes that I cannot keep up. While spouting her font of dictation, the Hatter adjusts then rejects several hats she has chosen for my fellow participant to wear. Then the Hatter suddenly stops and asks me to read the dictated note back to her. I just see a blur of black ink on white paper. To add to the madness, I realize that in my nervousness I had been holding the dip-pen upside down. I had been writing with the top of the pen. What I produced was only a blur of ink and a collection of nonsense scrawls. In addition, my right hand consequently is covered in black smears. The Mad Hatter in her frustration with me and the other participant, for whom she cannot seem to find a hat, suddenly throws us both out of the room and into the hallway, slamming the door behind us.



Tom Pearson as The White Rabbit and Rebekah Morin as The Red Queen from the original cast of *Then She Fell*, 2012. Photo Credit: Rick Ochoa used by permission.

The final foray into madness that brings all of the senses and characters from *Then She Fell* together in one attraction features the White Queen (Lindsey Ferguson). Four participants are now asked to enter a Victorian girl's playroom. The White Queen greets us, and taking me personally by the hand, she sits me at her feet. She then gets up on a small table and perches herself directly above me. In a corner of the room, unseen at first, Alice sits silently observing performers and participants alike. The White Queen then takes a bowl of grapes from the table, and offers me one that she holds just over my mouth, expecting me to eat out of her hand. This ritualistic feeding is followed by another dark mystery drink to wash it down. The White Queen then proceeds to do the same with the other participants in the room, as if it is a private performance just for Alice's benefit. The intimacy of this encounter with the White Queen is eerily erotic, and the vulnerability of the participants, including myself, is palpable. A mirrored wall opposite me is suddenly lit from behind, rendering the

opaque surface transparent. It is offering a view of a room through another looking glass.

We are now encouraged by the White Queen to watch what happens: it is a scene within a scene. Suddenly, we are voyeurs looking through a two-way mirror into the private world of an adult woman's boudoir. The furniture is of a dark red velour. A Victorian fainting couch is featured in the center of the room. The Red Queen leads the White Rabbit into her private chamber, and a darkly erotic game of domination begins as the Red Queen forces the White Rabbit into sexual submission just feet away from us. Participants are watching something truly forbidden. It is both fascinating and unnerving as the White Queen, now with her arm around Alice, observes us and our reactions to this forced intimacy with seemingly innocent glee. Looking through windows, doorways, and mirrors encourages voyeurism of illicit events for participants. Again, as in the Mad Tea Party scene, we take our cues from performers and fellow participants. Performers appear to be titillated by the curiosity and obvious enjoyment of intimate moments between characters. This is reinforced here, where the White Queen is quite pleased with herself for getting participants to expose their desire, witnessed when participants are not able to look away from something that they know they should not be observing, not to mention taking pleasure in the characters' discomfort and distress.

Windows, doorways, and mirrors are used throughout *Then She Fell* as portals into private worlds where this subconscious journey is performed. The scene featuring the White Queen illustrates how all the sensory stimuli are enacted in the same place and time. Immersive theatre participants are directly connected to the world of Alice Liddel and Charles Dodgson tactilely through taste (grapes, wines, ink); smell (scent of performers and participants in close proximity, Alice's hair from the brushing sequence); touch (actors guiding you through the building, sitting next to each other at tea party, participants taking frantic dictation with ink on their hands in the Mad Hatter's haberdashery); and sights and sounds of voyeuristic curiosity as participants

look and listen through windows, door-frames, and two-way mirrors into small rooms and private spaces. It is from the stimulation of these subconscious sensory states that we evaluate our relationship to each other and to the performers. Immersive theatre allows one to participate in the same way that dreams lead you through an internal logic that arouses your anxieties, fears, joys, and desires from the consciousness of the quotidian world. An immersive performance like *Then She Fell* serves as a visceral and tactile sensual experience for participants in real time. It allows them to follow the characters down the rabbit hole of subconsciousness through the human sensorium.

In the final moments of Third Rail Projects' production of *Then She Fell*, I am escorted alone by the performer playing Alice to a tiny space with a writing desk located under a stairway. As if in answer to the Mad Hatter's question: "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?," the raven-haired Alice gives me a folded piece of paper with a poem authored by one of the originators of *Then She Fell*, Zach Morris. Alice then leaves me to read in silence as I wait to be ushered to the original waiting room where the performance began two hours before. Written to seem as if Charles Dodgson penned it for Alice Liddel, the poem synthesizes the overarching journey of sensations of *Then She Fell*:

> I dreamt we were dreaming a dream together you and I, and we were trapped in a house, big as memory. Countless doors. You were there. I could hear you laughing, but I only caught glimpses of you in the glass. Eventually I gave in and found myself staring at myself, reflected. Looking at myself looking back at me. Both of us trying to decipher the face that was in front of us. (Morris n.p.)

Sensory provocation as a window into self-reflection is a recurring leitmotif in *Then She Fell*. This final and fictional missive to Liddel from Dodgson is really a poem to all of us as participants. The power of immersive performance allows us to enter the Liddel/Dodgson dream-madness world by encouraging our emotional self-awareness through sensual physical stimulation. Both performers and participants dream together as we move through the looking glass and down the rabbit hole of our fears, anxieties, and erotic desires.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, after seven and a half years and 4,444 performances, on 10 August 2020, the artistic team for Third Rail Projects sent out a press release explaining that *Then She Fell* would be closing permanently. The press release begs the following question: can immersive theatre practices be translated to our present online performance reality? As social distancing forces us as a human collective on a worldwide scale away and apart from each other physically, emotionally, and psychologically, we are in a unique position to reevaluate the value of immersive theatre, which has been abruptly suspended in this time of international pandemic.

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Le théâtre immersif en pratique.

Transcription de la table ronde du 17 janvier 2020 au Théâtre Lepic en présence de Simón Adinia Hanukai, Sébastien Bonnabel, Tristan Bruemmer, Mélanie Dorey, et Léonard Matton.

Juliette Mézergues

JULIETTE MÉZERGUES. Bonjour à toutes et à tous. Merci beaucoup de participer à cette table ronde consacrée aux pratiques du théâtre immersif. Je vous invite à vous présenter et à nous dire comment vous êtes arrivés au théâtre immersif.

MÉLANIE DOREY. Je suis Mélanie Dorey, fondatrice de Madame Lupin, maison de design expérientiel créée en 2015. J'organisais des événements *site specific*, c'est-à-dire des évènements sur mesure dans des lieux abandonnés. Avec le temps, j'ai développé l'aspect narratif et théâtral jusqu'à produire des spectacles de théâtre immersif, comme *The Lost Generation* (2020).

LÉONARD MATTON. Je m'appelle Léonard Matton. Je viens du théâtre traditionnel. Le premier spectacle que j'ai joué était un spectacle dont la première scène impliquait qu'une partie des acteurs vienne de la salle. On l'a créé à Avignon, il y avait des parades : cette première scène réunissait acteurs et spectateurs. J'ai toujours su que c'était ça que je voulais faire : intégrer les acteurs à la salle. Peu à peu, j'ai eu envie de monter *Hamlet*, qui est devenu *Helsingør : le château d'Hamlet*, adaptation des trois heures du texte shakespearien réduite à un texte d'une heure trente, en arborescence, dans un espace à sept dimensions.

SIMÓN ADINIA HANUKAI. I am Simón Adinia Hanukai, artistic director of a company based between New York and Paris: Kaimera Productions. We create live pieces, with dance, theatre, multimedia, etc. I was doing immersive theatre, not knowing it was that, in the early 2000. I had my own company in California. We were frustrated with the political state in the United States—things don't change!—so we created very political performances. We slowly began to break the fourth wall, to exit the stage, bleed into the audience and drag the audience members onto the stage. I moved to New York and studied theatre. My thesis was an immersive performance right at the same time that *Sleep No More* came to New York. And all of a sudden, there was a word: immersive! Before that, we had no idea it was immersive, we were just making stuff. At the time, I was very inspired by Augusto Boal, creator and driver of Theatre of the Oppressed, from Brazil, and the term that he uses, *spect-actor*; the idea that the audience is not passive. *Spect-actors* can change and transform the play. That has always been with me, to this day, and that's what I try to do with my work.

SÉBASTIEN BONNABEL. Je suis Sébastien Bonnabel. J'ai développé une approche qui s'appelle le Libre acteur. Je suis formateur. J'ai commencé par des stages intitulés « La réussite en casting malgré soi » : un travail sur la relation entre l'acteur et le spectateur, sur comment on arrive à un certain endroit d'intimité par rapport au casting et à la caméra. Je suis arrivé au théâtre immersif de façon un peu bête. Au cours de mes stages, je travaillais toujours *Closer* de Patrick Marber et je me suis dit : et si on amenait les spectateurs tout contre ? Sur internet, j'ai vu qu'il y avait un truc qui s'appelait Punchdrunk à Londres, j'y suis allé, et c'est parti comme ça. On a monté *Closer* avec la Compagnie du Libre Acteur, *Smoke Rings* d'après Léonore Confino, et *Cyrano Ostinato Fantaisies*.

TRISTAN BRUEMMER. Je suis Tristan Bruemmer, président de l'Association Française des Artistes de l'Immersif (AFAI), qui existe depuis un an. Elle accompagne surtout des compagnies de théâtre

immersif, mais elle est ouverte à toutes les formes immersives. Je suis auteur, metteur en scène et suis venu à l'immersif sans savoir que je le faisais. Le premier spectacle que j'ai monté était *Hamlet*, dans un espace merveilleux. Je trouvais ça dommage de ne pas en profiter, donc on s'est éparpillé partout, on a brisé le quatrième mur. À partir de là, je me suis intéressé à d'autres formes, j'ai rencontré ces belles personnes et l'AFAI est née.

JM. Quel est votre rapport aux techniques de jeu ? Sébastien, tu viens de parler du Libre Acteur ; Simón, tu enseignes les *Viewpoints.* Comment travaillez-vous avec vos acteurs pour ce dispositif particulier ? Comment pensez-vous le rapport entre acteurs et spectateurs ?

SB. Une expérience qui m'a toujours fasciné, c'est l'effet Koulechov. Koulechov était un metteur en scène du siècle dernier, un des premiers réalisateurs à avoir fait des expériences sur le montage. La légende dit qu'un soir, il a dit à ses camarades : « les comédiens ça sert à rien, c'est le montage qui fait l'histoire ». Il a filmé un comédien en gros plan, regardant quelque chose, sans lui demander quoi que ce soit comme intention de jeu. Il a fait trois montages différents : premier film, on voit un bol de soupe et la gueule du mec ; deuxième film, on voit une femme lascive sur un canapé et la gueule du mec ; troisième film, on voit une petite fille morte dans un cercueil et la gueule du mec. Il montre ça à des spectateurs lambda, qui ne savent pas que c'est à chaque fois exactement le même plan. Les spectateurs voient, dans le premier film la relation à la faim, dans le deuxième la relation au désir, dans le troisième la relation à la tristesse. J'ai toujours trouvé cela fascinant par rapport au positionnement de l'acteur vis-à-vis du spectateur. J'appelle ça le « paradoxe du spectateur » : ce n'est pas l'acteur qui fait le spectacle mais le spectateur. Lorsque j'assiste à une scène, je vois quand la personne fait semblant, mais dès qu'elle est organique, je me raconte des histoires. Si l'acteur a un trou de mémoire, le spectateur se raconte vingt milliards de trucs. Le Libre Acteur, c'est amener l'acteur, non pas dans une relation de performance, mais à

l'inverse, dans une relation d'expérience : être dans l'instant, vivant, organique et finalement, laisser la place au spectateur d'interpréter la situation et de se projeter en fonction des éléments qu'il a. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'on ne peut pas avoir différents niveaux de jeu. Je pense au clown, qui peut être un certain registre, mais où cette réalité est toujours aussi importante. Dans le cadre du théâtre immersif, dès que j'entends qu'un comédien fabrique, dit un texte, mon immersion ne va pas du tout être la même que quand je crois être témoin de quelque chose. Je travaille beaucoup avec les techniques de Meisner, Strasberg, Tchekhov, Stanislavski, mais finalement tout est orienté vers cela.

MD. Mon ami Seth Minard dit : « You don't create an experience, you create *for* an experience ». On ne peut jamais tout designer et tout prévoir. La place du participant est très importante. L'acteur ne délivre pas une performance frontale, il ne délivre peut-être rien du tout. L'acteur apporte peut-être simplement du jeu à l'expérience. Il est un vecteur de la pièce vers les spectateurs, les participants, ce qui crée une forme d'égalité. Pour l'immersif, il faut dédramatiser le texte pour valoriser l'expérience et l'interaction. Je trouve fort dans l'immersif de valoriser l'improvisation, la légitimation et la validité du participant à travers son interaction et son ressenti. Il n'y a rien de pire dans une expérience immersive que de se sentir en faute. Il faut développer des techniques de formation pour les acteurs pour permettre de créer ensemble une expérience à un moment T, et donc au moment du spectacle. Ce qu'on dit en tant qu'acteur va valoriser quelque chose qui ne vient pas de soi ou du metteur en scène, mais d'une relation entre les participants, les acteurs et la pièce.

LM. Dans le théâtre immersif, une nécessité absolue fait que, même esthétiquement, on ne peut pas faire fi du spectateur, sans qu'il devienne pour autant prescripteur. Il faut qu'il intervienne au cours des répétitions ou en tout cas, le considérer en permanence. Je suis dans une continuité artistique et scénographique à la Appia, Svoboda…

Svoboda disait que si le travail du metteur en scène est de créer du sens, le spectateur va lui-même en créer. J'avais créé *Betrayal* de Harold Pinter en semi-immersion et à une représentation, deux acteurs ont un trou d'une minute, ce qui est très long. Deux scènes se ressemblent et ils ne savaient plus où ils en étaient. C'est évidemment après ça que des amis ont dit « ce silence, c'est le moment où on comprend tout des personnages ! ». C'est désespérant et c'est très éloquent.
Je travaille sur la notion du 360°. Il est nécessaire pour le comédien-performeur d'avoir cette vision à 360°, d'être en mesure d'englober, comme dans un phénomène de spirale, de ramener le spectateur au cœur des choses. Sinon, les spectateurs recréent le rapport frontal : il se mettent contre les murs et ne bougent pas. Il faut aller les chercher, c'est une initiation, je crois. J'ai appelé le lieu que j'ai créé pour *Hamlet* « le Secret » parce qu'il y a quelque chose de l'ordre du sacré, de l'initiation au théâtre. On prend les portables à l'entrée. La prochaine fois je pense que je prendrai aussi les montres. C'est important de se désolidariser de l'espace et du temps durant l'expérience.

SAH. It starts with the body. I feel like a lot of traditional theatre starts with the text. If the actors are not completely in their bodies and ready for anything, they're not able to respond in the moment. You have to be 100 % responsive when you're in an immersive performance, because the things you've rehearsed a million times are never going to be like that. Over the past few years, I have been developing a methodology to teach how to be completely in your body and responsive all the time, and I have been teaching it in Paris for immersive practitioners. I teach alongside Viewpoints, which is a technique that grew out of postmodern dance in New York and was adapted to theatre by Anne Bogaert. It's incredibly helpful, it really opens you up, and you can begin to see the back of your head, which is what you absolutely need when you're performing immersive work.

JM. Comment fait-on pour répéter un spectacle immersif ? Quelles sont les étapes de travail pour aller à la rencontre des spectateurs et

valider ou invalider des choix, sachant bien sûr que toutes les représentations seront différentes ?

SAH. It takes time. One of the things I appreciate about France is that people take time. I was in New York for seven years before coming here and most productions are four weeks. For a real fully immersive show, that's crazy! With my company, we usually create in residences, so it takes time. The shortest show we recently made was six months. We have a project right now which is in its fourth year of development and it will probably take three more. If we don't try things with the audience, it's stupid to even rehearse, because you have no idea what it is going to be like. All the things you have in your mind are not going to work in the same way, and the things you thought were not going to work, are totally going to work. When we rehearse, we try to show something once a week. The complicated thing is that when the audience saw it once, you can't invite them again. You have to try to get new friends, to convince new people to come and see it in order to have a fresh eye, a fresh perspective to give you new ideas.

SB. J'accepte qu'à la première le spectacle ne soit pas prêt. Ou peut-être ne sera-t-il jamais prêt ? En théâtre classique aussi, mais plus encore dans le cadre immersif. Cela me fascine d'être dans une création continue. On joue *Smoke Rings* depuis trois ans et c'est toujours en train de bouger. *Cyrano* a énormément évolué cette année. En immersif, on met en scène le public, sauf qu'on ne peut pas répéter avec. Il ne revient pas plusieurs fois pour dire « je vais bien me placer à ce moment-là ». Le metteur en scène gère plein de flux. La relation à l'attention du spectateur, faire en sorte de ne pas la perdre en déambulation, réussir quand même à raconter une histoire : tout ça, c'est passionnant ! Quand j'ai vu ce que faisait Punchdrunk, j'ai été fasciné par le budget. Il y avait des idées de mise en scène génialissimes, mais finalement, je n'ai pas eu d'histoire. Même s'il y avait une narration, elle était relativement faible. Ce qui était important était l'expérience que je vivais. C'était complètement valable. Actuellement, je recherche

comment allier immersion et narration, comment immerger le spectateur en lui racontant une histoire. Il y a une tension entre les deux. Plus je vais dans l'immersion, plus j'ai tendance à perdre en narration et inversement. C'est un vrai problème passionnant.

LM. Il n'y a pas encore d'auteur connu comme auteur de théâtre immersif. Appia disait que le metteur en scène est celui qui doit mettre en espace ce que le dramaturge a mis en temps. Là, le metteur en scène doit faire les deux. Il est nécessaire de « mettre en temps » en plus de « mettre en espace » dans un espace qui n'est pas maîtrisé puisque c'est souvent du *site specific.*

JM. Pour *Smoke* et *Helsingør*, vous avez changé de lieux. Comment se réadapte-t-on ?

LM. Je suis passé d'une friche industrielle, à l'horizontale, au donjon du château de Vincennes. Trente mètres de hauteur, des étages à n'en plus finir. D'un seul coup, ça devient tentaculaire alors que c'était écrasé. Il y avait un sentiment d'étouffement et d'un seul coup c'est devenu très fou, très arachnéen. La magie de Shakespeare, c'est que ça passe. J'ai eu une grosse frayeur en me disant que les goulots d'étranglement allaient nuire à l'expérience… Pas du tout ! Ce qu'on perd en étouffement, on le gagne en majesté.

SB. Le spectacle qu'on a fait au Lepic, celui qu'on a fait au Delirium (Avignon) et la version qu'on joue actuellement au théâtre Michel sont, pour moi, des spectacles différents. Des scènes peuvent être similaires, mais ça ne raconte pas exactement la même chose. Le lieu est un personnage à part entière et change la narration.

SAH. Not every show is supposed to tour or needs to move to different places. When I know that I'd like to take a specific show to different

places, I try to create it with an understanding of what the show needs. For example, the show needs one massive space, two smaller spaces, three hallways and four basement rooms. I know that I would take a place only if it has that. Every time I'll do it in different place, there will be a rehearsal process. It's not a tour where you show up, mount and get out. You have, at least, one week to adapt the play to the new space, and then you move on, if you're lucky.

JM. Tout cela crée un rapport au temps différent. Est-ce qu'on peut revenir au concept d'arborescence et reparler du texte ? En France, on y reste très attaché, comme à la notion de trame linéaire, y compris dans des expériences immersives.

TB. En tant qu'auteur, je me suis confronté à la question de l'écriture en arborescence, non-linéaire. Comment peut-on écrire pour quelque chose qui va se modifier ? En tant qu'auteur, seul, la solution que j'ai est plutôt d'écrire des bibles, à l'instar des séries. On peut créer une « liste de besoins » pour qu'un univers naisse à partir de graines et de points de rendez-vous, des jalons dans une arborescence, un espace, et à partir de cela, des choses peuvent fleurir. C'est en donnant ce type d'outils qu'on peut aider un comédien. C'est plus intéressant d'approfondir qui est le personnage, d'où il vient, etc. quitte à le faire avec le comédien, que d'écrire des dialogues qui sont amenés à changer.

MD. On écrit aussi des bibles pour les jeux ! Ça n'est pas intéressant d'écrire des dialogues lorsque la production est peu avancée. Écrire des interactions, partir de ce que les participants vivront (est-ce qu'il y a plusieurs arcs narratifs ? en quoi le nombre d'interactions font sens ?) est plus pertinent. Partir d'un point de vue macro, d'un design global, de verbes, de sensations qui définissent une arborescence très générale, qui ensuite, va faire sens en allant du général au particulier. On écrit les dialogues quasiment en dernier. Si le participant va par-là, qu'il choisit de parler à cette personne, en quoi ça fait sens par rapport

à l'arc narratif général ? S'il reste dans cette pièce, est-ce que ça fait quand même sens ? Tout cela crée l'arborescence.

SAH. In the show that we have been developing for almost seven years, the best thing that I learned is from video gaming. We are structuring it like a video game because video game structures give freedom. Every player who plays a video game is the key person in the game, she is the sole person the game is made for. We actually chose consciously not to bring a playwright on board while we were creating it, but to bring a video game writer. He's been our main writer. Now, we're looking for a playwright to join him. There are structures in video games that are fascinating because they help you decide what is the primary focus, what is the secondary focus; what thing is cool but you don't need to see (if you find it it's really fun, but if you don't, it is not a problem with the storytelling). It's all about environmental storytelling. Every room you enter in I'm not talking about a fighting game or a car game, I'm talking about a game with a quest where you go and discover things—, everything is about how you enter the space and the environment is part of storytelling. And through the discovery of the environment, you discover the story. Those things have been fascinating, and now I begin to apply it to most of the work we're creating structurally.

TB. Le mot que Simón n'a pas employé est *open world.* Dans les jeux vidéo, on en parle, pourtant c'est fermé par les limites de technicité. C'est pareil en théâtre immersif : on essaie de créer un *open world*, où tout a l'air totalement ouvert, même s'il a forcément des limites physiques, et ce, dès l'écriture. J'appelle ça la « courbe de l'horizon » : comment créer l'impression que le monde est plus vaste, comment laisser des petits indices qui suggèrent l'existence d'un univers qu'on ne voit pas mais qu'on ressent ?

LM. Il y a beaucoup d'*open worlds* au cinéma. Les spectateurs comprennent en un quart de seconde des ellipses de temps, des franchissements d'espaces. Passer une porte peut, pour le spectateur, vouloir dire franchir un espace et du temps. Patrice Pavis dit que le boulot du metteur en scène est de donner le désir de voir et de comprendre sans jamais y parvenir. J'avais plein de personnages autour d'Hamlet qui, dans la pièce, n'apparaissent que peu, comme Rosencrantz et Guildenstern. Que font-ils le reste du temps ? On a fait une sorte de bible, sur le tard, avec les comédiens. Parfois, c'était « trouvez ce que vous faites car il faut que je m'occupe des autres ». La créativité du comédien est formidable ! On peut se reposer sur lui pour qu'il trouve sa ligne narrative. Ce travail se fait en troupe, en communauté.

SB. Dans *Cyrano Ostinato*, il y a quelques extraits de Rostand, mais c'est moi qui l'ai écrit, donc l'écriture évolue en fonction du spectacle. Simón dit souvent « est-ce que j'ai besoin de l'immersif pour raconter mon histoire ? » C'est la première question à se poser. L'immersif n'est pas une fin en soi. C'est très sympa. Aujourd'hui tout est immersif, les expos, les shampoings, mais à quoi ça sert ? Si je réalise un film, est-ce que je vais faire un champ / contre-champ ou un plan séquence ? Il faut se poser cette question : est-ce que c'est intéressant ? Notre envie à tous, c'est surtout de faire un bon spectacle.

JM. Je reviens au spectateur : comment crée-t-on des sas pour lui donner un rôle, une fonction, lui demander d'être un *ghost* (invisible comme un fantôme), un témoin muet ou d'interagir, selon les séquences ? Comment le fait-on passer dans un même spectacle par des postures différentes sans qu'il s'en rende vraiment compte ?

SAH. I love that! It's the most challenging and fascinating thing. You have « sas »—we call it « threshold »—all the time in immersive plays. You know how to act in a theatre space: you come in, you get your ticket, you walk in, you sit down, you watch, you cry, you laugh, you

fall asleep, you clap, you leave. In immersive theatre, you have no idea what you walk into, you don't know the rules of the world. How do you transmit the rules of the word? I'm not personally a fan of « you can do this », « you should do that ». It is best if the rules of the world can come out of the dramaturgy and the space. The more they can be ingrained into the story (and not be given on a piece of paper or sent to you on an e-mail beforehand), the better it is. Between every single scene, you need another threshold—unless it's all within the same world, but usually in immersive work, the world changes from scene to scene—so how do you create this buffer zone, this transition, where the rules change? The number one thing that can help you is the space. We all know how to act in specific spaces. We all know, when we walk into a church, this is how I act in a church. But that's not specific enough. How do you act in a Baptist church versus an Evangelical church versus a mosque, etc.? The more specific you can be, the more the audience is going to know how to act and behave. The more the space can teach you how to be, the more it can help you with transition, from space to space. The very important transition, and we often don't think about it, is the last transition, when you leave and go home. In the best possible case, you've created a world in which the spectators have fully immersed themselves, so how do you help them transition into the world after? You want your play to begin way before the show, much earlier, like with the invites you send, the way you design your tickets, the information you give to the audience before they come, or things like that, but what about after? How can the world still remain in people's minds and be there after the show is over? I'm very interested in this point of threshold. It's a kind of purgatory: when you die, you are stuck in this middle place, what's going to be next?

MD. Il y a deux choses à préciser. La première est la notion de *priming* : comment préparer les participants pour qu'ils en sachent assez pour ne pas avoir de mauvaise surprise ? Comment préserver la sécurité émotionnelle et physique ? La deuxième est la notion de sas narratif,

au cours de l'expérience, qui aide à la dramaturgie et à l'expérience du participant, mais aussi qui indique les règles du monde. Comme tu l'as dit, Simón, on ne sait jamais quelles sont les règles du monde dans lequel on entre. C'est aussi ça la beauté de l'immersif, l'opportunité de créer un monde avec de nouvelles règles ! C'est pour ça qu'autant de personnes sont fascinées. On peut vivre quelque chose qu'on ne vivrait pas autrement, comme être une autre personne, explorer d'autres univers. Priya Parker, autrice de *The Art of Gathering: How we Meet and Why It Matters*, parle de la différence entre les *pop up rules* et l'*étiquette*. L'*étiquette* recouvre les codes sociaux qui s'appliquent dans la vie, dans les événements sociaux auxquels on est habitué. Cela divise les gens. Dans le théâtre immersif, on a l'occasion de briser ces codes sociaux, de briser l'*étiquette* et de créer nos *pop up rule*s. Le sas permet aux participants d'établir une véritable horizontalité, puisqu'on peut mettre tout le monde sur un pied d'égalité pour explorer l'expérience.

LM. Ça rejoint la communauté et la notion de sacré. Comment passer d'un espace profane à un espace sacré ? Donner son portable est un acte de foi incroyable. Des gens disent « non », on leur dit « si, regardez, c'est marqué sur le billet ! » et après, ils disent « merci de m'avoir permis de me couper du monde ». Il est nécessaire d'initier le spectateur à cette forme, en lui disant qu'on peut changer les règles, mais ce mécanisme du sacré est dans le théâtre depuis 2500 ans ! C'est une nouvelle technique, qui correspond à une connaissance des spectateurs, parce qu'aujourd'hui il y a les séries, les jeux vidéo. Robert Lepage dit que le théâtre ne survivra pas seul s'il n'intègre pas les techniques narratives qui sont à sa portée. Les techniques du jeu vidéo, de la réalité virtuelle, augmentée bientôt, rentreront en ligne de compte. On partage le même vocabulaire. Quand on parle au cinéma des *close-ups*, *long-shots, fade-ins*, *fade-outs*, c'est évidemment des mots partagés par l'ensemble des spectateurs, ou d'une majorité. On est dans une communauté sacrée, et oui, la sortie est aussi importante.

JM. Tu parlais du rapport au cinéma. Dans l'immersif, le moment où le spectateur est comme l'œil de la caméra est fascinant. Tu t'en sers beaucoup dans tes spectacles, Sébastien. Pour passer d'un plan large à un gros plan, voire jouer pour les deux échelles en même temps, dans quelle énergie de jeu doit être l'acteur ? Comment met-on le focus, comment crée-t-on cette intimité ? Et comment gérez-vous les o*ne-to-one*, ces moments privilégiés passés seul à seul entre un acteur et un spectateur, quand il y en a ?

LM. C'est le fait de jouer seul qui me fascine. L'actrice qui joue Ophélie se maquille pendant un quart d'heure. Des gens restent à la regarder pendant dix minutes. L'acteur ne fait jamais cela. Au cinéma, on ne voit pas dix minutes de rien ou de très peu de choses. C'est fascinant pour certains spectateurs, et pour l'acteur de jouer sur ce potentiel du geste qui n'arrive pas à destination. Parfois il peut jouer sans spectateur. Qu'est-ce qu'un acteur sans spectateur ? Ça reste un acteur ou ça devient un fou ? Il continue car quelqu'un pourrait arriver.

SB. Sur *Smoke* et *Cyrano*, il y a des moments d'intimité avec un spectateur, de danse, de confidences, de demande de conseil et donc d'interaction. Ça fait partie des outils. Mais encore une fois, à quoi ça sert ? C'est toujours très important de se demander « est-ce que ça a du sens ? », « est-ce que c'est nécessaire ? ».

SAH. I'm currently working on an adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* by Tchekhov and I'm really interested in these one on one moments, because we are creating a whole new section in the middle of the play, which does not exist in the original play. We're making it for a *château* and the audience gets to explore the *château* and discover

moments of the subconscious of the characters. I deeply believe in the creative freedom of actors. I don't believe in rigidity of director—I enjoy seeing Bob Wilson's work but I'm not interested in Bob Wilson's work because everything is calculated—and I really believe in working with actors as creatives and giving actors agency to create new work because that puts them deeper into the character. Actors get to create individual moments, which I will obviously guide and support in the making. By making those moments, they learn about the subconscious of the character. As they're playing that character, they're developing a backstory for themselves, something you have to have in immersive theatre, because if you're just playing your character that is written, you don't know nearly enough. You have to create, and by creating these individual separate moments—some of them we will never use—we make in the rehearsal process way more than we will ever use in the final show. But the creative process builds the universe of the characters' identity, so the actors have a lot more to play with. *West World*—for those who know it—for all of its issues, creates a full universe, where the actors have a track but at any point they are thrown out of the track by an audience member, but they know at another time, that they have to come back to the track. To me that is really interesting.

JM. Merci beaucoup pour ces échanges. Nous allons maintenant ouvrir le débat au public.

SPECTATRICE 1. En terme d'écriture, comment fait-on pour que le public, quel que soit l'endroit où il se trouve, se dise, c'est là que je dois être ? Comment fait-on pour que le public comprenne tout et qu'il se passe des choses pour tout le monde ?

LM. J'ai compris quelque chose en écoutant Josephine Machon parler des crescendo de Punchdrunk. Dans *The Drowned Man*, il y a des crescendo qui réunissent tout le monde. Dans *Helsingør*, je ne

répète pas la pièce plusieurs fois, mais j'ai quand même trois scènes qui réunissent tout le monde, trois jalons qui permettent que tous les spectateurs voient des scènes clés. C'est important pour ne pas perdre le spectateur. Ça dépend aussi du texte. J'ai essayé de faire une adaptation de *Cromwell* de Victor Hugo. Ça ne marche pas : le théâtre français fonctionne dans la règle de l'unité de temps et d'action, donc une scène en déclenche une autre.

TB. C'est un choix. On sacrifie des choses. Si l'histoire centrale est vraiment importante, c'est peut-être mieux de faire une déambulation plutôt qu'un univers ouvert. Si ça doit vous mettre des bâtons dans les roues, ne le construisez pas comme ça. Pour ce qui est de « est-ce que le public a tout compris », il faut tenter avec des spectateurs et s'ils n'ont pas compris, il faut peut-être réécrire. Malheureusement, ce processus est valable pour toute écriture. Il n'y a pas de formule magique. Juste, essaie, réessaie, montre à des gens.

MD. Avec plusieurs pistes, plusieurs *tracks*, il y aura plusieurs compréhensions de l'histoire, si c'est vraiment arborescent. Si un participant choisi une *track*, il aura telle compréhension de l'histoire, différente de celle des autres. S'il le refait, il aura une autre compréhension. On peut partir d'un point de vue très macro en se disant « qu'est-ce que cet arc narratif veut dire ? », plutôt que de voir la chose en dissection, en se disant « est-ce qu'il faut qu'on voit tant de scènes pour comprendre l'histoire ? », et se dire que cet arc permet de comprendre ça, ça et ça.

SAH. Number one, I think it's because of the impact of Punchdrunk's large scale shows, when we think of immersive, we only think of this big open environment, and it's not true. There are millions of formats of immersive. When you think of immersive work, think of all these different forms and structures you can use, so open world is not the only thing. Number two, when I'm making a show, I make a list of all the essential things the audience needs to understand and no matter

what track they are on, those things have to be in those tracks. If I don't hit those things, they are going to miss an essential element. Everybody has to get the most important things. Which means that it could be completely different scenes that speak on the same point, but those points need to be hit.

SPECTATEUR 2. It seems that, in France, there's a growing desire to move the immersive experience out onto the street, isn't it?

SAH. For my company, there are two things in our mission. One thing is that every piece we make is asking a large societal question. When I try to answer those questions, I try not to be preachy but to tackle those questions in order to create a space, which is the second thing of our mission. I think the spaces on the streets are incredibly important, but we also have to have those spaces to rehearse real life. To me, they are magical. The thing I'm always interested in performance space is the connection between the magical and the quotidian. Those can often be found in the street but the space we create the performance, in a controlled environment, it's not necessarily a rehearsal for life, but it's an importantly valid space to come together, dig in to question what our society is dealing with, and then go back out and deal with the society.

LM. I was fascinated by what I've heard of Punchdrunk's work. Well, in their latest work, you took a train, went somewhere and you didn't know who was an actor, who wasn't, but that's a way of creating sacred environments of some sort, but I think we [in France] are not there yet.

TB. The main thing is the question of how the spectator is approaching it. When you walk outside, as a general rule, you're not thinking « I'm going to experience a work of art ». You can, that's what some

people do, and that's an interesting way of walking around the town, but most people don't, so you're giving the spectator the opportunity to shift their mindset to look at things differently. But Simón was saying that you create a space in which you can look at things differently because when you come to the show you're not coming to it as you come to the rest of your everyday activities, you're coming hopefully with a different mindset.

SAH. Every single city has a different need at the moment. Sometimes we don't ask what the society we live in needs, and we're just saying « I want to make this thing » without asking the question « why am I doing this thing in that specific place? ».

SPECTATRICE 3. Je viens du jeu vidéo. Des choses résonnent, du point de vue de la narration, de l'expérience de jeu, de comment on va intégrer un spectateur. Dans le jeu vidéo, on a énormément de *playtests*, réduits à un aspect du jeu, ou à des points de narration, de *game design*, etc. À quel point pouvez-vous intégrer les spectateurs dans l'évolution de votre spectacle ?

MD. Ça vient beaucoup par l'engagement, l'inclusion et la validation qu'on donne aux participants. Dans un jeu vidéo, on est validé car on joue au jeu. Dans une expérience immersive, c'est au *designer* de donner cette possibilité. Ça peut prendre des formes différentes, donner une carte de rôle, envoyer des informations qui seront utilisées de manières narratives et amèneront un engagement émotionnel et/ou physique dans l'histoire. Ça peut se faire à des points précis ou de manière générale. Ça se *design* et ce sont des choses qui peuvent être incluses dans l'histoire. Il y a plein de manières de créer un engagement réel chez des participants.

SAH. You can test it any time and you can literally use the same play-test techniques that you use in video game, the exact same ones.

JM. Un grand merci à toutes et à tous pour ces échanges passionnants, qui nous l'espérons, se poursuivront bientôt.

Immersion et confinement

Entretien avec Dot Pierson, directrice artistique de Mondes Sauvages

Juliette Mézergues

Avant-propos

Dot Pierson, artiste pluridisciplinaire, est chanteuse, romancière, metteuse en scène et directrice artistique de Mondes Sauvages, structure conceptrice d'événements immersifs. Durant le premier confinement, elle a créé *Home*, expérience immersive confinée, via le réseau social Facebook et la plateforme Zoom. Conçu pour un seul spectateur au départ, *Home* propose un parcours sur mesure, guidé par différents artistes, à travers l'intime, pour se reconnecter à soi et aux autres. Dot a ensuite créé *L'Ours* de Tchekhov dans une version pour la plateforme Zoom. Elle et ses comédiens ne séjournant pas ensemble, les étapes de travail, comme pour *Home*, se sont déroulées en visioconférence. Dans *L'Ours*, une veuve, retirée du monde, refuse de recevoir un propriétaire terrien avec qui son mari était en dettes. Ce dernier décide de rester chez elle tant qu'elle ne le paiera pas.

Cet entretien a été réalisé durant la période de déconfinement, alors que les théâtres étaient encore fermés et que les artistes étaient dans la plus grande incertitude.

Entretien

JULIETTE MÉZERGUES. Nous sommes le 28 mai 2020. Suite à l'épidémie de Covid-19, la France, comme de nombreux pays, a été confinée. Le déconfinement a commencé depuis le 11 mai, mais les théâtres sont toujours fermés et les artistes sont encore dans une phase d'incertitude. Comment as-tu eu l'idée de faire des créations immersives confinées ? Quels sont les enjeux de *Home* et de *L'Ours*, qui sont deux formes de spectacles très différentes ? Comment s'est passé le travail en équipe et à distance ?

DOT PIERSON. Le 12 mars 2020, date de l'annonce du premier confinement… La première semaine a été entre sidération et peur. Des copains qui tombent malades… Puis, pendant des apéros en visioconférence, on discutait avec Ornella Boulet et Aurélie Delmas, mes collaboratrices, du fait que le théâtre nous manquait, que d'autres travaillaient pour le bien de tous et que nous, finalement, on ne faisait rien. Comme la culture et l'art, c'est vital, on a décidé de s'y mettre et on a monté *Home*. On ne savait pas où on allait. On n'a pas l'habitude de travailler avec le digital. Je suis chanteuse. Ornella est comédienne. On est des gens de contact, surtout dans l'immersif. Je me suis dit qu'on avait besoin de se sentir bien, de voir des gens qui nous font nous sentir bien. Le premier spectacle que j'ai monté était *Douze*. Ça parle de l'intimité et ça intègre du développement personnel. Je me suis dit qu'on allait partir de ça. J'ai contacté les comédiens avec qui je travaille, notamment ceux du dernier spectacle qu'on aurait dû créer le 4 juin 2020. Avec une douzaine de comédiens, on est partis sur l'idée de faire une expérience. Il y a deux *Home* différents. Celui de 15h est plus physique, avec du mouvement, de la danse ; celui de 17h, plus introspectif. La première représentation était un *crash test* car on a monté le projet en deux jours. L'idée, c'était « on en a besoin, on y va » et au bout d'une semaine on a trouvé notre rythme. C'était très prenant. Il y avait énormément de travail en amont. Puis de nouveaux comédiens sont arrivés et ont proposé d'autres choses, comme de nouvelles méditations, de la peinture, des rêves, etc.

JM. Pour bien comprendre, chaque comédien arrive avec une proposition ? D'ailleurs, sont-ils tous comédiens ?

DP. Non, il y a des musiciens, des danseurs, des performeurs. Certains sont arrivés avec des propositions, en rapport ou non avec leur discipline. Un danseur a, par exemple, proposé d'écrire des textes sur les gens. Parfois, c'est moi qui disais « j'aimerais que tu fasses ça » ou « il nous manque ça ». Ça a été une réflexion commune, même si j'en ai été l'instigatrice. Ils ont été force de propositions. Jouer tous les jours,

c'est très prenant. Les week-ends, on répétait. Ça nous a tous sauvé pendant ce confinement. On avait besoin d'interaction. Ça nous a permis de faire notre métier et on a fait du bien aux gens. On a eu de très beaux moments avec des spectateurs extrêmement touchés. On a eu, notamment, un monsieur très réticent, qui a fini en larmes.

JM. Vous faisiez des recherches sur les gens en amont pour proposer des activités et orienter la relation ou tout se construisait dans l'instant ? Par exemple, est-ce que vous aviez besoin de savoir quelle était la profession de la personne ou ses *hobbies*, avant de lui proposer de méditer ou de danser ?

DP. Non. Sur *Douze*, on faisait ça, mais pour *Home*, c'était sur l'instant. Au début, il n'y avait pas forcément d'histoire. Comme ça a beaucoup évolué, les spectateurs ont vu des spectacles assez différents d'une semaine à l'autre. Tu as eu quelle version ?

JM. Une jeune femme m'a saluée, puis a prétexté devoir partir, mais entre-temps, quelqu'un d'autre avait débarqué dans une nouvelle fenêtre, comme par hasard et ainsi de suite. Des gens éteignaient leur caméra et d'autres allumaient la leur. Les fenêtres de l'outil Zoom fonctionnent finalement un peu comme des portes qui s'ouvriraient et se fermeraient.

DP. Dans une version très rigolote, je parlais à la personne et je lui disais : « ça foire complètement, je suis désolée mais tu ne pourras pas faire l'expérience. Je te propose de te voir quand même en visio ». La personne arrivait dans une *room* où une famille (5 comédiens) était en pleine conversation autour d'une histoire de mariage qui ne se ferait jamais à cause de la pandémie. Le spectateur se demandait vraiment ce qu'il faisait là. Au bout d'un moment, je lui disais « je suis désolée, je ne t'ai pas donné le bon code ». Je disais aux autres « partez ! ». Ils

quittaient la *room* au fur et à mesure. Il ne restait que le spectateur, moi et une autre comédienne. Je disais « Je vais te donner les codes et donc en fait… ».

JM. Attends, attends, je t'ai perdue, j'ai plus de son !

DP. Non, je te montrais ce que je faisais. Les gens réagissaient exactement comme toi ! Là, je coupais ma caméra. La personne se retrouvait en tête à tête avec la comédienne. Puis, il y avait tout un déroulé avec des comédiens qui entraient et sortaient. Ensuite, je revenais et je disais « ça remarche ». Le spectateur se demandait ce qui se passait. On a fait de plus en plus immersif. On a travaillé le jeu en continu et on est arrivés à une version quasi définitive à la fin du confinement.

JM. C'est cette version que vous jouez en ce moment ?

DP. Non. On s'est rendu compte que les gens étaient aussi avec leurs enfants, que l'école n'avait pas encore repris pour tous. On s'est dit qu'on pouvait aider les parents. Je ne suis pas très favorable aux écrans pour les petits, donc on voulait une forme assez courte, qui leur apprenne des choses. Une semaine, c'est un spectacle autour de l'écologie et la suivante, autour des émotions. On continue pour les adultes, mais avec une version familiale. Et aussi une version célibataire. Non bien sûr, tu ne rencontres pas l'âme sœur, mais on travaille sur la séduction, sur la solitude, sur l'envie de rencontrer des gens. Pour cela, on se penche sur l'écriture de lettres d'amour, on pose des questions, on voit des films. Ça fonctionne bien. Mais je pense qu'on va s'arrêter d'ici quelques semaines et reprendre en septembre. Avec le déconfinement, une autre volonté s'installe. On avait envie d'accompagner les gens pendant le confinement et le déconfinement. Maintenant, on dit aux gens « ça y est, vous pouvez reprendre vos habitudes de vie, vous n'avez plus besoin de nous. On vous laisse mais on reviendra à la rentrée ».

On craint que les salles ne rouvrent pas tout de suite. Je ne peux pas laisser mon pays pendant six mois, voire plus, sans culture et sans art. Ça ne remplacera jamais le fait d'être à côté de la personne, mais c'est une chose à laquelle on peut s'accrocher.

JM. On a vu pléthore de captations, mais le fait d'être en direct avec des gens, avec ce que ça comporte d'imprévus, de maladresses, d'accrocs, permet de retrouver un semblant de ce qui fait vibrer au théâtre. C'est quelque chose dont on aura besoin tant que les salles ne rouvriront pas.

DP. On travaille exactement là-dessus. On sait que ça va rouvrir. On sait qu'on rejouera. Mais c'est important de ne pas laisser les gens à l'abandon. C'est un acte politique. On doit continuer la culture, continuer à aider les gens, même si c'est le bordel.
Sur *L'Ours* c'était très différent. J'avais envie depuis longtemps de mettre en scène du Tchekhov. Je voulais peu de personnages et une pièce courte, car on est vraiment beaucoup sur nos écrans en ce moment. Je suis tombée sur *L'Ours*, que je ne connaissais pas, et le hasard faisant bien les choses, il s'agit d'une femme qui se confine. Surtout, c'est une farce… Très politique, sociale, féministe, engagée… En accord avec mes valeurs. J'ai la chance d'être entourée de gens qui ont beaucoup de talent. Il fallait des comédiens avertis, capables de bouffer un texte énorme en peu de temps. On l'a monté en une semaine. C'est un travail collectif. Comment tu mets en scène quand tu n'es pas chez les gens ? Je n'avais jamais vu leur intérieur et deux des comédiens n'étaient même pas chez eux.

JM. C'est déjà un exercice étonnant de répéter par visioconférence. Peut-être que travailler avec des gens qu'on connaît est une certaine sécurité ?

DP. Pour *L'Ours,* c'était des comédiens que je connaissais déjà. C'était nouveau pour moi. J'avais besoin d'avoir des comédiens qui avaient confiance en moi. Ils savaient que je leur voudrais du bien.

JM. Des deux côtés, c'est important.

DP. Pour *Home*, il y avait des comédiens avec qui je n'avais jamais travaillé. Pour revenir à *L'Ours*, quand j'ai proposé à Diane Renier, Raphaël Beauville et Franck Saurel, ils ont dit « oui, carrément ! ». Puis il y a eu ce moment où tout le monde était un peu circonspect, où tout le monde s'est dit « ça risque d'être un peu de la merde ». On a fait une première lecture et on s'est dit « c'est pas mal », puis une deuxième et on s'est dit « c'est vachement bien ». Ils ont amené moult propositions. C'est une chance d'avoir des comédiens aussi engagés ! On avait un peu peur que les émotions ne passent pas. Ce n'est plus un quatrième mur, c'est un cinquième. Mais ça fonctionne bien et ça donne une forme nouvelle. Le comédien est filmé, mais il est en live. Tu peux voir ses larmes d'hyper près, mais c'est en direct. L'aspect technique n'est pas simple. Pendant une représentation, Smirnov ne captait plus. Je suis arrivée dans la *room* et j'ai joué un personnage qui n'existe pas dans la pièce, une gouvernante très embêtée par la présence de ce Smirnov. Ça a duré cinq minutes, mais le ressenti était très long. Le direct te donne un peu les sensations de la scène. Pour *L'Ours*, plus que pour *Home*, il y a ce moment avant de jouer où on a tous le trac ! On a un rituel, comme avant de rentrer sur scène. Après la représentation, on prend trois-quarts d'heure pour parler avec les spectateurs. Ils nous interrogent sur le processus, on raconte notre travail. Ça fait du bien. On joue deux soirs par semaine. On a tenté aussi un dimanche à 18h, c'était complet. On a eu deux petits garçons et une petite fille. Ils ont adoré et ont pu échanger avec nous ensuite. La petite fille avait trois ans et demi. Et ça, je me dis, c'est gagné ! Tout le monde peut avoir accès à la culture, à l'art. Jamais un enfant de trois ans et demi n'ira voir du Tchekhov à 21h avec ses parents. Là, ça devient possible. Beaucoup d'enfants se couchaient plus tard pendant le confinement.

Si les enfants bougent ou parlent, par Zoom, ça ne dérange personne. Le format est aussi intéressant pour ça. Les personnes plus âgées ont parfois des soucis avec l'outil. Je fais un tuto, mais il est arrivé qu'un spectateur fasse irruption pendant le spectacle parce qu'il avait rallumé sa caméra et son micro. Il s'est excusé et est reparti ! Les comédiens ont improvisé avec la situation. En revanche, on joue le texte intégral… À une exception : un personnage dit « J'ai la tête qui éclate » et on a rajouté « je veux seulement dormir, m'étendre sur l'asphalte et me laisser mourir », parce qu'on a les références qu'on mérite. On a essayé de faire quelque chose qui reste drôle, qui parle aux gens, d'où la présence des masques Covid. Le spectacle évolue. Maintenant, le comédien aura un masque qu'il coud à la place d'un masque en plastique. Au début, derrière Smirnov, était écrit « Confinement » et il cochait les jours comme en prison. Maintenant, il est écrit « Déconfinement ». Tant qu'on n'aura pas la possibilité de faire notre travail dans les lieux habituels, on continuera à compter les jours jusqu'à ce qu'on puisse retourner sur scène.

JM. Il m'a semblé que *Home* était peut-être plus immersif (le spectateur est au centre) que *L'Ours* qui, malgré l'outil de visioconférence, était d'une forme plus classique.

DP. Oui, *Home* est plus immersif. Sur les premières de *L'Ours*, on n'osait pas trop. On cherchait, on découvrait le medium.

JM. En général, ce n'est pas le comédien qui gère la caméra, même au théâtre, même si ça se fait parfois, ce n'est pas un exercice auquel tous les comédiens sont habitués. Cela fait beaucoup de contraintes techniques à apprivoiser en même temps.

DP. C'est fou, ce que font ces comédiens ! Smirnov ne joue pas avec un ordinateur mais avec un téléphone portable ! Il joue face à lui-

même ou face à Louka, mais la plupart du temps, Louka est *freezé* car il capte très mal dans son garage. C'est comme s'il jouait pour le point lumineux vert de la caméra qui indique que ça tourne. Maintenant que nous maîtrisons mieux l'outil, ça devient plus immersif. On commence à inciter les gens à participer parfois. Je suis sur l'écriture d'un autre spectacle qui mélangera immersion et théâtre plus classique. Ces deux expériences ont été comme un laboratoire, pendant deux mois. Outre le fait de vouloir apporter aux gens de l'art, du réconfort, on sait qu'on va utiliser ces outils pendant un certain temps, donc comment les utiliser au mieux ? Ce nouveau spectacle mêlera des formes différentes et sera plus immersif.

JM. Envisages-tu de faire vivre ces spectacles-là en présentiel ? *Home* pourrait se faire en contact direct avec les spectateurs.

DP. *Home* préexistait au confinement. C'est une adaptation, plus légère, de *Douze*. Dès qu'on pourra, on fera une version de *Home* avec les gens. On nous pose beaucoup la question pour *L'Ours*. Si on a la possibilité de le jouer sur scène, on le fera avec plaisir ! Le prochain spectacle, *De battre mon cœur a commencé*, était conçu pour être joué sur scène et on est en train de l'adapter, mais j'espère que les deux versions seront possibles.

JM. Tu envisages de faire les deux en même temps ? Le présentiel et le distanciel ? En 2008, j'avais travaillé sur *Invocation* de Martin Eckman, mis en scène par Rolf Kasteleiner : deux comédiens étaient dans un lieu, avec des spectateurs, deux autres dans un autre lieu avec d'autres spectateurs. Les deux couples d'acteurs communiquaient par Skype et des projections sur écran permettaient au public de voir ce qui se passait sur les écrans d'ordinateur manipulés par les acteurs. Le dispositif n'était donc pas immersif, mais il y avait cette idée de travailler sur la présence de l'acteur en direct et sur écran, de l'autogestion de l'outil caméra et de la transmission par internet.

DP. C'est intéressant. Je pense qu'on va continuer. *Heroes* est un spectacle très rock, qui se vit en live, comme *Bohème* (quoique, comme on a dû repousser *Bohème*, si on ne pouvait pas le faire, je pense que je proposerai une version digitale). Mais avant tout ça, des gens m'avaient approchée pour faire une version digitale de *Douze.* À l'époque, je n'avais pas osé. Je pense que je n'étais pas prête. Je viens du rock, du live. Je suis chanteuse. Pour moi, c'est la scène qui est primordiale, c'est là que j'ai envie de voir mes comédiens. Mais ma réflexion a évolué. J'ai vu que ça pouvait faire passer beaucoup de choses. Je pense qu'il va y avoir un mélange des deux.

JM. Ça permettrait de diviser la jauge, ce qui sera intéressant si les théâtres rouvrent à jauges réduites. On pourrait imaginer un dispositif où les spectateurs seraient répartis en trois lieux différents, par exemple.

DP. Tout à fait. Pour *De battre mon cœur a commencé*, sans rien dévoiler, il y aura des formes différentes, du développement personnel, des media type ordinateur ou téléphone, mais aussi du physique. On cherche une solution pour avoir les gens. Ce que tu décris serait la parfaite symbiose entre le digital et le physique. Je ne suis pas une fille du digital. J'ai quarante ans, j'ai eu Facebook à vingt-sept ans. Je m'y mets, mais je ne pousserai pas forcément la chose à son paroxysme, mais c'est sûr que je l'utiliserai. Pas mal de gens disent « je ne veux pas voir ça car ça ne remplacera jamais le théâtre ». On est tous d'accord pour dire que ça ne remplacera jamais le théâtre. C'est un autre processus.

JM. Il faut pouvoir l'utiliser sans pour autant le généraliser. Pouvoir continuer à échanger et à travailler, même via les outils numériques, a maintenu la tête hors de l'eau à beaucoup d'artistes.

DP. Tout est une question de posologie. Sans comparer le medium internet au cinéma, on sait que le cinéma ne remplace pas le théâtre. On est content d'aller voir des spectacles. Là, c'est encore une autre forme. Si c'est utilisé à bon escient, pourquoi pas. Ça n'est pas une fin en soi, c'est une proposition. C'est souvent dans les moments où les artistes sont le plus brimés qu'il y a un besoin de se réinventer. Je trouve ça positif. Ça m'a fait un bien fou. J'ai appris énormément. J'ai fait des erreurs. Mon management n'était pas forcément le bon et il faut que je travaille sur moi, sur mon rapport à l'autre. Comment parler aux comédiens, par exemple ? Il y a des choses que tu peux dire quand tu es avec la personne et qui ne passent pas quand tu es en visioconférence. Si tu t'emportes, tu ne peux pas faire un câlin pour dire « désolée, je me suis un peu enflammée ». J'ai ressenti ce moment où l'écran était gênant entre le comédien et moi, où j'avais besoin de sentir l'autre et vice-versa. C'est un peu comme quand tu écris un message et que l'autre te dit « pourquoi tu m'engueules ? » alors que ce n'était pas ton intention. Tu n'as pas l'énergie réelle de la personne. On a dû travailler là-dessus aussi, y compris dans la mise en scène et le travail des personnages. Dans *L'Ours*, Diane a ce rôle social et politique et elle est comique à la fois. Il fallait arriver à faire passer toutes les nuances à travers l'écran. Dans *Home*, parfois, c'est difficile d'entrer en contact avec le spectateur à travers un écran. C'est déjà dur quand tu es en immersif avec les gens, alors avec la visio, c'est encore plus complexe.

JM. Les gens ne sont pas là par hasard. On sait souvent ce que l'on va voir au théâtre, mais parfois, on peut se laisser entraîner sans se renseigner. En cette période, il faut une démarche volontaire pour se connecter et voir tes spectacles. Il y a des listes d'attente, tellement la demande est grande. La motivation des spectateurs est réelle.

DP. Oui, pour la plupart, c'est une véritable démarche. Mais on a tout de même eu des gens qui « sont entrés parce qu'ils ont vu de la lumière ». Et là, tu te demandes vraiment comment ils sont arrivés là,

comment ils ont trouvé l'information. Il y a un homme qui était très dubitatif au début de *Home*. Il disait « moi je fais jamais ça, je vais jamais au théâtre ». Quelqu'un l'avait inscrit. Sa mère, sa femme, sa pote je ne sais pas. Il disait « c'est pas mon délire » et à la fin, il était en larmes et nous remerciait. « Vous venez de m'ouvrir un monde », nous a-t-il dit.

JM. Vous aviez fait de la communication ?

DP. Il y a eu un peu de presse, France Télévision aussi. Mais c'était très peu. C'est resté très confidentiel. On a eu les gens de l'AFAI, les copains théâtreux, leurs familles, puis le bouche à oreille a fonctionné et on a eu des gens qui nous étaient inconnus. Une spectatrice s'attendait à un cours de danse. Donc elle n'était pas prête pour ça. Et puis, ça s'est très bien passé.

JM. Pour *Home*, je ne savais à quoi m'attendre. Je te connaissais, je connais certaines comédiennes qui sont dedans, mais je ne savais pas quel était le concept. J'ai trouvé ça bien de ne pas savoir. Je pense que ça a vraiment apporté à mon expérience. La surprise fait partie du spectacle. Je me doutais que je ne tomberais pas sur les comédiens que je connaissais.

DP. Ça d'ailleurs, ça a été un gros casse-tête, car certains connaissaient presque toute l'équipe !

JM. Comment avez-vous répété *Home* ?

DP. On a écrit un livret du spectacle, puis chacun jouait sa partition à un camarade, en *one to one.* On se faisait des retours pour voir ce qui fonctionnait ou pas. Ensuite, c'est avec les spectateurs que les choses se

font. Les gens te disent ce qui marche ou non. Puis, tu le sens. Quand tu vois que la personne est sur son téléphone, tu comprends que ce moment-là ne fonctionne pas, qu'il faut le revoir.

JM. Je trouve l'attention plus difficile qu'au théâtre. J'imagine que c'est pareil pour les comédiens. On est tellement habitué à faire plusieurs choses à la fois devant nos écrans, y compris des choses qu'on ne ferait pas avec les gens, comme lire un message.

DP. Pour les téléphones, on en a toujours un qui le fait pendant mes spectacles ! C'est peut-être aussi lié à la forme. Pour *Heroes*, il y a un énorme travail de décoration et de costumes. Les gens prennent des photos avec leur téléphone. Certains veulent même faire des *selfies* avec les comédiens « Oh, mon Dieu ! Je suis avec Mick Jagger ! » et là on dit « Non ! ».

JM. Donc tu ne prends pas les téléphones des gens au préalable ?

DP. Pas sur *Heroes*, ni sur *Bohême*. On les prenait sur *Douze*. Pour *Heroes*, la configuration de la salle ne le permettait pas. C'était au Bus Palladium et on avait deux cent personnes. Il y avait 90 comédiens, ça durait quatre heures. On avait trente minutes pour faire rentrer les spectateurs. L'entrée est minuscule. Ça jouait dès la rue. Quand tu prends les téléphones, tu dois négocier donc ce n'était pas faisable. Sur *Douze*, comme ça touchait à l'intime, les gens étaient parfois gênés et comme parfois, quand on est gêné, on fait des trucs idiots… Certains faisaient chier les comédiens. Un jour, un spectateur a pété un plomb et cassé une chaise. C'était à l'Hôtel de Seize à Bordeaux, qui est un cinq étoiles… Du mobilier d'époque ! On a fait beaucoup de service après-vente avec lui. On avait touché un truc. L'immersif, c'est un peu comme des singes avec des kalachnikovs. On amène les spectateurs vers des choses très profondes et même si ça reste bienveillant, c'est

parfois limite. Parfois tu es touché mais tu n'es pas prêt à être touché de cette façon. C'est arrivé une fois ou deux dans mes spectacles. Mais j'aime aussi cette bascule.

JM. Comment gères-tu ce que tu appelles « le service après-vente » en digital ? Comment crées-tu le sas de sortie du spectateur avec les écrans ?

DP. Il y a forcément une différence. Mais tu sens les choses. Tu perçois l'émotion.

JM. Ça vous arrive de rappeler des gens pour savoir comment ils vont ?

DP. Ça m'est arrivé deux fois. J'ai senti que ça avait été très important pour eux et qu'ils n'étaient vraiment pas bien, dû au confinement. Vers le milieu du confinement, un spectateur n'arrêtait pas de répéter « les humains me manquent ». Donc, j'ai fait du service après-vente. On a discuté et ça allait. Pour *Home*, je réponds beaucoup aux mails.

JM. C'est vrai que l'envoi du texte après le spectacle amorce le dialogue.

DP. Tu parles du texte écrit sur mesure pour toi ? C'est pas toujours le cas.

JM. Ah bon ? Chaque spectateur ne reçoit pas son texte ?

DP. Non. C'est à chaque fois différent. Certains reçoivent une peinture, un portrait, une chanson. On envoie toujours quelque chose.

JM. L'envoi donne la possibilité du dialogue et constitue finalement un sas de sortie.

DP. On envoie toujours quelque chose, car c'est important qu'il y ait une trace.

JM. C'est important aussi de laisser cette possibilité de se parler après l'expérience car c'est un parcours très intime. En cette période, c'est très délicat. Quand on demande « comment se passe / s'est passé ton confinement ? » j'imagine que tout le monde n'a pas envie de répondre.

DP. J'ai vu des gens que je connais et que je considère comme des rocs, dans des états de grande fragilité. Le besoin de parler et de voir des humains qui donnent était très fort chez certains. C'était politique, mais ça avait aussi à voir avec la santé.

JM. Beaucoup d'artistes ont eu besoin d'agir et de créer. C'est formidable. En même temps, cette période a posé à nouveau, entre autres, la question de la rémunération des artistes. Dans l'urgence et aussi par générosité, des choses se sont mises en place sans moyen, dans une gratuité totale, mais si ce mode de diffusion se pérennise dans le futur, il faudra trouver une façon de monétiser les performances pour rémunérer les artistes. C'est l'étape suivante et c'est aussi politique.

DP. On fait le seul métier au monde où on paye pour travailler. Pour les deux spectacles, on a choisi de faire une cagnotte pour le SAMU SOCIAL. Les gens ont été généreux. À partir du déconfinement, on a dit qu'on allait payer les comédiens. La première étape a été de mettre

un ticket d'entrée à cinq euros, mais c'était compliqué, ça générait des échanges de mails et ça embêtait les gens. Alors on a préféré donner un lien vers une cagnotte sur lequel les gens pouvaient donner ce qu'ils voulaient. On s'aperçoit que le ticket moyen est entre dix et quinze euros. Les gens payent comme ils paieraient au théâtre. Mais c'est une éducation à faire. Pour *Home*, comme ils sont trop nombreux, on garde la cagnotte pour la suite. Pour *L'Ours*, on a pu faire un cachet par comédien. Ce n'est pas le bout du monde, mais c'est déjà ça. Pour le principe, c'est bien.

JM. Si ça devait durer ou se reproduire, cette éducation est importante. Par rapport au medium que tu utilises, as-tu eu des réclamations ? Bientôt, les plateformes comme Zoom ou Facebook pourraient avoir leur mot à dire.

DP. Avec l'abonnement Zoom, c'est une forme de location. Ce qui est logique. Tu payes pour ta location de salle, les spectateurs payent, tu payes tes comédiens. Comme pour un spectacle sur scène, on retrouve la problématique du nombre de comédiens. On ne peut pas tourner avec une grosse troupe.

JM. Tu envisages de mutualiser des espaces digitaux avec d'autres ?

DP. Ça pourrait être intéressant, mais il faut trouver les bonnes personnes. J'ai contacté certains théâtres, je n'ai pas eu de réponse. Je ne suis pas quelqu'un de connu.

JM. On pourrait imaginer une certaine indépendance en mettant en place un medium mutualisé, ce qui éviterait les problèmes de droits par exemple.

DP. Oui, tout à fait. Dans un premier temps, il faut digérer ce qu'on vient de vivre et voir comment les choses évoluent.

JM. Pour les compagnies qui font de l'immersion et de la Virtual Reality, le fait que les casques deviennent de plus en plus grand public va ouvrir des perspectives de nouvelles expériences que les gens pourront faire de chez eux.

DP. Oui, ça fait partie des pistes à creuser.

JM. Un grand merci, Dot, d'avoir pris le temps de répondre à mes questions.

DP. Avec plaisir.

Cyrano Ostinato Fantaisies

Sébastien Bonnabel

À Jeff…

Distribution :

LOUIS-CYRANO : Eric Chantelauze

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE, *enceinte* : Pascale Mompez

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE : Marine Dusehu

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE : Pauline Cassan

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE : Marie Combeau / Louise Rebillaud

MADELEINE-ROXANE : Marie Hennerez

JEAN-DE GUICHE : Philippe De Monts

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU : Stéphane Giletta

THEOPHILO-LE BRET : Emanuele Giorgi / Sébastien Bonnabel

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN : Kevin Rouxel / Pierre Cachia

L'ACCORDEONISTE : Zsuzsanna Varkonyi

Le spectacle a été créé au Théâtre Lepic, à Paris. Les espaces utilisés sont la salle de spectacle, le lounge et le bar.

Le texte justifié à droite et dans cette police,
est issu de Cyrano de Bergerac d'Edmond Rostand.

Sur scène quasiment tous les comédiens de la troupe du « Gai Savoir » sont réunis. L'ambiance est conviviale. On sent une complicité sincère, ils discutent dans un brouhaha joyeux et paisible. Sur l'avant-scène GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE, qui tient une lourde pile de textes à la main, se tient près de MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE, enceinte jusqu'au yeux et droite comme un i. GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE, après avoir jeté un coup d'œil anxieux et furtif à son téléphone, se décide à prendre la parole, elle s'adresse directement à la salle.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Bonjour à tous, alors pour celles et ceux que je n'ai pas eu en cours, je suis Gabrielle Leterrier et je suis l'assistante à la mise en scène de Michelle. Michelle Garnier qui dirige,

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Co-dirige !

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui pardon, co-dirige la « Compagnie du Gai Savoir » avec Louis…

Elle désigne d'un geste empressé un comédien d'une cinquantaine d'années qui s'avance à son tour de façon nonchalante vers l'avant-scène.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Bienvenue !

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je suis ravie que cette rencontre avec les élèves du cours Florent de première année ait pu s'organiser et je peux dire au nom de la Compagnie que nous sommes vraiment très contents de vous accueillir.

Sur scène chacun acquiesce à sa manière.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Alors je vais vous donner le programme de cette demi-journée « immersion ». Donc nous sommes en train de travailler sur *Cyrano de Bergerac*, vous connaissez ?

Notre première est dans un mois. Le 28 octobre 2019 à 21h *(la date qui est donnée correspond à celle du jour de la représentation).*

A l'évocation de la date fatidique, MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se tend légèrement et le ton de sa voix se durcit un peu.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et un mois c'est très court pour un monument tel que *Cyrano*. Ce matin vous allez donc faire le chœur, notamment sur les scènes de groupe.

JEAN-DE GUICHE : Vous ferez la figu' quoi…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se tend encore un peu plus.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Jean, chéri, s'il te plait.

Il recule d'un pas sans demander son reste. Sentant le léger malaise, GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE enchaîne.

GABRIELLE- L'ASSISTANTE. On fait les présentations ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui allons-y vite !

Chaque comédien se fait connaître. MADELEINE-ROXANE, qui depuis le départ se tient près d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE avec qui elle échange des regards et des sourires complices, se tortille péniblement dans une robe blanche d'époque, affublée d'un corset. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE le remarque.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Euh, Madeleine, pourquoi t'es déjà en robe toi ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Manu voulait faire des essais pour les baleines et là il y a un nœud que j'arrive pas à défaire.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Bon ben assis-toi une seconde dans le fauteuil. Elle est où Manu ?

Une jolie jeune femme fragile et menue entre sur scène avec nervosité. Elle a des airs de petite souris effarouchée, quand elle passe près de JEAN-DE GUICHE celui-ci lui adresse un regard en coin.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Euh, je suis là.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Voilà Manu, notre habilleuse.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Emmanuelle…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Qui remplace notre habilleuse habituelle, Anastazia, qui travaille sur un film.

A ces mots, MANU-L'HABILLEUSE baisse légèrement la tête et part aider MADELEINE-ROXANE, toujours coincée dans sa robe. GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE, qui partage toujours son attention entre son téléphone et la salle qui s'éclaire. Soudainement on entend une voix venant de la régie.

NATHAN-LE REGISSEUR. Et les consignes incendie ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Ah oui alors, s'il y a un incendie, vous entendrez cette cloche. *(On entend une cloche sonner quatre fois…)* Alors pour les précieux, levez la main. Vous partirez par-là, les marquis par-là, et les académiciens là vers le fond. Et évidemment on laisse ses affaires !!!

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE. Ok ! On va enfin pouvoir attaquer la relaxation !!!! Nous allons pouvoir commencer le travail. On va essayer d'être un peu plus au taquet pour la suite hein, on va essayer d'être *focus*… Les comédiens sur le plateau ! Louis, tu peux diriger là, relax ? Je crois que j'en ai bien besoin…

LOUIS-CYRANO. *(toujours paisible et nonchalant s'assoit sur le bord de la scène)* On s'installe confortablement ; et je vais vous demander à tous de fermer les yeux.

Le noir se fait progressivement dans la salle, la voix de LOUIS-CYRANO, grave et chaude, commence lentement à bercer le public.

Et nous allons prendre quelques instants pour simplement se demander comment on se sent là maintenant…

Il laisse passer quelques secondes. Le ton de sa voix devient plus profond encore.

À présent, je vais vous demander de porter votre attention sur la lourdeur de votre corps, et on va s'amuser à imaginer que chaque fois que j'inspire, je deviens de plus en plus sensible à la lourdeur.

Il sort un paquet d'allumettes de sa poche.

On inspire…

Il craque une allumette.

Savez-vous que nous allons mourir ?

Il éteint l'allumette.

On expire… Pause…
On prend conscience de l'instant présent…

Et à l'expiration, on abandonne tout…

Il change de ton, comme une confidence.

Au dernier soupir de Cyrano, l'ange préféré de Dieu vint lui proposer ce pacte : « Cette vie telle que tu l'as vécue, tu pourras la revivre une fois, et encore une quantité de fois. Mais il n'y aura en elle rien de nouveau, au contraire ! Chaque douleur, chaque joie, chaque pensée et chaque soupir reviendront tel un ostinato incessant… »

Une femme accordéoniste se glisse en fond de scène…

Et vous, à la mort qui s'avance, seriez-vous prêt à revivre cette vie ? Amusons-nous à imaginer qu'un incendie réel ou symbolique emporte ce soir en un souffle nos existences. Imaginons dans 1h13 une flamme qui embrase… Amusons-nous de cette fantaisie, de cet ange lumineux, qui vous propose :

« Tout l'infiniment grand et l'infiniment petit de ta vie reviendra pour toi, et tout cela dans la même suite et le même ordre – et aussi cette araignée et ce clair de lune au-dessus de l'arbre, et aussi cet instant et moi-même. L'éternel sablier de l'existence sera retourné

toujours à nouveau; encore et encore - et toi avec lui, poussière des poussières ! »

Reprenant le ton de la relaxation :

On inspire… Pause…

On expire…

À nouveau en confidence, pendant que la femme accordéoniste joue l'ostinato D929 (op. 100) de Schubert.

J'ai rêvé tant de fois que j'étais Cyrano Hercule Savinien de Bergerac que je ne sais plus si c'est moi qui ai rêvé que j'étais lui ou Cyrano qui rêve qu'il est moi… Je ne sais plus si vous êtes mon songe ou si je suis votre fantaisie mais qu'importe ! Avant que ma vie s'achève, j'aimerais pouvoir porter le meilleur de moi-même, ma seule joie comme étendard, et mon sourire comme ultime panache. Je suis un esprit de ce théâtre, j'en suis la mémoire, et son futur, et cet instant. Du souffle de la scène, vous êtes l'inspiration qui attise. De tous les actes qui sonnent ici, vous en êtes le chœur et l'unique raison. Avec les acolytes qui ont choisi ce pacte, ensemble, célébrons ! Quittons la vie profane car minuit approche… Dansons ! Dansons si vite que les larmes sécheront, dansons si fort que nos rires gronderont l'orage ! Et frappons ! Frappons de notre sceau l'existence, frappons avec force les trois coups !

Dans le noir frappe, il les trois coups…

ACTE I

SCENE 1 – MONTNORDAY

Une poursuite s'éclaire sur RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU jouant Montfleury. Il entre très lentement et s'immobilise. Il déclame son texte

avec une emphase un peu gênante… Tous les comédiens du premier acte sont installés dans le public en « habit civil ».

MONTFLEURY.
Heureux qui loin des Cours dans un lieu Solitaire
Se prescrit à soi-même un exil volontaire,
Et qui par le secours d'un jugement bien sain
Préfère son repos à tout autre dessein :
UNE VOIX.
Coquin, ne t'ai-je pas interdit pour un mois ?

VOIX DIVERSES.
Hein ? Quoi ? Qu'est-ce ?…
CUIGY.
C'est lui !
LE BRET. (terrifié)
Cyrrrrano !
LA VOIX.
Hors de scène à l'instant !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN arrive avec un panneau où il est inscrit «oh !» et le montre au public.

LE PARTERRE.
Oh !
MONTFLEURY. (s'étranglant)
« Heureux qui loin des cours… »
CYRANO. (surgissant du parterre)
Ah ! Je vais me fâcher !…
MONTFLEURY.
Messieurs ! Venez à mon secours

UNE AUTRE VOIX.

Pourtant…

CYRANO.

Bon ! je vais sur la scène en guise de buffet, Découper cette mortadelle d'Italie !

MONTFLEURY. (rassemblant toute sa dignité)

En m'insultant, Monsieur, vous insultez Thalie !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN montre un panneau où il est inscrit « Montfleury ! Montfleury ! La pièce de Baro ! » et le montre au public pour que celui-ci le répète.

LE PARTERRE.

Montfleury ! Montfleury ! La pièce de Baro !

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE intervient sèchement, apparemment mécontente, la salle se rallume.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ok ça marche pas ! On va reprendre ! Arthur, il faut absolument aller plus vite sur l'enchaînement des panneaux, c'est toi qui donnes le rythme. *(S'adressant aux spectateurs)* Et le chœur, il faut envoyer aussi, vous êtes super mous. C'est la scène d'ouverture et je veux sentir le scandale que crée Cyrano. Vous devez être à la fois amusés, terrifiés. J'ai envie qu'on sente ces ambiances de théâtre du 17ème où tout était permis. Il faut vous dire que c'est comme un concert de rock, c'est la même énergie ! Allez on fait un test avec les panneaux.

JEAN-DE GUICHE se rapproche de sa femme avec une grande prudence.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Pardon chérie mais tu crois que le public va comprendre qu'il doit lire les panneaux ? Enfin je veux dire ça sert à quoi ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(lui adresse un regard d'une froideur infinie)* Tu veux faire la mise en scène ?

Il se fige sur place.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Je pose une question c'est tout.

Elle se détourne de lui et revient au public.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je veux que le public s'implique. J'ai pas envie que les spectateurs soient juste là à regarder. Christian ! Les panneaux ! Allons-y !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN fait défiler tous les panneaux. Les faisant répéter aux spectateurs.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE à LOUIS-CYRANO. Ok c'est bien. Louis ?

J'aimerais que tu montes un tout petit peu plus tôt sur scène…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Sur quelle réplique ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Attends… *(à GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE)* Je peux avoir le texte ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. (*sursaute.)* Oui, oui, pardon !

Elle lui tend le texte, MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE le prend avec humeur.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Si tu pouvais lâcher deux minutes ton portable ce serait très bien…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui, oui, pardon ! !

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE revient au texte.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. « Ah je vais me fâcher », ok ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ok.

Elle rend le texte froidement à GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. T'as contacté l'attaché de presse et le Rond-Point, ils viennent ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je suis dessus, je suis dessus…

Dans un coin de la scène, MADELEINE-ROXANE fait signe à AMANDINE-LA DUÈGNE de l'aider à détacher un peu son corset. AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE essaie sans succès ; les deux filles étouffent quelques rires.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(à THEOPHILO-LE BRET qui a un très fort accent italien)* Bon, et THEOPHILO-LE BRET si tu pouvais un peu moins faire rouler ton « r » de « Cyrano » ce serait pas mal…

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Oh ça va, ça ne s'entend pas tant que ça !

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ah si, si, je t'assure, on entend que ça.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Oui, ben merde !

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(le regardant, impassible, en arquant un sourcil)* Ça fait combien de temps que tu as arrêté de fumer ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Je ne vois pas le rapport !!! Une semaine…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE entre sur scène et rejoint MADELEINE-ROXANE et AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE pour aider avec le corset. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se tourne vers GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu peux voir avec lui pour la prononciation de « Cyrano » ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE hoche la tête et entraîne THEOPHILO-LE BRET dans un coin. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE prend conscience de la présence de MANU-L'HABILLEUSE et l'apostrophe avec un agacement teinté de mépris.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et le nez on le reçoit quand ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, qui s'affaire sur le corset de MADELEINE-ROXANE, ne répond pas tout de suite. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE hausse le ton.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et le nez on le reçoit quand ???

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE sursaute.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ah pardon… Désolée, je… Parce qu'elle

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Un problème avec le corset ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Non aucun…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. On ne peut pas le délacer et j'étouffe…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je vais arranger ça !

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et le nez alors ?

Pendant ce temps dans le public : JEAN-DE GUICHE, à présent, semble faire du charme à une spectatrice, du coin de l'œil MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE le remarque mais ne dit mot. De son côté, MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, qui se débat entre le corset et le regard accusateur de MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE, se liquéfie de plus en plus.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Alors écoute, je suis vraiment désolée mais hier j'ai contacté le livreur. Enfin d'abord, en fait, j'ai appelé, Anastazia, l'ami qui devait me fournir le plâtre parce qu'en fait,

comme hier, je devais m'occuper des perruques, je lui ai donc demandé…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Bon quand est-ce qu'on reçoit le nez ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui pardon, désolée, en fait on doit le recevoir tout à l'heure.

Sans crier gare, MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se tourne vers son mari.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Bon, Jean…

Il sursaute.

JEAN-DE GUICHE (sursaute). Oui ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu peux rester focus ? *(elle se désigne elle-même)*

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Oui bien sûr !

Il s'éloigne instantanément de la jeune femme sur qui il avait jeté son dévolu.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Très bien… Bon écoutez je sais que ces scènes de groupe sont très longues à mettre en place et j'aimerais bien qu'on reste efficace. On n'a qu'un mois avant la sortie de résidence, donc s'il vous plaît on reste *(Attendant)*

TOUS. Focus…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Voilà…Allez, on repr…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU lève timidement le doigt pour faire comprendre qu'il aimerait parler. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE ne le voit pas… GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE, qui couve RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU d'un œil bienveillant, s'approche de

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE et lui touche légèrement l'épaule.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je crois que Raphaël veut te dire un truc…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se tourne vers RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU qui adresse un sourire reconnaissant et troublé à GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Merci Gabrielle…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE lui sourit avec douceur. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE, un brin exaspérée, interpelle RAPHAËL-RAGUENEAU.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui ?

RAPHAËL-RAGUENEAU. Pardon, c'est une proposition, hein, pour le jeu, enfin la pièce.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Je sais que tu m'as demandé de ne pas bouger sur la tirade de Montfleury mais là je me sens super angoissé quand Cyrano m'agresse et je pense que cela m'aiderait si je pouvais faire des mouvements… Pas forcément physiques mais internes. Surtout que tu vois le personnage de Montfleury, je me dis que c'est super important pour lui de jouer sa pièce. Enfin, tu vois son objectif c'est de battre Cyrano sur scène.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Hmm hmm…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. En plus comme je joue aussi Ragueneau, je me dis qu'il faut qu'on distingue bien les deux

personnages… Et comme ils sont tous les deux « lourds » au sens métallique, je me suis dit que l'un pouvait être à la fois terre et à la fois feu, et l'autre à la fois terre et vent…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. C'est-à-dire ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ben, Montfleury pourrait être plus « sagittaire » et Ragueneau « balance » voire « gémeaux » ! Tu vois ?

On sent à l'expression de MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE qu'elle ne comprend pas du tout mais qu'une forme de lassitude l'empêche de répondre.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Euh…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Attends, je te montre…

Il prend place sur scène et fait exactement la même chose que sur sa première entrée…

MONTFLEURY.

Heureux qui loin des Cours dans un lieu Solitaire
Se prescrit à soi-même un exil volontaire,

Une fois sa réplique achevée, il se tourne tout heureux vers la metteuse en scène.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Tu vois ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. *(se glissant doucement près de sa femme et lui demandant en aparté)* C'est… pareil non ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Super…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Voilà je me sens beaucoup mieux comme…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Parfait merci ! On va réattaquer un petit peu plus loin. *(Elle se tourne vers le public)* On refait ce passage !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN montre un panneau où il est inscrit « Montfleury ! Montfleury ! La pièce de Baro ! » et le montre au public.

LE PARTERRE.

Montfleury ! Montfleury ! La pièce de Baro !

La salle s'éteint de nouveau.

CYRANO.

Je vous ordonne de vous taire ! Et j'adresse un défi collectif au parterre !

J'inscris les noms ! Approchez-vous, jeunes héros ! Chacun son tour ! Je vais donner des numéros !

Un téléphone sonne comme une alarme… LOUIS-CYRANO se stoppe en pleine réplique et se dirige vers l'origine du son.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Pardon c'est le mien…

L'ACCORDEONISTE se glisse sur scène… On entend un nouveau Ding message répondeur.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ah ! Tu as un message !

LOUIS-CYRANO récupère son téléphone et le pose au centre de la scène. Il n'écoute pas le message.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(exaspérée)* Bon, ça va pas de toute façon, on reprend du début. Faut plus de rythme !

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Ce serait peut-être pas mal de faire la pause dej ?

TOUS. Oui ce serait cool.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah oui une pause !

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. *(regardant sa montre presque à lui-même)* Va falloir que je mange bientôt parce que…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(rassemblant ses affaires avec humeur et nervosité, maugréant pour elle-même)* Ok super, bon, ben, bon appétit, on est pas capables de mettre en place une scène en 4h et les gars ils pensent qu'à bouffer. Allez, régalez-vous bien, hein.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. On reprend à quelle heure ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ben, dans une heure. C'est bon pour toi Raphaël ? 1h pour manger et faire ta petite sieste ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ben euh,…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(se tournant avec froideur vers MANU-L'HABILLEUSE)*. Et toi Manu si on pouvait avoir ce putain de nez pour jouer ce putain de Cyrano pour dans un putain de mois. Ce serait super !

Elle sort vivement.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. *(qui la suit)* Michelle !

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Ambiance de merde !

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Pourquoi elle est vulgaire comme ça ! *(à MANU-L'HABILLEUSE)* Laisse tomber Manu…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Moi c'est Emmanuelle…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Désolé, hein, elle est un peu à cran je crois…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ben oui, c'est normal. C'est vrai que ce serait quand même pas mal si cet après-midi on essayait d'être un peu plus…

TOUS. Focus…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ben, oui, focus… Faut lui faire confiance, c'est sûr que cette sortie de résidence, elle est importante pour elle mais aussi pour la Compagnie, pour nous tous. Vous connaissez les enjeux, une programmation l'année prochaine alors… Bon, bref…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. On mange ?

Chacun part de son côté MADELEINE-ROXANE et AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE sortent ensemble.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. J'ai envie de quinoa.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN s'approche de LOUIS-CYRANO et lui caresse doucement le bras.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Tu veux que je te prenne un truc mon Loulou ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ça va je me suis déjà acheté une salade…

La salle s'éteint de nouveau. ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN se glisse sensuellement contre LOUIS-CYRANO, frôlant ses hanches avec les siennes.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. T'es beau quand tu parles à tout le monde comme ça.

Il lui donne un baiser furtif sur les lèvres. LOUIS-CYRANO lui sourit.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Petit con.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN lui sourit à son tour et sort. Ne reste sur scène que RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU qui déballe son repas avec une précision absolue et LOUIS-CYRANO qui regarde son téléphone au centre de la scène. L'ACCORDEONISTE entre et s'assoit à côté du téléphone dans le fond de la scène.

SCENE 2 – L'ENDIVE

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU a plein de petits bocaux de crudités qu'il déballe méticuleusement pendant que LOUIS-CYRANO mange une salade toute faite. Au bout d'un moment, il s'adresse à lui.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Pendant des années, je me réveillais avec des migraines et je ne comprenais pas pourquoi. J'ai tout essayé, hypnose, acupuncture, et rien n'y faisait. Puis, j'ai fait des tests sur l'intolérance alimentaire, parce que j'avais aussi assez régulièrement des problèmes d'aérophagie, notamment quand je mangeais de la laitue. Et bref, le naturopathe m'a fait découvrir que j'étais intolérant au gluten, bien sûr, mais aussi aux œufs, et ce qui est plus bizarre, aux avocats et aux endives. Et en même temps, et ça c'est dingue, j'ai jamais trop aimé les endives, comme si mon corps avait compris qu'il ne fallait pas que j'en ingère, que c'était un poison pour moi, c'est fou hein. En fait j'ai peur des endives. Et ça dès l'enfance, ma mère faisait des endives au jambon et je détestais ça ! En plus, c'était du jambon de supermarché imbibé de nitrite, c'est incroyable quand on y pense comment on peut détruire les gosses. Mais bref, je suis intolérant aux œufs, et depuis que j'ai arrêté d'en manger, plus aucune douleur. Et c'est très chiant, parce qu'il y en a de partout ! Dimanche dernier, par exemple, c'était mon anniversaire.

À ce *moment-là, RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU marque une pause et sourit à LOUIS-CYRANO comme s'il attendait quelque chose de sa part. Au bout de quelques secondes, LOUIS-CYRANO finit par comprendre.*

LOUIS-CYRANO. Bon anniversaire.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU : Merci… Maman me fait un repas d'anniversaire, elle invite ma sœur (qui vient d'ailleurs avec mon neveu qui avait un rhume, il avait les trucs qui coulaient et qui n'arrêtait pas d'essayer de grimper sur moi, je le disais à ma sœur, je lui disais « lave-le » ou fais quelque chose mais bref j'ai cru tout lundi et mardi qu'il m'avait refilé ses microbes…) mais donc, Maman

arrive avec le gâteau et dès que j'aperçois le gâteau, je sens des sueurs froides, des palpitations et devine quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Euh … Je sais pas…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Des œufs ! Elle avait mis pleins d'œufs dans sa forêt noire Pas que les jaunes hein, les blancs aussi !!! Je lui ai dit « Maman, tu veux me tuer c'est ça ! » et bon voilà, on s'est disputés mais tu vois mon corps avait compris qu'il y avait des œufs ! C'est fou, non ? En tout cas, voilà toi là ce que tu manges *(il désigne la salade de LOUIS-CYRANO)* c'est plein de cochonneries, et tu vois, il suffit que j'approche ma main *(il tend une main tremblante au dessus du plat)* Et là mon corps réagit directement, j'ai la gorge qui s'assèche, mon cœur qui commence à battre plus fort, c'est comme si je m'étouff…

Il retire sa main du plat pris d'un petit malaise. Soudainement le téléphone de RAPHAËL-RAGUENEAU sonne, c'est un téléphone ultra basique, il branche d'énormes écouteurs dessus méthodiquement. Durant toute la conversation, il tient son téléphone éloigné pour ne pas recevoir les ondes.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Je mange là. Ben je ne sais pas à quelle heure je rentre, je t'ai dit ! Ben non là on a pris du retard sur les répétitions, je te tel quand je termine, oui, oui, hmmm, ben oui, dès que je termine oui, ben c'est le boulot tu sais, ben oui mais elle a beaucoup à faire, hmmm, oui, moi aussi, moi aussi, oui, bisous, bisous *(il fait un bruit de bisous, raccroche, enlève son casque, LOUIS-CYRANO le regarde mi-désolé mi-attendri).* Maman.

Il range ensuite ses énormes écouteurs méthodiquement après les avoir essuyés avec du désinfectant. Pendant ce temps Manu entre avec un petit paquet, la peur de déranger lui sort de la peau.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Désolée de te déranger mais on a enfin reçu le nez, cela t'embête pas si on l'essaie ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Euh, non.

Le visage de MANU-L'HABILLEUSE s'éclaire de soulagement.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Coool ! Merci, merci ! Pardon pour le dérangement.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE sort de son étui un faux nez tout en continuant à s'excuser. Le nez a très clairement la forme d'un énorme phallus en érection. LOUIS-CYRANO le prend dans ses mains, le fait tourner une seconde entre ses doigts et lève de nouveau la tête vers MANU-L'HABILLEUSE.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Qu'est-ce que c'est ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ben, un nez…

LOUIS-CYRANO. *(enfilant le nez)*

Ah ! non ! C'est un peu court, jeune homme ! On pouvait dire…
Oh ! Dieu !… bien des choses en somme…
En variant le ton, par exemple, tenez :
Agressif : « Moi, monsieur, si j'avais un tel nez,
Il faudrait sur-le-champ que je me l'amputasse ! »
Amical : « Mais il doit tremper dans votre tasse !
Pour boire, faites-vous fabriquer un hanap ! »
Descriptif : « C'est un roc !… C'est un pic !… C'est un cap ?
Que dis-je, c'est un cap ?

C'est une énorme bite…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU et LOUIS-CYRANO ne peuvent réprimer un rire.

LOUIS-CYRANO. *(« retirant » le nez)* Non mais c'est quoi ce truc. Je vais pas jouer avec ce, ce… zgueg sur le visage.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. *(profondément mal à l'aise)* Ben, tu sais, on s'était dit que voilà, d'un point de vue dramaturgique, il fallait suggérer que la difformité de Cyrano pouvait être…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ça c'est pas de la suggestion, c'est un gode *(il tient l'énorme nez entre ses mains et fait un geste obscène)*. C'est une idée de Michelle, c'est ça ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Euh, ben oui, moi je trouvais ça aussi un peu… Osé… Oh la la, mais elle va m'en vouloir, je vais encore me faire…

L'angoisse regagne MANU-L'HABILLEUSE intensément, LOUIS-CYRANO le remarque et lui pose doucement la main sur le bras.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je vais voir ça avec elle, ne t'inquiète pas…

Elle lui sourit de soulagement.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ok ! Merci hein !

Elle va pour partir.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ah, Emmanuelle, on peut voir pour mon col parce que j'ai l'impression qu'il me serre et je me demande même si je fais pas une petite allergie…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui, viens

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU et MANU-L'HABILLEUSE sortent, laissant LOUIS-CYRANO seul au milieu de la scène. Après quelques secondes, il s'approche de son téléphone, le déverrouille et le porte à son oreille. L'ACCORDEONISTE se glisse de nouveau froidement en fond de scène.

L'ACCORDEONISTE. Aujourd'hui à 12h47. Oui, bonjour Monsieur Sifre, c'est le Docteur Krabeski, on a reçu vos résultats et je dois vous avouer que ce n'est pas ce qu'on espérait. Il faut que nous nous voyons très rapidement. Merci de me rappeler.

LOUIS-CYRANO, après un temps d'arrêt, prend son téléphone, et rappelle le docteur. L'ACCORDEONISTE joue et le suit alors qu'il sort.

SCENE 3 – DON JUAN

Dans la salle, MANU-L'HABILLEUSE s'affaire avec des costumes. JEAN-DE GUICHE entre sur scène la chemise ouverte et le sourire séducteur. Dès qu'elle l'aperçoit, elle rougit. Il s'approche d'elle sensuellement.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. *(en mettant sa chemise)* « J'ai beau être engagé, l'amour que j'ai pour une belle, n'engage point mon âme à faire injustice aux autres; je conserve des yeux pour voir le mérite de toutes, et rends à chacune les hommages, et les tributs où la nature nous oblige. » *(Don Juan) (Il s'approche encore un peu plus)* Tu vois moi aussi cela me comprime ici.

JEAN-DE GUICHE désigne le bouton le plus haut de sa chemise, elle regarde le bouton et se retrouve tout près de lui.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. *(poursuivant MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, qui arrange les affaires n'osant le regarder)*. « Quoi qu'il en soit, je ne puis refuser mon cœur à tout ce que je vois d'aimable, et dès qu'un beau visage me le demande, si j'en avais dix mille, je les donnerais tous. Les inclinations naissantes après tout, ont des charmes inexplicables, et tout le plaisir de l'amour est dans le changement. » *(Don Juan)*

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE entre et voit leur proximité…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Qu'est ce tu fous ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE se recule instantanément et JEAN-DE GUICHE prend un air innocent.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben, je répète.

Elle pose un regard glacial sur MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, qui est dans un état de malaise profond.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Est-ce qu'on a reçu le nez ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Euh, ah oui, alors en fait il y a un problème… Louis trouve que cela fait trop… Euh, trop « phallique ».

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, ben, va le chercher fais voir !

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. J'y vais !

Elle se précipite hors de la scène.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu fais vraiment chier…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Oh chérie !

Il tente de l'enlacer mais elle le repousse.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE : Tu sais tout le boulot que j'ai ! Tu crois que je te vois pas à brancher tout ce qui bouge ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Eh, oh, chérie, je m'amuse c'est tout, je sais toute la pression que tu as mais… Ne sois pas jalouse… Regarde… Ma plus belle preuve d'amour… *(il pose sa main sur le ventre. il l'enlace, elle se laisse faire…)*. Oh, elle a bougé…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, parce qu'elle est énervée contre toi. Elle veut que tu prennes soin d'elle, elle ne veut pas d'un copain qui s'amuse, elle veut un père, un adulte. Et elle veut que tu prennes soin de moi aussi…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Promis… Puis franchement ton habilleuse elle est un peu nunuche hein…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, ben, nunuche pas touche.

On entend un bruit de fracas.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. C'est quoi ça ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE l'assistante entre.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Dis-moi, Michelle, tu veux qu'on attaque par quoi cet après-midi ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Euh, je sais pas, la scène du duel.

JEAN-DE GUICHE sort en sifflotant Don Juan.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. OK. On reprend dans 15 minutes ? *(MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE acquiesce)*. Ça va ? Pas trop fatiguée ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(se tournant vers elle froidement)* Ce serait cool si tu n'étais pas tout le temps sur ton tel pendant les répét'.

Surprise, GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE accuse un peu le coup mais reste conciliante bien que blessée.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Pardon, c'est que je devais répondre à…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu fais ce que tu veux dans ta vie privée mais…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui pardon, bien sûr, bien sûr.

LOUIS-CYRANO entre ainsi que L'ACCORDEONISTE.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je vais… Je… À tout à l'heure…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE la mine basse sort.

SCENE 4 – MALADE

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE semble fatiguée, LOUIS-CYRANO s'approche d'elle l'air bienveillant, ils se sourient et on sent à travers ce sourire toute la tendresse et la complicité qui les lient.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tu vas y arriver…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu crois ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Oui…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Parfois je me demande pourquoi on s'impose tout ça…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Parce qu'on aime ça…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ouais… *(Silence)* Et toi, ça va ? Pas trop dur de bosser avec Arthur ? Ça se passe bien entre vous ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Oui très bien, après je commence à sentir la différence d'âge…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE. Ah, ben, c'est ça de les prendre au berceau hein…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je sais qu'il a toujours envie de sortir et avant ça me donnait de l'énergie mais là, je suis… Fatigué…

Silence.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ça va ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. …Non.

Ils échangent un regard, on la sent frémir.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je suis malade.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Hein ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je meurs.

Nouveau silence.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Quoi mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes ???

LOUIS-CYRANO. Une tumeur. Au cerveau. Impossible de soigner.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Quoi, mais non, mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes, c'est pas possible !

LOUIS-CYRANO. …

On la sent doucement perdre pied.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu as vu plusieurs docteurs, tu as eu d'autres avis, enfin…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE entre. Ils ne la voient pas.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Oui j'ai fait tout ça. J'ai fait une chimio, ça n'a rien donné. Bref.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je sais quoi pas dire…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Il n'y a rien à dire…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et du coup, il te reste, enfin, tu peux jouer ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je pourrai jouer la sortie de résidence, oui. Après…

Puis soudainement elle prend conscience de l'égoïsme de sa question et de la douleur du moment. Elle pose une main tremblante sur sa bouche.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Pardon, je suis conne, putain.

LOUIS-CYRANO lui sourit tristement. Il s'approche d'elle et lui pose doucement les mains sur les épaules.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Mon dieu, c'est affreux… Pardon… Je… Mon dieu… T'as pas à me consoler…

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est rien, je comprends…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oh putain, pardon, pardon de pleurer… Et Arthur ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Il n'est pas au courant.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE : Quoi ? Mais tu n'as pas le droit… Tu l'aimes, il t'aime, tu as besoin de lui. Il doit savoir…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Pardon… Je… Pardon mais j'ai eu un problème, il y a une étagère qui… et le nez, il est…

Elle montre le nez de Cyrano qui est cassé en deux. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE passe une main sur son visage tentant de retrouver une contenance.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Putain. Ok… On va… Il faut… Euh, j'appelle tout le monde on va reprendre… Je vous laisse… Deux minutes…

Elle fuit. MANU-L'HABILLEUSE s'approche de LOUIS-CYRANO. Il s'effondre dans ses bras. L'ACCORDEONISTE joue.

ACTE II

SCENE 1 – LA CLEF

Même lumière qu'à l'acte 1 scène 1 avec le même RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU sur scène qui joue avec la même emphase… Près de lui, Louis-Cyrano porte le nez rafistolé de Cyrano qui ressemble toujours autant à un pénis.

RAGUENEAU.
Comment on fait les tartelettes amandines.
Battez, pour qu'ils soient mousseux,
Quelques œufs ;
Incorporez à leur mousse
Un jus de cédrat choisi ;
Versez-y
Un bon lait d'amande douce ;
Mettez de la pâte à flan
Dans le flanc
De moules à tartelette ;
D'un doigt preste, abricotez Les côtés ;
Versez goutte à gouttelette
Votre mousse en ces puits, puis
Que ces puits
Passent au four, et, blondines,
Sortant en gais troupelets,
Ce sont les Tartelettes amandines !
CYRANO.
Bercés par ta voix,
Ne vois-tu pas comme ils s'empiffrent ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE stoppe la scène d'un geste sec de la main.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Bon, ça ne va pas…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Tu veux que je le fasse plus aérien ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Non, c'est pas ça, c'est… je sais pas…

JEAN-DE GUICHE est à côté de MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, il lui dit un truc à l'oreille qui la fait pouffer de rire. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE se hérisse et se tourne avec violence vers MANU-L'HABILLEUSE.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Et puis ce nez, c'est n'importe quoi. Manu !

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE sursaute.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ben, c'est toi qui m'a dit…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui ben, ça va pas… Faut autre chose… C'est quand qu'on reçoit le nouveau ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je ne l'ai pas encore commandé parce que je croyais que tu voulais…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ben, je t'ai validé tes nouveaux croquis non ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je suis désolée hein, mais je croyais que…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE : Pardon, mais tu croyais quoi ?

Plus elle devient incisive, plus MANU-L'HABILLEUSE perd ses moyens.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Tu m'as validé mais je pensais que tu voulais essayer…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ok, mais ça marche pas là d'accord. Tu vois bien que ça marche pas.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ben oui, j'ai bien vu mais je ne sais pas, c'est toi qui sais.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je dois tout faire c'est ça ? Tu ne peux pas prendre un peu des initiatives ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Des initiatives ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, des initiatives, tu es toujours là à tout recevoir. Genre tu subis.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je subis ? Mais c'est toi qui…

Elle est presque en larmes.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Qui quoi ? C'est moi qui subis ? C'est moi qui subis ? Oh non tu vas pas chialer hein ? Je veux que tu changes !

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Que je change ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Pas que toi tu changes, je veux que tu changes le nez !

Sous la pression, MANU-L'HABILLEUSE finit par éclater en sanglots.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. ZUT !!!

Elle part en courant. L'ACCORDEONISTE se glisse de nouveau sur scène. Silence. Ils échangent des regards gênés.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Zut ? Qui dit encore *Zut* aujourd'hui. Elle va pas bien elle…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben t'es pas super tendre non plus, hein.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. T'arrête de prendre sa défense toi ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ecoute, chérie…

L'ACCORDEONISTE se met lentement à jouer. Au même moment, MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE ressent une violente douleur au ventre. Chacun s'approche inquiet.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Ça va ?

L'ACCORDEONISTE joue El desierto. *MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE chante ses cauchemars…*

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, ça va…

Noir.

SCENE 2 – PROBLEMES

Lumière. JEAN-DE GUICHE et LOUIS-CYRANO s'entraînent à l'épée avec des bâtons. *Tout le début de la scène les deux comédiens s'entraînent à l'escrime…*

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Je t'ai pas fait peur, vieux pédé ?

Ils rient. LOUIS-CYRANO s'approche et manque de le toucher au ventre.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Wow, doucement !

LOUIS-CYRANO lui sourit.

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est qui la fiotte, hein ?

Ils se sourient et continuent à s'entraîner.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Michelle, va mieux ?

JEAN -DE GUICHE. Oui, c'est rien, fausse alerte, le stress.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tu penses que c'est sérieux qu'elle continue ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Je sais pas. Mais je vois pas vraiment comment la dissuader.

Ils se battent en silence. L'ACCORDEONISTE s'avance. LOUIS-CYRANO a un vertige. JEAN-DE GUICHE fait un pas vers lui, inquiet.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ça va ?

LOUIS-CYRANO marque un temps et esquisse un sourire doux.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Oui.

Ils sortent et comme dans un fondu enchainé AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE et MADELEINE-ROXANE entrent sur scène.

SCENE 3 – ITALIENNE

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Alors toujours rien ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Non, j'ai eu mes règles ce matin.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ça va bien finir par se faire…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Marc Antoine dit que c'est à cause du boulot.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Comment ça ?

MADELEINE ROXANE. Ben, il dit que c'est pas bon le stress et tout… Que pour avoir un bébé il faudrait que je lâche un peu la scène pour me recentrer sur moi.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. C'est quoi ces conneries ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. *(changeant vite de sujet)* Bon, tu veux bien m'aider pour la prochaine scène ? Je la sens pas et Louis est jamais dispo pour des italiennes.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Oui bien sûr, pas de soucis.

Elles s'assoient en avant-scène et très rapidement disent le texte « en italienne » :

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Puis… je voulais…

Mais pour l'aveu que je viens faire, Il faut que je revoie en vous le… presque frère,

Avec qui je jouais, dans le parc près du lac !…

AMANDINE-LA DUÈGNE jouant CYRANO.

Oui… vous veniez tous les étés à Bergerac !…

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Les roseaux fournissaient le bois pour vos épées…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE jouant CYRANO.

Et les maïs, les cheveux blonds pour vos poupées !

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

C'était le temps des jeux…

AMANDINE-LA DUÈGNE jouant CYRANO.

Des mûrons aigrelets…

Soudainement le jeu des deux jeunes femmes devient de plus en plus sincère. MADELEINE-ROXANE plante ses yeux dans ceux d'AMANDINE-LA DUÈGNE.

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Le temps où vous faisiez tout ce que je voulais !…

On sent AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE fortement troublée.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE jouant CYRANO.

Roxane, en jupons courts, s'appelait Madeleine…

MADELEINE-ROXANE se fait plus sensuelle.

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

J'étais jolie, alors ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE répond alors avec une douce sincérité.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE jouant CYRANO.

Vous n'étiez pas vilaine.

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Parfois, la main en sang de quelque grimpement, Vous accouriez ! Alors, jouant à la maman,

Je disais d'une voix qui tâchait d'être dure.

MADELEINE-ROXANE prend vivement la main d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE.

« Qu'est-ce que c'est encor que cette égratignure ? »

Oh ! C'est trop fort !

Et celle-ci !

MADELEINE-ROXANE approche sa bouche de la main d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE et fait mine de la caresser avec la langue, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE rit, rougissant… Elle essaie de retirer sa main…

Non ! Montrez-la ! Hein ? À votre âge, encor !

Mais MADELEINE-ROXANE la retient et la pose sur son...

Où t'es-tu fait cela ?

Le trouble et la sincérité d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE vont grandissant.

En jouant, du côté de la porte de Nesle.

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Donnez !

MADELEINE-ROXANE reprend doucement la main d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Tout le reste de la scène se joue très sincèrement. AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE jouant Cyrano.

CYRANO.

Mais vous, dites la chose Que vous n'osiez tantôt me dire…

ROXANE (sans quitter sa main).

À présent, j'ose, car le passé m'encouragea de son parfum !

Oui, j'ose maintenant. Voilà. J'aime quelqu'un.

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Qui ne le sait pas d'ailleurs.

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Pas encore.

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Mais qui va bientôt le savoir, s'il l'ignore.

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Un pauvre garçon qui jusqu'ici m'aima timidement, de loin, sans oser le dire…

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Laissez-moi votre main, voyons, elle a la fièvre.

Mais moi, j'ai vu trembler les aveux sur sa lèvre.

CYRANO.

Ah !…

Et figurez-vous, tenez, que, justement, oui, mon cousin, il sert dans votre régiment !

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE (riant).

Puisqu'il est cadet dans votre compagnie !

CYRANO.

Ah !…

ROXANE.

Il a sur son front de l'esprit, du génie, Il est fier, noble, jeune, intrépide, beau…

CYRANO. (se levant tout pâle)

Beau !

ROXANE.

Quoi ? Qu'avez-vous ?

Avec douceur LOUIS-CYRANO entre sur scène et sans mot dire prend la place d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE, qui s'éloigne troublée. C'est Louis qui joue à présent Cyrano.

CYRANO.

Moi, rien… C'est… c'est…. C'est ce bobo.

ROXANE.

Enfin, je l'aime. Il faut d'ailleurs que je vous dise que je ne l'ai jamais vu qu'à la Comédie…

CYRANO.

Vous ne vous êtes donc pas parlé ?

ROXANE.

Nos yeux seuls.

CYRANO.

Mais comment savez-vous, alors ?

ROXANE.

De la place Royale, on cause… Des bavardes m'ont renseignée…

Sous les tilleuls

CYRANO.

Il est cadet ?

ROXANE.

Cadet aux gardes.

CYRANO.

Son nom ?

ROXANE.

Baron Christian de Neuvillette.

CYRANO.

Hein ?… Il n'est pas aux cadets.

ROXANE.

Si, depuis ce matin.

Capitaine Carbon de Castel-Jaloux.

CYRANO.

Vite, Vite, on lance son cœur !… Mais, ma pauvre petite…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE (qui est restée sur le plateau, regardant fixement MADELEINE-ROXANE). Madeleine…

AMANDINE-LA DUEÈGNE. (ouvrant la porte du fond)

J'ai fini les gâteaux, monsieur de Bergerac !

CYRANO.

Eh bien ! Lisez les vers imprimés sur le sac !

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE sort de scène. A nouveau jeu sincère.

CYRANO.

…Ma pauvre enfant, vous qui n'aimez que beau langage,

Bel esprit, si c'était un profane, un sauvage.

ROXANE.

Non, il a les cheveux d'un héros de d'Urfé !

CYRANO.

S'il était aussi maldisant que bien coiffé !

ROXANE.

Non, tous les mots qu'il dit sont fins, je le devine.

CYRANO.

Oui, tous les mots sont fins quand la moustache est fine. Mais si c'était un sot !…

ROXANE. (frappant du pied)

Eh bien ! j'en mourrais, là !

CYRANO.(après un temps).

Vous m'avez fait venir pour me dire cela ?

Je n'en sens pas très bien l'utilité, madame.

ROXANE.

Ah, c'est que quelqu'un hier m'a mis la mort dans l'âme, Et me disant que tous, vous êtes tous Gascons

Dans votre compagnie…

CYRANO.

Et que nous provoquons tous les blancs-becs qui, par faveur, se font admettre

Parmi les purs Gascons que nous sommes, sans l'être ? C'est ce qu'on vous a dit ?

ROXANE.

Et vous pensez si j'ai tremblé pour lui !

CYRANO. (entre ses dents)

Non sans raison !

ROXANE.

Mais j'ai songé Lorsque invincible et grand, hier, vous nous apparûtes,

Châtiant ce coquin, tenant tête à ces brutes,

J'ai songé : s'il voulait, lui que tous ils craindront…

CYRANO.

C'est bien, je défendrai votre petit baron.

SCENE 4 – LE RECIT

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ok, Louis, on passe au récit !

Lumière dans tout le théâtre.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Le récit.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui, Le récit du combat. Ce sera la meilleure

leçon pour ce timide apprentif !

Elle donne une taloche à ARTHUR qui joue CHRISTIAN. Soudainement réalité et jeu se confondent, les comédiens incarnant à présent les compagnons de Cyrano.

CHRISTIAN. (levant la tête)

Apprentif ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE.

Oui, septentrional maladif !

CHRISTIAN.

Maladif ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

Monsieur de Neuvillette, apprenez quelque chose :
C'est qu'il est un objet, chez nous, dont on ne cause
Pas plus que de cordon dans l'hôtel d'un pendu !
CHRISTIAN.
Qu'est-ce ?
GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE .
Regardez-moi !
(Elle pose trois fois, mystérieusement, son doigt sur son nez)
M'avez-vous entendu ?
CHRISTIAN.
Ah ! c'est le…
JEAN-DE GUICHE. (donnant une nouvelle taloche à Christian)
Chut !… Jamais ce mot ne se profère !
(Il montre Cyrano qui cause au fond avec Le Bret.)
Ou c'est à lui, là-bas, que l'on aurait affaire !
THEOPHILO-LE BRET.
Deux nasillards par lui furent exterminés
Parce qu'il lui déplut qu'ils parlassent du nez !
AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE.
On ne peut faire, sans défuncter avant l'âge,
La moindre allusion au fatal cartilage !
MANU-L'HABILLEUSE.
Un mot suffit ! Que dis-je, un mot ? Un geste, un seul !
Et tirer son mouchoir, c'est tirer son linceul !
CHRISTIAN.
Capitaine !
GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.
Monsieur ?
CHRISTIAN.

Que fait-on quand on trouve

Des Méridionaux trop vantards ?…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

On leur prouve

Qu'on peut être du Nord, et courageux.

CHRISTIAN.

Merci.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE.

Maintenant, ton récit !

TOUS.

Son récit !

CYRANO. (redescendant vers eux)

Mon récit ?…

(Tous rapprochent leurs escabeaux, se groupent autour de lui, tendent le col. Christian s'est mis à cheval sur une chaise)

Eh bien ! donc je marchais tout seul, à leur rencontre.

La lune, dans le ciel, luisait comme une montre,

Quand soudain, je ne sais quel soigneux horloger

S'étant mis à passer un coton nuager

Sur le boîtier d'argent de cette montre ronde,

Il se fit une nuit la plus noire du monde,

Et les quais n'étant pas du tout illuminés,

Mordious ! on n'y voyait pas plus loin…

CHRISTIAN.

Que son nez.

Silence. Tout le monde se lève lentement. On regarde Cyrano avec terreur. Celui-ci s'est interrompu, stupéfait. Attente.

CYRANO.

Qu'est-ce que c'est que cet homme-là ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET.

C'est un homme

Arrivé ce matin.

CYRANO. (faisant un pas vers Christian).

Ce matin ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. (à mi-voix)

Il se nomme

Le baron de Neuvil.

CYRANO. (vivement, s'arrêtant)

Ah ! C'est bien…

(Il pâlit, rougit, a encore un mouvement pour se jeter sur Christian)

Je…

(Puis, il se domine, et dit d'une voix sourde)

Très bien…

(Il reprend)

Je disais donc…

(Avec un éclat de rage dans la voix)

Mordious !….

(Il continue d'un ton naturel)

Que l'on n'y voyait rien.

(Stupeur. On se rassied en se regardant)

Et je marchais, songeant que pour un gueux fort mince

J'allais mécontenter quelque grand, quelque prince,

Qui m'aurait sûrement…

CHRISTIAN.

Dans le nez !…

(Tout le monde se lève. Christian se balance sur sa chaise)

CYRANO. (d'une voix étranglée)

Une dent,

Qui m'aurait une dent…et qu'en somme, imprudent,

J'allais fourrer…

CHRISTIAN :

Le nez…

CYRANO.

Le doigt… entre l'écorce

Et l'arbre, car ce grand pouvait être de force

A me faire donner…

CHRISTIAN.

Sur le nez…

CYRANO. (essuyant la sueur à son front)

Sur les doigts.

Mais j'ajoutai : Marche, Gascon, fais ce que dois !

Va, Cyrano ! Et ce disant, je me hasarde,

Quand, dans l'ombre, quelqu'un me porte…

CHRISTIAN.

Une nasarde.

CYRANO.

Je la pare, et soudain me trouve…

CHRISTIAN.

Nez à nez…

CYRANO. (bondissant vers lui)

Ventre-Saint-Gris !

(Tous les Gascons se précipitent pour voir, arrivé sur Christian, il se maîtrise et continue)

Avec cent braillards avinés

Qui puaient…

CHRISTIAN.

A plein nez…

CYRANO. (blême et souriant)

L'oignon et la litharge !

Je bondis, front baissé…

CHRISTIAN.

Nez au vent !

CYRANO.

Et je charge !

J'en estomaque deux ! J'en empale un tout vif !

Quelqu'un m'ajuste : Paf ! et je riposte…

CHRISTIAN.

Pif !

CYRANO. (éclatant)

Tonnerre ! Sortez tous !

(Tous les cadets se précipitent vers les portes)

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE.

C'est le réveil du tigre !

CYRANO.

Tous! Et laissez-moi seul avec cet homme !

JEAN-DE GUICHE.

Bigre !

On va le retrouver en hachis !

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU.

En hachis ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE.

Dans un de vos pâtés !

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU.

Je sens que je blanchis,

Et que je m'amollis comme une serviette !

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE.

Sortons !

THEOPHILO-LE BRET.

Il n'en va pas laisser une miette !

Les comédiens pressent les spectateurs de sortir. Toute la partie qui suit se déroule en immersion…

SCENE 5 – CONFRONTATIONS

Les spectateurs qui ont été répartis en trois groupes déambulent dans le théâtre et assistent aux différentes confrontations qui se déroulent en simultané.

Scène 5' – Jamais je ne t'ai dit (bar)

MADELEINE-ROXANE est avec son ukulélé. Elle commence à chanter, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE la rejoint. Elles chantent ensemble avec tendresse et complicité. Vers le milieu de la chanson, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE essaie d'embrasser MADELEINE-ROXANE qui se retire brutalement.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Qu'est ce tu fais ? Tu as essayé de m'embrasser là ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ben pardon, j'ai cru…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Mais tu as cru quoi ? T'es conne ou quoi ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Pardon ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Ecoute, je t'aime beaucoup mais qu'est ce qui a pu te faire croire que tu me plaisais.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ben, je sais pas j'ai eu l'impression que tu en avais envie…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Et puis, d'abord, depuis quand t'es lesbienne toi ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ben je ne suis pas… Enfin c'est toi qui me…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Enfin tu sais bien que j'essaie d'avoir un gosse… Que je suis en couple, que j'aime mon mec.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Oui bien sûr, pardon… Je ne sais pas ce qui m'a…Tu me troubles… Depuis…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Ah non mais t'arrêtes ça tout de suite. Je veux pas entendre tes trucs-là. Ça me dégoûte, tu me dégoûtes !

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ok… Enfin tu n'es pas obligée de…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Moi je te confie mes histoires, mes problèmes et toi en fait quand tu me consoles c'est pour me baiser c'est ça. Tu me… Tu me répugnes, putain !

MADELEINE-ROXANE laisse AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE effondrée. Cris dans le théâtre… AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE retourne au théâtre entraînant les spectateurs.

Scène 5" – Tu fais la tête – (Lounge)

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE, avec de l'argile, refait un nez pour Cyrano. Le nez ne prend pas forme, elle s'obstine…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ça va ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. *(en train de laver ses mains rouges)* Mmm Mmm…

Elle reste froide.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Tu fais la tête ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Non…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Tu me fais la tête ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ben pourquoi je te ferai la tête à toi…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Je sais pas.

Elle termine de nettoyer ses mains de plus en plus nerveusement.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Enfin peut-être que je devrais la faire, la tête, à toi aussi. Je suis trop bête, de toute façon, vous vous moquez tous de moi. Je sais la façon dont vous me regardez tous. Même toi. Oh puis ce nez de m… De merde… Mes croquis de chiotte.

Elle perd patience et jette le chiffon maculé d'argile par terre.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Arrête, t'es parfaite !

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ah oui je suis parfaite, alors pourquoi tu te fous de moi ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Je me fous de toi ?

Elle se lève d'un coup et se plante devant lui. À quelques *centimètres de son visage.*

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. « Je ne puis refuser mon cœur à tout ce que je vois d'aimable, et dès qu'un beau visage me le demande, si j'en avais dix mille, je les donnerais tous. » Blablabla… Tu crois que ça me trouble pas ? Pourquoi tu t'amuses avec ça hein ? Si je te disais que je le veux bien ton cœur.

Il recule troublé et surpris.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Hein ? Mais qu'est-ce que tu dis…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. J'en ai marre d'être la meuf polie. Fais chier, t'aimes bien jouer avec moi ? Ben moi je te dis que j'ai envie que tu me baises.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Bon écoute…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ah oui c'est marrant, ça te fait quoi quand les rôles s'inversent ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Bon ça va arrête, c'est pas drôle.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. C'est pas drôle ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Non.

Elle se colle encore un peu plus à lui. En fond de scène THEOPHILO-LE BRET entre sans être vu, il les observe en silence.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. J'ai envie de toi…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Bon arrête.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. J'ai envie de toi je te dis, embrasse-moi !

Elle essaye de l'embrasser, il l'évite mais on le sent réellement troublé.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Arrête…

Elle lui met la main « au paquet »

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Ah ben ça va, je vois que je te fais de l'effet quand même.

JEAN-DE GUICHE : Bon arrête s'il te plait, j'ai pas envie que quelqu'un entre et nous voit.

Elle l'embrasse à pleine bouche, cette fois-ci il ne résiste pas. Ils s'arrêtent pour reprendre leur souffle.

JEAN- DE GUICHE. Ok tu veux que je te baise ?

Il la fixe, le regard assombri par le désir, la voix plus grave.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ok.

Il l'embrasse à son tour. Elle se dégage violemment.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Allez casse-toi petit merdeux !

Surpris, il la regarde sans comprendre.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Quoi ???

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Casse-toi, laisse-moi seule je te dis. Casse-toi ou je dis à ta meuf que tu m'as embrassée. Allez barre-toi, le toutou dans sa niniche !

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Putain t'es barrée !

THEOPHILO-LE BRET, qui a assisté à la fin de la scène, va s'asseoir à côté d'elle en silence.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Pourquoi on est toujours attiré par des personnes qui ne nous conviennent pas…

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Je ne sais pas… Pour Freud, c'est souvent…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Tu aimes ta femme toi ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ahahah, c'est quoi cette question…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Est-ce qu'elle t'aime comme tu aimerais l'être ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. …Non… Enfin pas exactement…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je te trouve très beau tu sais.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah oui ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui… Pardon.

Les larmes lui montent aux yeux, elle va pour sortir.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Emmanuelle !

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. : Oui

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Tu es belle…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Merci… *(elle part)*

Cris dans le théâtre… THEOPHILO-LE BRET retourne au théâtre entraînant les spectateurs.

Scène 5''' – Embrasse-moi – (Théâtre)

LOUIS-CYRANO et ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN restent face à face, et se regardent un moment.

CYRANO.
Embrasse-moi !
CHRISTIAN.
Monsieur…
CYRANO.
Brave.
CHRISTIAN.
Ah ça ! mai !…
CYRANO.
Très brave. Je préfère.
CHRISTIAN.
Me direz-vous ?…
CYRANO.
Embrasse-moi.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN et LOUIS-CYRANO, sortant de leurs personnages, s'embrassent à pleine bouche… Ils s'enlacent tendrement et sensuellement.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. J'aimerais qu'on parte tous les deux… Tu sais que c'est bientôt mon anniversaire…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je sais…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Après les représentations, nous pourrions partir.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Peut-être…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN s'approche de nouveau pour embrasser LOUIS-CYRANO.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Arrête.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Pas ici. Je t'ai déjà dit que je ne voulais pas qu'on s'embrasse ici.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Oh ça va il n'y a personne.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Arrête s'il te plaît.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN enlace à nouveau LOUIS-CYRANO qui se laisse aller, un bref instant. Puis le repousse

LOUIS-CYRANO. Stop.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN fixe son amant avec incompréhension.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Ça va pas ? Il y a quelque chose.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tu as fait quoi cette nuit ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Euh, ben, on est sortis…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tu as fait quoi cette nuit ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. …Ben je sais pas… Je croyais que tu ne voulais pas savoir…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tu as fait quoi cette nuit ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN est de plus en plus inquiet et décontenancé.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. …Tu veux savoir ?

LOUIS-CYRANO se contente de le fixer froidement.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Ok, je me suis tapé un mec que j'ai rencontré dans un bar, ça te va ? À quoi tu joues, amour ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Ne m'appelle pas comme ça, c'était bon ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN, effrayé et blessé, ne sait plus quoi comprendre.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Tu fais chier…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Réponds ! C'était bon ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais qu'est-ce que… Je t'aime !

Sans crier gare, LOUIS-CYRANO gifle violemment ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN, qui le regarde les yeux écarquillés *par le choc et l'incompréhension.*

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Qu'est-ce que tu fous ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. J'en ai marre de me taper une petite pute…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Nous deux c'est fini. Je termine cette pièce et après je ne veux plus jamais voir ta gueule.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais… Pourquoi ?

Nouvelle claque

LOUIS-CYRANO. Fais gaffe.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais qu'est-ce que tu fous bordel ! Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe là, je comprends pas ! C'est toi qui me disais… Je peux arrêter mes conneries, je veux être avec toi, moi…

LOUIS-CYRANO. POURQUOI ? Pourquoi tu restes avec moi ? C'est pour avoir des rôles ? C'est ça ? Petit suceur de merde !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Arrête.

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est pour mon pognon ? Tout ça parce tu n'es même pas capable de garder un rond, à toujours t'en foutre dans le nez et dans le cul.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Arrête !

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est du pognon que tu veux ?

LOUIS-CYRANO sort de l'argent de sa poche et le balance à la gueule d'ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tiens ! Tiens, vas te défoncer ! Tiens ! Tiens vas te faire défonce !!

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN est partagé entre les larmes, la rage et l'incompréhension.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. ARRÊTE ! Sinon…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Sinon quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO crache à la gueule d'ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN qui lui saute immédiatement dessus tout en le tapant.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais je t'aime, bordel, je t'aime !

Fin des autres scènes en simultané !

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU et THEOPHILO-LE BRET entrent à la hâte et séparent comme ils peuvent LOUIS-CYRANO et ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Mais qu'est-ce que vous foutez ???

LOUIS-CYRANO a la bouche en sang. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCÈNE entre ainsi que tous les autres.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Qu'est ce qu'il se passe, nom de Dieu ?

Mais ça va pas ? Mais vous allez pas bien ? C'est quoi votre problème ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE est prise de convulsions. Elle se tient le ventre. Elle s'écroule. Tous sont terrifiés et se précipitent pour l'aider. L'ACCORDEONISTE joue. Noir

SCENE 6 – BISOUNOURS

Toute l'équipe est assise en bord de scène sauf JEAN-DE GUICHE et MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE… Les gênes et les tensions sont palpables. ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN est complètement défoncé.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. J'espère… J'espère que ça va aller… D'abord… D'abord pour le bébé… Enfin… Que la grossesse se termine bien…

Tous approuvent d'un hochement de tête.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. De toute façon, c'est elle qui va nous dire… Je sais que je suis pas toujours facile et impatient, et frustré aussi, mais si le spectacle ne doit pas se faire… Je… Je vais être très triste… Enfin voilà… Je sais pas quoi dire…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui et puis pour la Compagnie, je ne sais pas si on peut survivre à ça… Si on annule, je veux dire… Enfin, je veux dire avec tout ce qu'on a déjà vécu ensemble, ben je sais pas… C'est beau quoi et… *(Un instant l'émotion lui noue la gorge)* …

Pardon… Je… Pardon d'être émotif comme ça mais… Vous êtes un peu ma famille quoi…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE lui pose doucement la main sur l'épaule.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. L'important c'est l'enfant.

Nouvelle approbation générale…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Peut-être que ce spectacle ne doit pas se faire…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Peut-être que la Compagnie a fait son temps. Peut-être qu'il faut arrêter là.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Ben voyons…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Je suis d'accord.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah oui ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Ben oui faut voir les choses en face, depuis le début des répétitions, il n'y a jamais eu autant de tensions, il y a plein de disputes, enfin je sais pas, moi aussi je… Je ne me sens plus à l'aise, comme au début. Alors oui, ce qu'on a vécu ensemble c'était beau mais, je sais pas, tout me semble difficile.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui mais ça c'est dans toutes les compagnies enfin je veux dire…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Dans tous les projets…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui dans tout ce qui est humain. On a des difficultés et oui il y a des disputes mais… Enfin, on œuvre pour quelque chose de plus grand. Enfin, pourquoi on fait du théâtre ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Moi c'est ce qui donne un sens à ma vie…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui, moi sans ça…

On sent qu'un feu nouveau s'allume au ventre de GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE, elle se plante face à eux.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Mais voyez comme on se bat, combien c'est beau de faire rêver les gens et surtout de leur donner du plaisir. La vie est dure, c'est pas facile ok, mais je crois qu'agir avec peur ben c'est la mort. À quoi bon vivre si on n'a pas du sens, du plaisir. Pardon je m'enflamme mais ce qu'on fait c'est important, non, pas important, c'est essentiel.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Essentiel…

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Mais tu te sentirais toi ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. De quoi ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. De faire la mise en scène ? Si Michelle ne pouvait pas continuer…

Soudainement GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE semble perdre de sa contenance, elle balbutie un peu.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Non ! …Enfin… Et puis c'est pas mon projet c'est celui de Michelle.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui mais si c'est important pour la compagnie.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je… Je ne sais pas.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Tu vois.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE reste silencieuse une seconde les regardant tous un par un.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Peut-être… Il faudrait que… Il faudrait que je…

JEAN-DE GUICHE entre d'un pas vif.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Ça va ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Oui, elle passe un coup de fil et elle arrive… Elle va vous parler…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE s'approche de JEAN-DE GUICHE qui l'ignore délibérément.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Et toi ça va ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. De toute façon, moi je ne sais pas si je vais pas tout arrêter.

À *ces mots, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE se fige et se tourne vers son amie. MADELEINE-ROXANE remarque ce regard mais détourne les yeux.*

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Le métier ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE confirme de la tête.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oh non, faut pas…

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ben non…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE ? C'est ta décision ou c'est pour faire plaisir à ton mec ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. De quoi tu parles ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. T'en as pas marre de le laisser décider pour toi ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE regarde AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE choquée.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Je t'emmerde.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oh, eh, les filles…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Elle a le droit… Si tu ne veux plus continuer, tu as le droit d'arrêter le métier.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. T'es chiant…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Quoi ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais putain mais comme t'es chiant !

Ils se regardent avec dureté.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oh les gars ça va pas recommencer hein !

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN se lève avec humeur.

ARHTUR-CHRISTIAN. Mais vous voyez pas que depuis le début c'est lui qui crée cet ambiance de merde, depuis le début t'es négatif, tu fais chier !!!

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Arrête Arthur !

Soudainement c'est au tour de RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU de se lever d'un bon et de hurler à plein poumons.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. ÇA SUFFIT HEIN !!!!! JE NE SAIS PAS CE QUI SE PASSE MAIS VOUS ARRÊTEZ MAINTENANT ! *(Silence de tous face à cette autorité nouvelle)* C'est pas possible ! Ce n'est plus possible ! Je fais des insomnies toutes les nuits, j'arrête pas d'avoir des aigreurs d'estomac. Toutes ces tensions, je ne comprends pas ! Je ne comprends pas ! On s'aime bordel ! Alors quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. … Je suis malade.

Léger recul de RAPHAËL-RAGUENEAU, regard et silence abasourdi des autres.

LOUIS-CYRANO. J'ai un cancer.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Quoi ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Tumeur au cerveau.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. C'est… grave ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Oui.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU prend LOUIS-CYRANO dans ses bras.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. On est là.

À part *ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN, tous entourent et enlacent LOUIS-CYRANO. Ce faisant, MADELEINE-ROXANE et AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE se retrouvent à côté.*

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. On est là.

TOUS. On est là.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN se jette également dans les bras de LOUIS-CYRANO et pose sa tête sur ses jambes. Câlin général. MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE entre. Ils ne la voient pas. Elle les observe. LOUIS-CYRANO l'aperçoit.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Bon ben moi aussi je veux bien un câlin…

Elle vient s'installer à côté de LOUIS-CYRANO.

ACTE III

SCENE 1– LE THEATRE IMMERSIF

Lumière. L'ACCORDEONISTE regarde le public.

L'ACCORDEONISTE. Et ensuite ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. *(s'adressant au public)* Ensuite ? Je m'amuse à imaginer le purgatoire de Cyrano. Comment supporter la mort qui s'avance ? On aimerait l'ignorer mais comment faire face à cette Camarde qui revient sans cesse tel un *ostinato* incessant. Le véritable incendie de mon être, c'est de savoir que chaque instant que je vis me rapproche de la fin. Je peux hurler, pleurer, construire des châteaux de pierre ou de guimauve, mais chacun de mes pas me conduit au néant. Rester spectateur de son existence pourquoi pas, la faute à tous et à tout.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Accepteriez-vous de vivre votre vie une infinité de fois ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Peut-être. Peut-être que je répondrais un grand oui si au-delà des peines et des plaisirs, au-delà des mensonges que sont la victoire ou la défaite, au-delà des mensonges que je me conte, je vivais avec panache… J'imagine à 22h34 ce 28 octobre 2019 *(la date qui est donnée est celle du jour).* Une clé perdue, les portes closes, une cigarette mal écrasée, un feu qui emporte en un souffle nos existences et cet instant sublime où pour la première fois, peut-être, je serai l'auteure de ma vie.

Soudainement le son des cloches résonne dans tout le théâtre.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Un incendie a débuté, je vais vous demander de quitter par ici la salle dans le calme et le silence, vous pouvez laisser vos affaires, là où nous allons elles ne vous serviront à rien.

Tous les spectateurs sont invités à sortir du théâtre. Ils se retrouvent dans les couloirs enfumés. Les comédiens les entourent et ânonnent…

SCENE 2 – TOUT SEUL

TOUS. À la mort qui s'avance, j'aurais aimé pouvoir porter le meilleur de moi-même, ma seule joie comme étendard, et mon sourire comme ultime panache.

Ils se mettent d'une même voix avec force.

Rêver, rire, passer, être seul, être libre,
Avoir l'œil qui regarde bien, la voix qui vibre,
Mettre, quand il vous plaît, son feutre de travers,
Pour un oui, pour un non, se battre, ou faire un vers !
Travailler sans souci de gloire ou de fortune,
À tel voyage, auquel on pense, dans la lune !
N'écrire jamais rien qui de soi ne sortît,
Et modeste d'ailleurs, se dire : mon petit,
Sois satisfait des fleurs, des fruits, même des feuilles,
Si c'est dans ton jardin à toi que tu les cueilles !
Puis, s'il advient d'un peu triompher, par hasard,
Ne pas être obligé d'en rien rendre à César,
Vis-à-vis de soi-même en garder le mérite,
Bref, dédaignant d'être le lierre parasite,
Lors même qu'on n'est pas le chêne ou le tilleul,
Ne pas monter bien haut, peut-être, mais tout seul !

Les comédiens se séparent et se disséminent dans tout le théâtre.

SCENE 3 – RÉSOLUTIONS

Toutes les scènes qui suivent se font en simultané. Les spectateurs peuvent circuler d'une scène à l'autre en toute liberté…

Scène 3’ – Cyrano

*Au théâtre, tout est en place pour la scène du balcon. LOUIS-CYRANO et ARTHUR-CYRANO en costume sont côte à c*ôte.

CHRISTIAN.

Roxane !

CYRANO. (ramassant des cailloux qu’il jette dans les vitres)

Attends ! Quelques cailloux.

(Roxane entrouvre sa fenêtre)

ROXANE.

Qui donc m’appelle ?

CHRISTIAN.

Moi.

ROXANE.

Qui, moi ?

CHRISTIAN.

Christian.

ROXANE. (avec dédain)

C’est vous ?

CHRISTIAN.

Je voudrais vous parler.

CYRANO. (sous le balcon, à Christian)

Bien. Bien. Presque à voix basse.

ROXANE.

Non ! Vous parlez trop mal. Allez-vous-en !

CHRISTIAN.

De grâce !…

ROXANE.

Non ! Vous ne m’aimez plus !

CHRISTIAN. (à qui Cyrano souffle ses mots)

M'accuser, justes dieux !
De n'aimer plus… quand… j'aime plus !
ROXANE. (qui allait refermer sa fenêtre, s'arrêtant)
Tiens ! Mais c'est mieux !
CHRISTIAN. (même jeu)
L'amour grandit bercé dans mon âme inquiète…
Que ce… cruel marmot prit pour… barcelonnette !
ROXANE. (s'avançant sur le balcon)
C'est mieux ! Mais, puisqu'il est cruel, vous fûtes sot
De ne pas, cet amour, l'étouffer au berceau !
CHRISTIAN. (même jeu)
Aussi l'ai-je tenté, mais… tentative nulle :
Ce… nouveau-né, Madame, est un petit… Hercule.
ROXANE.
C'est mieux !
CHRISTIAN. (même jeu)
De sorte qu'il… strangula comme rien…
Les deux serpents… Orgueil et… Doute.
ROXANE. (s'accoudant au balcon)
Ah ! c'est très bien.
Mais pourquoi parlez-vous de façon peu hâtive ?
Auriez-vous donc la goutte à l'imaginative ?
CYRANO. (tirant Christian sous le balcon, et se glissant à sa place)
Chut ! Cela devient trop difficile !…
ROXANE.
Aujourd'hui…
Vos mots sont hésitants. Pourquoi ?
CYRANO. (parlant à mi-voix, comme Christian)

C'est qu'il fait nuit,
Dans cette ombre, à tâtons, ils cherchent votre oreille.
ROXANE.
Les miens n'éprouvent pas difficulté pareille.
CYRANO.
Ils trouvent tout de suite ? Oh ! cela va de soi,
Puisque c'est dans mon cœur, eux, que je les reçois ;
Les miens montent, Madame : il leur faut plus de temps !
ROXANE :
Mais ils montent bien mieux depuis quelques instants.
CYRANO.
De cette gymnastique, ils ont pris l'habitude !
ROXANE.
Je vous parle, en effet, d'une vraie altitude !
CYRANO. (que l'émotion gagne de plus en plus)
Laissez un peu que l'on profite…
De cette occasion qui s'offre… de pouvoir
Se parler doucement, sans se voir.
ROXANE.
Sans se voir ?
CYRANO.
Mais oui, c'est adorable. On se devine à peine.
Vous voyez la noirceur d'un long manteau qui traîne,
J'aperçois la blancheur d'une robe d'été :
Moi je ne suis qu'une ombre, et vous qu'une clarté !
Vous ignorez pour moi ce que sont ces minutes !
Si quelquefois je fus éloquent…
ROXANE.
Vous le fûtes !

CYRANO.

Mon langage jamais jusqu'ici n'est sorti

De mon vrai cœur…

LOUIS-CYRANO croise le regard d'ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN dans la pénombre. À partir de ce moment-là, on ne sait plus si les mots sont ceux de Cyrano parlant à Roxane ou de LOUIS-CYRANO parlant à ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN.

CYRANO.

Je pars pour décrocher l'étoile, et je m'arrête

Par peur du ridicule, à cueillir la fleurette !

ROXANE.

La fleurette a du bon.

CYRANO.

Ce soir, dédaignons-la !

ROXANE.

Eh bien! si ce moment est venu pour nous deux,

Quels mots me direz-vous ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE entre en fond de scène. Dans la scène qui suit, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE va dire en même temps que LOUIS-CYRANO le texte de CYRANO. Elle adresse son texte à MADELEINE-ROXANE tandis que LOUIS-CYRANO s'adresse à ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN.

CYRANO.

Tous ceux, tous ceux, tous ceux

Qui me viendront, je vais vous les jeter, en touffe,

Sans les mettre en bouquet.

Je vous aime, j'étouffe,

Je t'aime, je suis fou, je n'en peux plus, c'est trop ;

Ton nom est dans mon cœur comme dans un grelot,

Et comme tout le temps, Roxane,
Je frissonne,
Tout le temps, le grelot s'agite, et le nom sonne !
De toi, je me souviens de tout, j'ai tout aimé :
Je sais que l'an dernier, un jour, le douze mai,
Pour sortir le matin, tu changeas de coiffure !
J'ai tellement pris pour clarté ta chevelure
Que,
Comme lorsqu'on a trop fixé le soleil,
On voit sur toute chose ensuite un rond vermeil,
Sur tout, quand j'ai quitté les feux dont tu m'inondes,
Mon regard ébloui pose des taches blondes !
ROXANE. (d'une voix troublée)
Oui, c'est bien de l'amour…
CYRANO.
Certes, ce sentiment
Qui m'envahit, terrible et jaloux, c'est vraiment
De l'amour, il en a toute la fureur triste !
De l'amour, et pourtant il n'est pas égoïste !
Ah ! que pour ton bonheur je donnerais le mien,
Quand même tu devrais n'en savoir jamais rien,
S'il se pouvait, parfois, que de loin, j'entendisse
Rire un peu le bonheur né de mon sacrifice !
Chaque regard de toi suscite une vertu
Nouvelle, une vaillance en moi ! Commences-tu
À comprendre, à présent ? Voyons, te rends-tu compte ?
Sens-tu mon âme, un peu, dans cette ombre, qui monte ?… ?
Oh ! mais vraiment, ce soir, c'est trop beau, c'est trop doux !
Je vous dis tout cela, vous m'écoutez, moi, vous !

C'est trop ! Dans mon espoir même le moins modeste,
Je n'ai jamais espéré tant ! Il ne me reste
Qu'à mourir maintenant ! C'est à cause des mots
Que je dis qu'elle tremble entre les bleus rameaux !
Car vous tremblez, comme une feuille entre les feuilles !
Car tu trembles ! Car j'ai senti, que tu le veuilles
Ou non, le tremblement adoré de ta main
Descendre tout le long des branches du jasmin !
(Il baise éperdument l'extrémité d'une branche pendante.)

ROXANE.

Oui, je tremble, et je pleure, et je t'aime, et suis tienne !
Et tu m'as enivrée !

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE se tait à présent, émue.

CYRANO.

Alors, que la mort vienne !
Cette ivresse, c'est moi, moi, qui l'ai su causer !
Je ne demande plus qu'une chose…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN, partagé entre son rôle et son amour pour LOUIS-CYRANO, le regarde avec fièvre.

CHRISTIAN. (sous le balcon)

Un baiser !

ROXANE. (se rejetant en arrière)

Hein ?

CYRANO.

Oh !

ROXANE.

Vous demandez ?

CYRANO.

Oui… je… (à Christian, bas)
Tu vas trop vite.
CHRISTIAN.
Puisqu'elle est si troublée, il faut que j'en profite !
CYRANO. (à Roxane)
Oui, je… j'ai demandé, c'est vrai… mais justes cieux !
Je comprends que je fus bien trop audacieux.
ROXANE. (un peu déçue)
Vous n'insistez pas plus que cela ?
CYRANO.
Si ! j'insiste…
Sans insister !… Oui, oui ! votre pudeur s'attriste !
Eh bien ! mais, ce baiser… ne me l'accordez pas !
CHRISTIAN. (à Cyrano, le tirant par son manteau)
Pourquoi ?
CYRANO.
Tais-toi, Christian !
ROXANE. (se penchant)
Que dites-vous tout bas ?
CYRANO.
Mais d'être allé trop loin, moi-même je me gronde ;
Je me disais: tais-toi, Christian !…
(Les théorbes se mettent à jouer)
Une seconde !…
On vient !

Scène 3" – Massage

En simultané aux autres scènes, RAPHAËL-RAGUENEAU est avec son téléphone et ses écouteurs géants. *GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE entre. Quand il l'aperçoit, il tente de raccrocher à la hâte.*

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui maman… Oui… Bon je te laisse… Oui, moi aussi ! Bisousbisous ! *(Il raccroche)* Hé salut !

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE le regarde avec douceur.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. C'est super de t'occuper ainsi de ta mère…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ben oui…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Elle va mieux ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oh ben tu sais Maman… Ma mère est toujours un peu fragile. Ça doit être de famille…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. C'est beau la fragilité parfois.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui… Mais c'est pas très sexy… Non ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je sais pas…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Qu'est ce qui te plaît chez un homme ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. J'admire les personnes qui ont le courage d'assumer, qui ne se soumettent pas à l'idée de ce qu'on pourrait attendre d'eux. Bref, celles et ceux qui créent leurs propres règles…

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Tu es comme ça toi ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Non mais j'aimerais bien… Et puis tout ceci ce sont des généralités… Et puis parfois être trop indépendant, cela peut rendre égoïste.

Elle regarde son téléphone puis se lève pour sortir.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Attends Gabrielle.

Elle s'arrête et lève les yeux vers lui.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Non… Je… Attention avec le téléphone… Les ondes et tout… Enfin tu vois… En plus de tout ce stress que tu as, faudrait pas…

Elle lui sourit.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Je peux rester un instant si tu veux.

Elle s'assoit à côté de lui. Un temps. On sent qu'il ne sait pas comment réagir à cette proximité avec elle.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Tu veux de l'*Euphytose* ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. C'est quoi ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Pour le stress…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Non merci. *(Un temps)* Tu sais qu'on va mourir ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Oui… Je le sais… Tous les jours…

« Ding » : *elle reçoit un message.*

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Un massage.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Comment ?

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Pour le stress, je veux bien un massage.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Tu veux que moi, je te…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui. Tu ne sais pas masser ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Si parfois je masse mam… Enfin, oui je fais des massages.

Il commence à masser

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Ah voilà c'est ça dont j'avais besoin… Tu vas faire quoi après ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ben je pense pas rentrer trop tard…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Ah oui là c'est bon !

« Ding » nouveau message.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. C'est un nœud… Tu sais que tu peux le mettre en mode silencieux.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Tu masses bien… Je veux entendre quand cela s'arrêtera. Cela te choque si j'enlève ça.

Elle dégrafe et enlève sa chemise, rougit jusqu'à la racine de ses cheveux.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Heu… Oui mais non.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Tu n'as pas peur de ma peau ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Un peu mais non.

« Ding » message.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Là tu vois, il sait que je lui échappe. Mais je crois que j'en suis libérée. *(Elle éteint son portable.)* Continue s'il te plaît. *(Il reprend)* Moi après, je ne vais pas aller boire un verre. Je ne vais pas manger. Je vais rentrer chez moi. Je vais me déshabiller et je vais m'allonger. Tu voudras bien me raccompagner ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Euh, oui.

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. : Tout à l'heure, j'aimerais bien que toi aussi tu te déshabilles et que tu t'allonges avec moi. Tu seras d'accord ?

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ah oui. Il faudra peut-être que je prévienne que…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Oui tu pourras. Maintenant, je veux bien que tu m'embrasses. Tu es d'accord ?

Ils s'embrassent.

Scène 3''' – *Ninfomane*

En simultané aux autres scènes, MANU-L'HABILLEUSE et THEOPHILO-LE BRET sont assis l'un près de l'autre. Il mange une pomme.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Comment tu dis nymphomane en italien ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET ? *(s'étouffant avec sa pomme)* …*Ninfomane.*

L'HABILLEUSE. Ah oui c'est pareil.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Oui c'est juste la prononciation…

Silence gêné.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. *Ninfomane.*

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Voilà.

Silence gêné. Elle rit soudainement.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Cette nuit j'ai rêvé que j'étais un papillon.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah oui ? Je ne sais pas non, si tu connais Tchouang…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Mais je n'avais pas de trompe… C'est ça qu'on dit pour les bouches de papillons ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Euh, je ne sais…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. À la place j'avais comme le nez de Cyrano. Au début de mon rêve, j'étais une fourmi qui voulait devenir papillon. Je trouvais une espèce de petite bouse de licorne.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Une licorne ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui tu sais le cheval qui a une corne ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. *Unicorno.*

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Voilà, *unicorno*. Je mangeais la petite bouse et pouf, papillon.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. D'accord…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Mais alors, j'avais une faim terrible et il fallait que je butine un maximum de fleurs.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah oui.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Tu expliques cela comment ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah je ne suis pas un spécialiste mais je sais que pour Freud les rêves d'insectes sont parfois liés à la masturbation.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Comment tu sais ça toi ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ben, euh…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Tu as déjà rêvé que tu étais un papillon ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Non mais…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. En fait j'ai rêvé de toi aussi.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah bon.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui tu étais un très beau coquelicot.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Ah bon ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui… *(silence)* J'ai tellement voulu être sage toutes ces années. Et là, je ne sais pas, tout ce désir en moi ça me…

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. …Paralyse ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. *(elle dit non de la tête)* Ça me fascine… Tu me trouves belle ? Je veux dire désirable ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Euh…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. : Tu sais qu'on va mourir ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Oui je sais que la finitude est…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Mes lèvres, tu les aimes bien mes lèvres ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Euh, à quoi tu joues ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. J'ai vu comment tu me regardais tu sais.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Comment je te regardais…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Comme un baba au rhum avec de la chantilly. Ou comme une blonde que tu aimerais te griller.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Je… Je suis marié tu sais. *(Elle hoche de la tête pour dire oui)* J'ai deux enfants… *(Elle hoche de la tête pour dire oui)*

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Je crois que… Que j'aimerais que tu sois juste tendre avec moi.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Tendre ?

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Oui je crois que si tu me faisais l'amour, tu saurais être tendre. J'aimerais, si tu en as envie, que tu… Que tu passes juste un moment avec moi.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Mais, je…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Tu en as envie.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Oui… Oui mais je suis… J'ai… Si ma femme…

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. On est obligés de lui dire ?

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Mais je ne veux pas mentir.

MANU-L'HABILLEUSE. Un baiser.

Ils s'embrassent avec douceur.

Scène 3"" – L'Enfant

En simultané aux autres scènes, JEAN-DE GUICHE est seul. Il pianote sur son portable. Il est rejoint par MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je ne te dérange pas ?

Il lève la tête et lui sourit.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben non…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Qu'est-ce que tu dirais… Qu'est-ce que tu dirais si cet enfant je l'élevais seule ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Quoi. Mais qu'est-ce que tu…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je n'ai plus envie de nous… Je veux dire de toi, moi ensemble.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Mais je t'aime…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu crois ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. J'en suis sûr.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. On n'a pas le temps, pas le temps de tricher, de se mentir… On meurt tu sais… Ton désir, il est beau, c'est comme cela que tu m'as plu. C'était, oui, c'était

excitant pour moi de te reconquérir chaque fois qu'une autre te plaisait, c'est-à-dire environ cinq fois par jour… Tu m'as appris qu'aimer ce n'est pas posséder… Seulement, aujourd'hui, je n'ai plus envie de lutter, je crois… Je crois que je mérite mieux.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Mais… J'ai besoin de toi.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Ben oui mais je ne suis pas ta mère… Là tu vois, j'ai quelqu'un qui vient et qui, lui, a besoin de moi. Et toi, tu as le droit d'être fort, d'être libre.

On sent JEAN-DE GUICHE perdu, écrasé sous le poids de la nouvelle.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Tu veux qu'on se quitte ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je crois que tu as compris le concept oui… Si c'est mort entre nous, ce n'est peut-être pas si grave. Une autre viendra pour toi et pour moi j'aimerai aussi à nouveau. On s'en remettra.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Mais l'enfant ?

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Je l'ai voulu. Je peux m'en occuper.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Et la pièce, enfin…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. J'ai presque terminé ce que j'avais à faire. La pièce, elle est grande à présent… Et puis, je ne veux pas me battre avec toi tu sais.

Il la regarde avec tristesse.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Moi non plus… Et si j'arrêtais mes conneries, si je m'occupais de toi, de vous… Si je changeais…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Tu en as vraiment envie ? Tu n'y arriveras pas et puis je ne te le demande pas…

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Tu as l'air tellement sûre de toi…

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Oui ben là je ne le montre pas, mais tu sais au fond de moi, il y a une voix qui chiale et qui me dit que je fais peut-être la plus grosse connerie de ma vie.

Il s'approche d'elle comme pour la prendre dans ses bras.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben alors, pourquoi tout ça ???

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Le panache… Je préfère apprendre à être sans toi plutôt que d'attendre des choses impossibles. Et puis, on a quand même un fruit de cette histoire…

Il la regarde ému.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Tu es belle…

Elle l'embrasse.

MICHELLE-LA METTEUSE EN SCENE. Maintenant, j'aimerais que tu me laisses. Si tu restes là, mon panache va se transformer en plume mouillée…

Ils s'enlacent et se séparent.

SCENE 4 – TU M'AIMES

Scène 4' – Essayer

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE est seule sur scène, elle est rejoint par MADELEINE-ROXANE, visiblement mal à l'aise. Quand leurs regards se croisent, AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE détourne la tête.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Je peux te parler…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. *(avec froideur)* …Oui…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Je… Je voulais… Enfin j'ai envie… Oh la la, c'est pas facile… Je m'exc… Enfin je voulais te demander pardon pour l'autre fois. Je me rends compte que j'ai joué avec toi.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. C'est-à-dire ?

MADELEINE-ROXANE. C'est-à-dire que je voyais ou plutôt que je ne voulais pas voir ton désir… Pour moi… Tu es une femme.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Merci je sais.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Je suis en couple normal, enfin avec un…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Oui je sais aussi.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Enfin c'est compliqué d'assumer… J'ai jamais essayé avec une…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Moi non plus.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Tu me manques…

Les traits d'AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE se détendent un peu, on la sent touchée.

AMANDINE-LA DUÈGNE. …Toi aussi.

Elles se regardent en silence.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. J'aimerais tellement qu'on revienne comme avant…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Tu sais je n'ai pas choisi… De ressentir ce que je ressens. Cela fait mal.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Quoi ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Je n'arrive pas à contrôler. Quand tu es là. Je ne comprends pas. Je suis désolée, c'est plus fort que moi, j'ai envie de… Enfin. Bon. Pardon, j'ai tout gâché. C'est moi qui te demande pardon.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Tu as envie de quoi ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. …De t'enlacer.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. De sentir ma peau ? De la caresser ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. …Oui.

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Tu m'aimes…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. C'est fou de me demander…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Tu m'aimes ?

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. …

MADELEINE-ROXANE. J'aimerais juste essayer ça… Juste pour voir si je. Je peux…

MADELEINE-ROXANE embrasse AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE.

Noir.

Scène 4" – Petit con

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. On trinque ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. …Santé ?

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Tu n'es pas obligé d'être cynique tu sais. Je me souviens de quelqu'un qui me disait que l'ironie ne révélait que la faiblesse…

LOUIS-CYRANO. Si tu es venu là pour m'emmerder.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Louis, s'il te plaît… Je peux me taire… Je me tais.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN après un long temps silencieux sort les billets qu'il a reçu précédemment et les positionne entre eux. Il les pousse en direction de LOUIS-CYRANO.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Petit con.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Ah ben ça faisait longtemps. J'ai envie d'être… De rester avec toi.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je ne suis pas sûr que…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Je veux être là.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je ne suis pas sûr que tu aies conscience de ce que cela va être. Pour l'instant c'est que des migraines à vomir. Mais demain, quand je ne pourrai plus parler, quand je ne pourrai plus reconnaître personne… Si je me chie dessus, c'est toi qui vas me nettoyer ? Je refuse que tu me voies ainsi.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Tu n'as pas le droit de me refuser ça. Tu voudrais que je te laisse crever seul, mais moi ? Comment je pourrai continuer à vivre si tu ne me laisses pas t'aider ? Tu préfères que je me défonce ? Tu dois accepter que je te rende tout ce que tu m'as donné. Je… Je suis toujours un petit con mais je suis ton petit con. Tu me disais qu'on reconnaissait les grands hommes lorsqu'ils étaient au plus mal… Apprends-moi, apprends-moi encore…

LOUIS-CYRANO. J'ai peur.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Et donc ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Donc, je ne sais pas.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Que me dirais-tu si nous étions dans des situations complètement inverses ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Mais ce n'est pas…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. Que me dirais-tu si je devais mourir demain ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. Je te dirais que s'il reste un tout petit peu de lumière, il faut s'y accrocher.

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN. C'est quoi la lumière ?

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est ce qui fait que la vie vaut d'être vécue. C'est le plaisir, l'envie, l'amour…

ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN l'enlace. La voix de LOUIS-CYRANO se brise un peu.

LOUIS-CYRANO. C'est toi…

LOUIS-CYRANO embrasse ARTHUR-CHRISTIAN.

Noir.

SCENE 5 – MON PANACHE

Lumière. Tous les comédiens sont sur scène en train de se préparer à jouer la scène suivante quand soudainement JEAN-DE GUICHE entre sur scène d'un pas vif. Tous les regards se tournent vers lui.

LOUIS-CYRANO. Alors ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. 3 kg 8

Tous se précipitent vers lui en le félicitant. JEAN-DE GUICHE sort son téléphone.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Elle a de tout petits doigts, elle est… Elle est magnifique, et ses petits pieds sont tout… Petits… Elle est belle…

Il montre des photos. Tous font des « ohhh » et « elle est belle »…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Et Michelle ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Elle m'a beaucoup insulté mais elle est heureuse.

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Combien de temps du coup ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. 12h…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. Et le prénom alors ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Laetitia…

A l'annonce du prénom, MADELEINE-ROXANE fronce le nez mais sourit poliment.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. La joie…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. Bravo…

AMANDINE-LA DUEGNE. Tu crois qu'on peut appeler Michelle ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben essayez…

GABRIELLE-L'ASSISTANTE. On l'appelle ensemble.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Oui…

Tous sortent sauf JEAN-DE GUICHE, THEOPHILO-LE BRET, MADELEINE-ROXANE, RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU et LOUIS-CYRANO.

THEOPHILO-LE BRET. Et toi ça va ?

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ben c'est fou, je ne sais pas si je réalise…

MADELEINE-ROXANE. C'est trop beau...

Il montre une nouvelle photo.

JEAN-DE GUICHE. Ma fille…

LOUIS-CYRANO s'approchant pour regarder la photo, trébuche, et s'appuie sur JEAN-DE GUICHE.

RAPHAEL-RAGUENEAU. Ça va ?

LOUIS-CYRANO ne répond pas et s'effondre complètement soutenu par les autres. Cette fois-ci, LOUIS est redevenu CYRANO, il titube, on le soutient.

CYRANO.

Ne me soutenez pas ! Personne !

(Il va s'adosser à l'arbre)

Rien que l'arbre !
(Silence.)
Elle vient. Je me sens déjà botté de marbre,
Ganté de plomb !
(Il se raidit.)
Oh ! mais !… puisqu'elle est en chemin,
Je l'attendrai debout,
(Il tire l'épée.)
et l'épée à la main !
LE BRET.
Cyrano !

LOUIS-CYRANO va très mal, tous les comédiens autour de lui, telle une vague, l'entourent et le soutiennent à chaque fois qu'il perd l'équilibre.

ROXANE. (défaillante)
Cyrano !
CYRANO.
Je crois qu'elle regarde…
Qu'elle ose regarder mon nez, cette Camarde !
(Il lève son épée)
Que dites-vous ?… C'est inutile ?… Je le sais !
Mais on ne se bat pas dans l'espoir du succès !
Non ! non, c'est bien plus beau lorsque c'est inutile !
Qu'est-ce que c'est que tous ceux-là ! Vous êtes mille ?
Ah ! je vous reconnais, tous mes vieux ennemis !
Le Mensonge ?
(Il frappe de son épée le vide.)
Tiens, tiens ! Ha ! Ha ! les Compromis,
Les Préjugés, les Lâchetés !…

(Il frappe)
Que je pactise ?
Jamais, jamais ! -Ah ! te voilà, toi, la Sottise !
Je sais bien qu'à la fin vous me mettrez à bas ;
N'importe : je me bats ! je me bats ! je me bats !
(Il fait des moulinets immenses et s'arrête haletant).
Oui, vous m'arrachez tout, le laurier et la rose !
Arrachez ! Il y a malgré vous quelque chose
Que j'emporte, et ce soir, quand j'entrerai chez Dieu,
Mon salut balaiera largement le seuil bleu,
Quelque chose que sans un pli, sans une tache,
J'emporte malgré vous,
(Il s'élance l'épée haute.)
et c'est…
(L'épée s'échappe de ses mains, il chancelle, tombe dans les bras de Le Bret et de Ragueneau)
ROXANE. (se penchant sur lui et lui baisant le front)
C'est ?…

LOUIS-CYRANO est inconscient. Tous le retiennent, le soutiennent, l'entourent… Ils ne sont plus qu'un corps.

Noir.

FIN

The Body, the Dance, and the Voice: Asserting the Celtic Identity in Contemporary Irish Drama

Sophia Mallek

Abstract: Throughout the nineteenth century the Irish body was excluded, distorted, deprived of its organic, plastic, verbal, and linguistic function onstage and offstage. Contemporary Irish drama seeks to stage the spectacle of this infected, tormented, and famished Irish flesh which internalized physical and historical stigmas that have been transposed into types and stereotypes onstage. Contemporary Irish drama tries to reinvent and reconquer this corporeal identity to make it a postmodern and postcolonial Celtic body: a body given new status revalorized through a katabatic process, through an ontological and bodily experience based on the ritual. By integrating the choreographic body inherited from druidic dances, Contemporary Irish drama reinvents an identity for the Irish stage and anchors it into its contemporaneity. From a theatre of inertia to a physical theatre, contemporary Irish drama stages the revenge of a postcolonial and even a decolonial Gaelic body that hankers after words.

Résumé : Tout au long du dix-neuvième siècle, le corps irlandais s'est vu exclu, tordu, dépouillé tant de sa fonction organique que verbale et linguistique sur scène et hors scène. Le théâtre irlandais contemporain cherche précisément à mettre en scène le spectacle de cette chair irlandaise infectée, tourmentée, affamée et qui a intériorisé ces stigmates physiques sous la forme de types et de stéréotypes scéniques. La scène théâtrale irlandaise contemporaine réinvente et reconquiert cette identité corporelle pour en faire un corps postmoderne et postcolonial celtique, c'est-à-dire un corps revalorisé à travers le processus catabatique, à travers l'expérience ontologique et charnelle du rite. L'intégration d'un corps chorégraphique permet à ce nouveau théâtre de se réinventer une identité scénique et d'intégrer le corps dans sa contemporanéité. D'un théâtre de l'inertie à un théâtre physique, le théâtre contemporain cherche à mettre en scène la revanche d'un corps postcolonial et décolonial gaélique animé d'une soif de mots.

Keywords: Corporeity, contemporary drama, performativity, Irishness

Mots-clés : Corporéité, théâtre contemporain, performativité, Irlandicité

The body haunts Irish history and the Irish stage. From the Great Famine to the British colonization to The Troubles, Ireland has always been concerned with the body whether it be a political, an organic or a cultural and linguistic body. The Irish body has been feared. It is indeed a threat because it encapsulates the very essence of Irish identity and history. Through the body, Irishness can be experienced as a new form of nonverbal expression and can be a medium to reappropriate words and a language that Irish people have been deprived of. Through physicality and, especially choreography, Irish contemporary dramatists are given a chance to transcend the somatic and traumatic Irish body to create a postcolonial and even decolonial dramatic body. Irishness could finally be voiced through these dramatized bodies which release corporeal memories.

Throughout centuries, the Irish body has been the epicenter of an obsession, of a control. British tried to twist those political bodies, History tried to starve those bodies, a powerful Clergy wanted to imprison bodies, a nationalistic political organization tried to use these bodies to mold them into what seemed to be the illusion of "Celticity." In this regard, the Irish body has never been considered for itself, and thus has been deprived of two of its main characteristics: performativity and theatricality. Indeed, the Irish body is inherently dramatic, because it crystallizes the somatic memories of a national and traumatic tragedy, of a painful individual and ontological corporeal enucleation. The flesh internalized the trauma and turned the body into a living memorial. For those reasons, the bodies on the Irish stage need to be taken into consideration and Irish contemporary drama needs to be regarded as a physical theater: a theater of the body.

Centuries of British repression have not only tortured the Irish bodies from a political viewpoint, but also from an artistic perspective. Onstage, the Irish body has been turned into a type and even a stereotype. Progressively that stereotype started to be taken as a reality to the point of estranging Irish people to their own body. Theater allows re-presentation, that is to say the projection of an identity onstage. Re-presentation is necessary to be aware of one's own identity. But the dramatic representation of Irish onstage throughout British colonization mirrored an inverted and grotesque reflect. As a consequence, 19th century Irish dramatists decided to obliterate corporeity to the advantage of orality. The staged Irish body was reduced to a mouth, to performativity only, that is to say that the Word remained a word and never fulfilled its injunctive power. Indeed, performativity refers originally to the divine injunction, to the very passage from a verbal state to an incarnated state. The Word is turned into an action: performativity transmutes into performance. The body translates, through body lines, through motions, through plasticity, what the words cannot express. Body is not only an embodied vehicle for the words: it is a dramatic entity.

Therefore, considering Irish history and Irish theatrical historiography, it is merely impossible to neglect the body onstage. Irishness and Celticity are based on vitality, on the performative and choreographic body. Irish contemporary drama challenges the traditional model by investing the language and the capacities of those bodies, and by staging the very spectacle of a contemporary Irishness resisting immobility. Through performance, Irish contemporary theater dramatizes a katabatic diving into a mythical Ireland based on the ritualistic and druidic body. From line dances to *Riverdance* to posthuman productions, Irish physical drama tries to reintegrate corporeity into the stage. Through the study of those different portraits of the Irish bodies and through the introduction of physicality, I will show that Irish contemporary drama returns to its theatrical and ancestral origin, and that performance reinvents Irishness into its contemporaneity. In *the Great Hunger* (1983) by Tom MacIntyre, Irish bodies onstage not only tell the story of the Great Famine, but the story of a physical, sensual,

and corporeal body that has been smothered by a powerful Clergy. In Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), dance and performance are used to stage an electric *catabasis* to the world of the ancient Celts liberating female repressed bodies. In *Carthaginians* (1996), Franck McGuinness plays with transgressive identities and explores the corporeal limits through the story of the wounds left by The Troubles. In *Disco Pigs* (1997), Enda Walsh reasserts vitality through kinesics and asserts the rise of post-modern Irish identities, whereas McPherson's *The Weir* (1998) stages the quest of Irish specters hungry for embodied words. Eventually, Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) allows us to understand the arbitrariness of a traumatic postcolonial language and the importance for Irish contemporary drama to deal with taboos and ontological questions placing the individual at the center of Ireland's new challenges.

First, Irish traditional theater is based on a phenomenon of fragmentation between the *logos* and the body. According to that paradigm, the body is considered as secondary, whereas speech is regarded as the verbal embodiment of intellectual literariness. Throughout centuries of British colonization, Irish have been considered as uncultured, and uncivilized Hibernians. Onstage, Irish bodies were represented through the prism of animality. Hence the emergence of theatrical stereotypes such as the drunken, gesticulating *Paddy,* known as the stage Irishman "dancing about the stage in an expletive manner and in indulging in ridiculous capers and extravagancies of gesture" (Boucicault in Hogan 81). This caricatural representation of the Irish body convinced Irish 19th century dramatists to reject corporeality. In the *Irish Literary Theatre* manifesto, Lady Gregory says that the "[Celtic Theatre] will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism" (9). Thus, the choice of erasing the body from the stage was considered as a way to emancipate from this demeaning image created by the colonizer. Therefore, Irish actors started to discipline their bodies to erase this "ludicrous" physicality. They confined themselves in a limited scenography, topographically expressed in domestic places such as the kitchen, the pub or even the cemetery,

and dramatically "reinforced by confining the actors within a box-set that varied little from one rural play to the next" (Morash 187). By constructing space and stage limitations, Irish traditional theater contributed to the dramatic oppression of the Irish female bodies reduced to petrified allegorical images. As noticed by Pilkington, in the Irish traditional drama "the bodies of the actresses appeared like statues" (in Lecossois and Hopes 87). Those female domesticated bodies became votives. *The Great Hunger* rewrites this traditional dramatization or rather anti-dramatization of Irish maternal bodies, especially through the sacred icon of the mother. Maguire's mother is turned into the "MOTHER-effigy" (*TGH*: 15).[1] The personal and individual mother has become a collective, national immobile image. The contemporary corpus under scrutiny ingeniously reminds the audience of this tradition in order to show that this frozen conception is no longer valid.

However, this physical and mental subjugation of the bodies onstage chimes with a traumatic relationship of the Irish with their bodies caused by the stigmas etched on the flesh. The image of a "shameful" Irish body is not only nourished by the English colonizer, but also by the Irish Catholic Clergy and nationalistic political organizations. In the 1930s Irish bodies, especially dancing bodies, started to be regarded and treated as a threat. Irish bodies were socially regulated. The *Public Dance Hall Act* of 1935 forbade Irish people to dance in other places than those imposed by the Irish Church and the *Gaelic League* (Brennan 10). Thus, Irish people internalized this vision of a reprehensible and immoral dancing and moving body to the point of producing what Fintan O'Toole describes as the "fear of the flesh" (20). Irish stages were contaminated by this phobia of sensuality, of physicality, of Celticity. Irish people started to reject their own body, to see it as a Kristevian abject object (Kristeva 230). They understood their bodies as it was described by the Church: as an object of guilt. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, set in the 1930s, Kate's reaction over her sisters' dancing shows how much this vision of a contaminated and corrupted body pervaded the Irish mindset and dramatic stage. She declares about the Lughnasa festival and dancing that they threat the morality of "their Christian home" (*DAL*: 17).[2] Friel shows that these

dancing female bodies are dangerous because they can unshackle an ancestral and ritualistic power maintained in the body and repressed by society. Contemporary plays highlight this domination of religious and political institutions to show how this vision penetrated the Irish psyche, but also hindered Irish theater to evolve and to become a balanced theater characterized by the combination of kinesics and the verbal expression of a vernacular identity. This invention of a theatrical tradition captures the dramatic, thematic, and scenic dysfunctionality that pervaded 19th century Irish stages. Evacuating the body from the stage is intrinsically antidramatic and a contradiction of a Celtic identity centered on movement. I tried to demonstrate that the body encapsulates this history of reject; it contains the story of a misunderstood and distorted body. That is the reason why the body is essential in the contemporary stage because it enables, through the spectacle of its muscles, its lines, its scars, to bequeath a national memory and to keep it alive through the perpetuality of body movements. Irish bodies onstage could also graphically and visually epicize the body material and the story of Irish drama by other means than through verbal language.

Therefore, the bodies onstage need to be reconsidered as the material extension of the voice and not as physical and dramatic hurdles. Irish contemporary drama tries to recompose this lost harmony through the staging of the spectacle of a living and talking body, thus creating the organic language of a performative body and identity. Indeed, contemporary drama tries to reassert the Irish bodies by showing how much damage this contranatural theatrical tradition did to the bodies. Irish bodies are totemically linked to movement. As posited by the director of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance of Limerick's University, Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, the Irish traditional rural world implies "a lot of kicking and lepping and digging-in-going on [refering to]—the part of dance which is actually linked into the soil" (in Mulrooney 230). Irish identity is based on that rustic, active, and dancing gesture. Therefore, this negation and even denegation of corporeity contributed to the staging of dysfunctional and pathological bodies. In *Disco Pigs* and *On Raftery's Hill*,[3] bodies are imprisoned in

incestuous, dysfunctional, violent, and abusive relationships to their own bodies. Red wants his daughter to stay inside the family nucleus, and by doing so the play stages the obliteration of Sorrel's female voice and body symbolized by the "*blackout*" (*ORH*: 36). Her disappearance is counterbalanced by Runt's victory in Walsh's play. The ending monologue of the play contributes to Pig's male locutionary disappearance and to the destruction of his physical presence onstage: "Light slowly fades down on PIG until out" (*DP*: 29). Contemporary plays multiply these scenes of death and mourning bodies. *The Weir*'s characters tell individual stories about a loss. Valerie lost her daughter, Niamh, and tries to recompose her presence through the weir, standing as a metaphor for the umbilical cord (Harris 15). McGuinness's Creggan graveyard is filled with mourning people. Those staged deaths and the persistence of this pattern reveal the pervasiveness of specters, of revenants on the Irish stage. These phantoms want to be embodied to tell their story and this ballet of shadows hampers those mourning people to move on. It can be interpreted as the difficult process of mourning that Irish contemporary drama is experiencing. The resurrection of Irish drama could only be possible through the reinvention of a new dramatic language. Words have proven to be unsatisfying. Irish contemporary theater needs to explore a new language to finally give a chance to these voices of the past to reintegrate the present. Kiberd declares that Irish contemporary drama tries to "reconnect [the Irish] theatre of the word with those experienced buried deep in th[e] bodies" (in Mulrooney xiv). Indeed, contemporary drama tries to re-semantize the trauma to give it a new meaning. *ORH* and *DP* play with the intricacies of language creating soundscapes and musicality coming out from the mouth. The mouth is eminently symbolical. It does stand as an organic, synecdochical embodiment of the voice. Through the mouth, contemporary dramatists stage an intermediary preverbal and almost prelapsarian language. Then, the animality serves another purpose; it is reinvested by the dramatists to create a contemporary language. For instance, Walsh manages to create a porcine decolonial language. He reappropriates the animalistic stereotypes of the pig used during colonization to distort it and

to create a primitive phatic language which turns into a conventional contemporary language. The stage direction specifies that Pig "oinks" (*DP*: 18). By playing with language, with words, the dramatists try to challenge the arbitrariness of language creating an infra-language, a minor language mocking and mimicking the colonizer's language (Bhabba 126).

Moreover, the invention or rather reinvention of a new language also partakes in reappropriating an Irish folklore. The reuse of folklore in contemporary plays builds a textual and intertextual Irish corpus turning the text into an Irish bodily palimpsest, where ancestral stories are rewritten in the flesh. This return to mythical Celtic origins enables the re-membering of the fragmented Irish bodies. Irish drama delves into the origins of theater by modifying and reinventing the national tragedy. By doing so, Irish contemporary drama manages to stage the "re-vigoration of tradition, a cross-cultural absorption and adaptation of form, content and context, and an attempt to interrogate the present by appropriation" (Jordan xvii).

Eventually, this return to the origin and this transcendence of tradition, and of language lead to the creation of a kinesics allowing new Irish dramatists to emancipate from a model and producing a phenomenon of deterritorialization, which helps Irish identities to be reconnected to their Irishness through the medium of otherness. By doing so, Irish contemporary drama anchors Irish bodies into a post-modern contemporaneity since Irish identity is plural and enriched by exogenic influences. This otherness is materialized in the meeting with other cultures which are part of Ireland's new generation. And this otherness is dramatically expressed through music and dance, such as in *DAL*. Indeed, contemporary plays stage dancing bodies, which are reminiscent of Celtic druidic bodies, in order to untie Irish bodies, especially female bodies. Indeed, the liberation is ensured by a process of transformation and circulation of those contemporary bodies. The energetic, violent, and frenzied choreographic performance enables to overcome the deadlock the Irish traditional drama is left in. *DP* is the most brilliant example to portray this bodily ultraviolence which

translates the uneasiness of the new generation to cope with a traumatic and troubled past. Dance and music appear as a way to overcome those outdated concerns and to enter contemporariness, which is characterized by globalization. Thus, references to a contemporary consumerist culture nourished by foreign inspirations are reinforced. For instance, Pig and Runt are watching the American TV show *Baywatch*, whereas the Mundy sisters dance on a jazz music by Ben Selvin derived from Caribbean and African American influences (*DP*: 36). This new Irish drama deals with individual and transnational trajectories disclosed in dancing. Dance symbolizes the temptation of otherness which allows to uncover Irishness. In *DAL,* the references to African music and religious ceremonies introduced by Father Jack are a way for the Mundy sisters to return to their Celtic, collective, and national identity. It triggers, through a chthonian dancing rhythm, the apparition of the ancient Celts' spirits. The mediation with African dancing culture facilitates the understanding of Irishness and unfetters the Celtic druidic choreographic origin through the staging of the sisters' frenetic dance. Eventually, these intercultural exchanges, which happen in dancing, are perpetuated in contemporary Irish productions through intermediality. Indeed, contemporary drama re-locates the body to create what I call "extra-bodies." By transgressing aesthetic, physical, and scenographic limits the new Irish physical theater creates another form of graphic visuality which disqualifies the *logos*. This new language deconstructs binaries by dematerializing the body and by playing with its lines and possibilities.

The decorporized humanity will be a new challenge for the Irish physical theater to represent Irish contemporary bodies under a new form: a disturbing, but a truthful form as experimented by physical theater companies such as the *Operating Theatre*. The Irish dramatic body yearns for renewal and reinvention. Irish contemporary drama gives a possibility to those bodies to escape from their own limits and empowers them to find a balance between an ancestral Celtic origin and a modernity turned towards new dramatic practices. The Irish contemporary stage is now ready for this revolution of the body that will hopefully change the vision of the body in contemporary Ireland.

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1 MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* is referred to as *TGH* throughout this article.

2 Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* is referred to as *DAL* throughout this article.

3 Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* is referred to as *ORH* throughout this article, Walsh's *Disco Pigs* as *DP*.