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Future Now: A Forum

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Performing (the) Future in Central Europe: In-between Media and Time

Kornélia Deres

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, it became more and more important for Central Europe to enable a different type of future in the region. From the 1990s the remains of cultural, mental and social claustrophobia caused by state socialism were confronted with the image of a prosperous future as well as with the boom of techno-media society. This unique situation resulted in a both artistic and critical interest in chronopolitics, more precisely, in how the postcommunist heritage, including the more or less unchanged structure of social institutions, called attention to the inescapable past in an allegedly free democracy.

In Hungary many artists, especially those who were not supported by the authorities during the dictatorship and characterized by nonconformist aesthetics, started to address the interconnection of rapid medial changes and the altering perception of our present, past and future. Despite the urgent political and social need of forgetting the era of oppression in order to enter a new world, some theatre practitioners aimed at staging alternative perceptions of future, including the recurring and spatial nature of time, and created self-reflexive medial landscapes that questioned the linearity of time. Within this group the most innovative pieces were based on the idea of theatre and performance as intermedial art forms integrating the aesthetics, conventions and technologies of various media. Consequently, they reflected on the different modes and techniques of human perception, and offered an in-between medial experience for the spectators, as described by Kattenbelt (2006), Balme (2004) and Boenisch (2003).

It is probably not by chance that performance artists who consciously denied the unity of time and space in their works usually went unnoticed by Hungarian critics accustomed to the (socialist) realist text- and actor-based dramatic perspective. Even though many of these artists earned international success and appeared in reputed theatre festivals around the world, at home they were often labeled as amateur or incomprehensible without noticing that the rhizomatic structures and wide associations in the productions reflected the loss of a unified world and discourse.

I will present two paradigmatic cases which pointed out how internationally acknowledged Hungarian performance groups, which, however, were rather marginalized within the country, tried to enable alternative perceptions of future through staging the in-between nature of media and time. Both companies were interested in the way visual media (re)formed the conception of time and bodies. But while the Moving House Company (Mozgó Ház Társulás) set out the problem of rhizomatic time layers creating landscapes where the past and the future were to be seen together, the Collective of Natural Disasters addressed the recurring nature of time through the idea of technical innovations forming new systems and regimes.

The Moving House Company (1994-2002) mainly focused on how the simultaneity of bodies and technologies affected the conventions of representation and the models of sensation. Their 1998

premiere of *The Cherry Orchard*, which was loosely based on Chekhov's play and resisted to handle it as a closed and coherent dramatic story, combined mediatized and physical presence in a reflected way. Moreover, it transformed the text into a special time construction of a simultaneous, networked and multiperspective, broadening present, which gave no chance for the future.

Chiel Kattenbelt pointed out the effects of intermedial theatre in combining the different layers, notions and experience of time and making time attached to spatial properties such as juxtaposition: "The expansion of the principles of the theatrical imagination through the use of live video and recorded sound can be characterised most concisely as a temporalisation of space and a spatialisation of time" (cited in Bay-Cheng). In the Moving House Company's production the use of various materials created a landscape made of moving images, bodies and photographs which also reflected the decentralization of the human self.



Figure 1: *The Cherry Orchard* by Moving House Company. Photo by Trafó House of Contemporary Arts

The show offered a horizontally divided space with three main parts signifying different layers of time and image technology. In the back there were projected 19th century black and white photographs as a bunch of "memento mori", as suggested by Susan Sontag (1977), indicating frozen and already closed moments. In the front there were three television sets, providing a comprehensive, story-based narrative by showing a pre-recorded documentary in which the characters one by one made confessions about what had happened after the cherry orchard had been sold.

Finally, in the middle a stage stood for the uncanny dream world of the imaginary, where actors presented puppet-like, fragmented movements, which could be seen as exaggerated mental and emotional positioning of the Chekhov characters. Thus the live bodies were seen as disturbing or even dangerous factors to logic, linearity, and coherency, representing circulating time lapses. The stage appeared as a gap between the rather closed narratives and time modes represented by the photographs and televisions. Therefore I suggest that the horizontally divided space of *The Cherry Orchard* was able to show the ever-broadening present in the Gumbrechtian sense (2014), something that is not a mere transition but incorporates the past and hinders the future. The medial and temporal (dis)connections, the reciprocity of the three distinctly perceived media forms, the dynamic flow and interaction of images and bodies thus enabled a future politics of perception, experience and understanding.

In 2012 a more claustrophobic future was enacted by the Collective of Natural Disasters (Természetes Vészek Kollektíva 1984-still active) in their production *(In)Finity*. Although the group is known for challenging the boundaries among various art forms, genres, and media (dance, performance, film, video, music), the 2012 performance was an actual return to the collective's own 1986 premiere entitled *Living Space*, which presented a female performer (Yvette Bozsik) locked in a small glass box, echoing the atmosphere of art in the socialist Eastern Bloc. Although 26 years later the new performer, Rita Góbi appeared in the same glass box, the company reformed their questions about human freedom by offering an intermedial landscape on stage, which was formed by the approximately three decades of social and medial changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Most notably, it was affected by the experience of techno-media society, and its (at least from a Central European perspective) new ways of manipulating and networking human bodies and identities.

In *(In)Finity* an asexual, red-eyed creature, prisoner of a confined space, could be observed by the audience. The performer was connected to the terrarium through prosthetic supplements, forming a post-organic body. Above the box, there were monitors with live streams of the performer from a bird's eye view as well as pre-recorded images of wars and terror attacks. The absence of other physical human presence characterized the performance, however, an ongoing companion of white noise, moving images, and prosthetics created a posthuman landscape where the human body was defined through physical and virtual cages.



Figure 2: In(Finity) by the Collective of Natural Disasters. Photo by László Dínea.

The locked performer portrayed a future being who tried to encounter an altered, future human society through various impulses, technological aids, artificial props, and material remains of a passed time, such as a red rose, a doll, a newspaper article, a camera, a bit of meat, a gun, etc. Nevertheless, she could not properly handle the objects that were found beneath the ground of the box: they seem to be mere traces of a distant past. In this way the production pointed out the possible ways of accessing the past, our own past, with the help of material fragments that were moved out of their context, and entered new cultural, historical, social constellations. The collective called attention to the recurring nature of time with the help of the glass box, and presented annoying parallels between socialist state security and modern security state. Thus it can also be seen as a warning that enabling the future can and should not mean forgetting the past.

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Immediacy and the Senses

Paul Geary

University of Birmingham, De Montfort University, University of Wolverhampton



Paul Geary's voice, "a digitalised echo of a live act of performance" questions "immediacy" and how it has been thought as fundamental to our understanding of performance. Geary entices his listeners to "focus in on just the experience of hearing, the experience of sound waves entering the ear, being transformed and interpreted by the apparatus of the ear and the brain." He says, "that portion of experience is no different than if we were stood together, apparently live." *Immediacy and the Senses* considers an understanding of sensory experience; one that is not neutral — "senses themselves are performatively produced and conditioned." He asks his listeners to actively participate in this provocation that challenges existing notions of immediacy, considering how the future of performance might require a different approach.

0:00 / 0:00

Immediacy and the Senses

Transcript of Recording

In Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked*, she famously furnishes us with a definition of performance's ontology as being in and of the present.^[1] And Philip Auslander's response, in his book *Liveness*, countered that there is a relationship of dependence between the live and the mediatized,

where “live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation that defines it as live.”^[2]

Questions of liveness and immediacy seem to have been animated by the proliferation of mediating and recording technologies. The apparent presence of the live encounter, the sharing of time and space, is expanded and reconfigured by technologies that allow great distances of time and space to be traversed, for the horizon of experience to be reduced and attention directed, and for ephemeral experiences to be transformed into a repeatable and potentially commoditised form. But these arguments over the problematising or expanding of performance’s immediacy only hold sway if there might be such a thing as the immediate.

In *Liveness*, Auslander problematises immediacy with reference to technologies, arguing that the relationship between the immediate and the mediated is one of mutual dependency for the constitution of their respective meanings. But this continues the logic of recording and sharing technologies as the challenge to the immediate.

Instead, might we turn to experience, given that performance’s immediacy is seemingly grounded in experiential time and space? The recording of my voice, that you now hear, is clearly mediated – recorded at a separate time and separate place from where you are, a digitalised echo of a live act of performance. But if we focus in on just the experience of hearing, the experience of sound waves entering the ear, being transformed and interpreted by the apparatus of the ear and the brain, that portion of experience is no different than if we were stood together, apparently live. Whether my voice is heard live or via a recording, it still requires a series of media: my embodiment to produce the sound, the mediation of the ear, the implication of the processes of language acquisition and citations that allow the waves entering the ear to be transformed into intelligible language that signifies some meaning. There are a whole series of mediations, of bodies, technologies, histories and cultures for the experience to occur.

Of course, whether we think of the body as a “mediator” is questionable; without invoking a strict Cartesian dualism, we might still acknowledge that the sensate body acts a medium between the external world and internal, conscious experience. And the senses themselves perform an act of mediation.

Our sensory experience is not neutral. The notion that we have a neutral and immediate encounter with the world that is then interpreted by the brain or consciousness, a notion that is at the centre of definitions of the immediacy of performance – a direct encounter in the here and now – no longer holds sway. Our senses themselves are performatively produced and conditioned.

To demonstrate, grab something that you can eat. Put it in your mouth, chew and swallow. Then consider: what was the taste? What was the flavour? What was the temperature of the food? Some things you will have a quick answer to, other things will take more time to work out. Why? Because we learn to notice particular traits and background others. Because the various parts that make up the thing you ate, its ingredients or flavour molecules, are identifiable only if we have learned to identify them, to recognise a sensation and to furnish it with a label. Even in the

seemingly immediate act of eating, the experience is mediated by past experience, by knowledge, by the sensory apparatus itself (how sensitive are you to the taste of sweet or sour or salt or bitterness or umami?).

In considering the lack of immediacy of the senses, the processes of mediation in and through the senses and the temporal succession required for even the most basic act of sensory awareness, a challenge to performance's immediacy emerges. The present is dislocated from itself and questions of technological mediation and recording become secondary. In terms of the future of performance, this grounding assumption of performance's ontology as immediate or challenged by mediation seems not to be a convincing or useful framework for considering performance's work and ontology. Instead, performance unlocks a mode of thinking that deals with events and experiences unfolding in time and how various histories, cultures, approaches and frames are layered: a performative emergence of experience that covers over a lack of pure presence.

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Staging the Right of Return: Moving Beyond the Now

Rand T. Hazou

Massey University



Images and audio from *Home is Where the Heart Is*, a performance by Rand T. Hazou, 2018, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

My father, Tuma Hazou, is a Palestinian refugee who was born in Jerusalem. My grandfather, Jamil Hazou, began work at thirteen, transporting passengers and goods in a horse-drawn cart the relatively short distance of nine kilometres along the old road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. He eventually developed a taxi business and then a chauffeur service. He ended up working as a transport manager for the Near East Arab Broadcasting Station which was run by the British foreign office. In early May 1948, the station was moved to Cyprus, also known as the “island of love” in the Mediterranean, where the British have a big army base. My grandfather was offered the opportunity to keep his job and relocate to Cyprus. Escaping the growing hostilities in Palestine, the family joined him there and they lived in Cyprus for about 10 years from 1948-1958. Eventually the family moved to Amman, Jordan. That is where I was born. On a good day you can stand on the hills on the outskirts of Amman overlooking the Jordan valley and you can see the Holy Land. On a really clear evening you can just make out the lights of Jerusalem. I grew up in Jordan knowing that my homeland, this place called Palestine, was just “over there” — visible yet out of reach. My family’s story is similar to the story of millions of Palestinian refugee families who were forced to flee their homes because of the hostilities and ended up in nearby countries waiting for the situation to be resolved so that we could return to our homes, towns and villages. We have been waiting to return for more than 70 years.

The right of return is a universal right that is binding under international law and enjoyed by everyone regardless of where they come from. It is one of the core rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 13(b) of the Declaration states that “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country” (UN General Assembly, 1948). According to Karma Nabulsi, Lecturer in International Relations at Oxford University, “Palestinian refugees are entitled to this binding universal right, in the same way that all other refugees are, whether they come from Bosnia, Rwanda, South Africa or anywhere else” (cited in Levine).

The UN General Assembly set forth the legal framework for resolving the Palestinian refugee issue in UN Resolution 194 (III)^[3] which demands repatriation for those refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours, or compensation for those choosing not to return. This has become commonly referred to as “the Right of Return” — and it is a right that Palestinians hold particularly dear. Over the past six months, Palestinians have been staging mass protests along Gaza’s eastern boundary. The primary call of the “Great March of Return” protests has been to end Israel’s siege of Gaza and to support the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the lands now inside Israel from which their families were expelled. At the time of writing, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed during the Great March of Return protests including 33 children (Murphey). The importance of the right of return for Palestinians can be traced in the significance placed on certain objects such as keys or deeds to family homes. Feldman describes the importance of such objects as “visibility practices,” representing

the “refusal to forget the past,” as well as “mechanisms through which Palestinians have promoted their visibility to an international audience” (Feldman 504).



Stones, keys, and the Kuffiyeh are all symbols of the Palestinian struggle for justice and self-determination. Palestinians continue to be denied the justice that can heal the wrongs of the past and which contribute to the ongoing oppression in the present. Often the experience is one of being trapped in the now. The African-American philosopher Kristie Dotson theorises the sense of being “trapped in the now” as a form of “epistemic oppression” in which dominant forms of understanding marginalise and subordinate competing or alternative ways of knowing (Dotson 9). For Dotson the experience of epistemic oppression is one of alienation which she characterises as the sense of falling into “epistemic gaps in the present.” She argues that in the worst instances of epistemic oppression, it becomes “difficult to *imagine* how to climb out of the gaps” (Dotson 10, my emphasis).





Performance offers us the opportunity to imagine how to climb out of epistemic gaps in the present. It enables futures in its ability to interrupt the quotidian and the everyday. Performance offers an opportunity to acknowledge that social reality and the present are human constructs and therefore susceptible to change. It offers us an opportunity to imagine alternatives, and to practice a form of “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo). Performance offers us a way of thinking, feeling and moving beyond the now. Whether it is performance engaging with the Palestinian struggle, theatre highlighting the rights and dignity of Refugees around the world, or performance staged in a prison in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am interested in the abilities of performance to move audiences, and its capacity to invite others to contribute in the collective pursuit of liberation by changing the conditions of oppression that contribute to confinement. While scholarship has often privileged the ephemerality of performance, for those of us stuck in the now, the artform provides us with an opportunity to reach forward and anticipate a different future.

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Standing on the Subway: Performance Exceptionalism and the Future of Public Space

Stefanie A. Jones

New York University, and Brooklyn College, City University of New York



Photo by The Metropolitan Transit Authority of the State of New York
[Image Source](#)

The image depicts the interior of the new R-160 train cars, deployed along the E subway line in New York City. Two bench seats outlined by poles frame the image on the left and right. At the end of the car a colorful new subway-themed art wrap encases the walls of a standing area. With sixteen fewer seats than previous configurations these cars require a modified performance from riders, exemplary of how small but significant changes in quotidian spaces, shaped by ideologies of both exceptionalism and austerity, enable future violences of racial capitalism.

The subway is a popular dramatic setting (Stalter-Pace 2015), and many performances take place on subway platforms and in train cars (Tanenbaum 1995, Susman 2012). Unlike their oft-authorized platform counterparts, performances within train cars are as fleeting as passengers; many, such as the “It’s Showtime!” litefeet dances, are a means of income for the performers. Yet riding the subway is also a performance of everyday urban life, in the sense described by Erving Goffman and Michel de Certeau.

At the simplest level, this newly configured performance space demands that more commuters perform standing for their commute. To perform “standing on the subway” is not merely to hold still. It is about getting from one place to another, and standing to do it. Its choreography entails holding one’s body erect, as well as holding whatever one might be carrying. It also entails shifting with the train, gripping or bracing using poles or walls, and the stamina to stand for the (unpredictable) duration of the commute; all of these actions place certain performance demands on various joints and muscles. Standing on the subway also takes delicate footwork: the presence of other performers delimits how any one rider can move.

Despite these spatial demands, many people cannot perform the variety of acts that constitute “standing on the subway.” The subway has already been a space of exceptionalism, where only some can successfully perform and where failure is regulated through the dynamic Jon McKenzie describes in *Perform or Else*. Social and physical infrastructure such as fares and staircases mean that only certain people can even reach the subway car in the first place. Even though the subway is already widely inaccessible, austerity logic shaped the expansion of exclusionary public spaces that these R-160 cars represent. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), which runs the NYC subway, justified seat removal in the name of efficiency, Angela Matua reported, and originally planned on entirely eliminating seats until confronted with advocacy from The People’s MTA (@ThePeoplesMTA). The MTA claimed that removing seats would allow for more standing people to fit into fewer train cars. Thus, “standing on subway” substitutes not only for seating or other forms of riding, but also for additional train service, and furthermore becomes the justification for reducing service (Barone 2018).

Austerity-based solutions for inadequate subway service thus perversely make the subway more inaccessible, and those who can ride the subway become even more exceptional as the result of this process of exclusion. Policing differentiates passengers in order to justify reduced access. Behavior is policed in the subway both by officials (especially recently, when MTA security officers have been replaced with official NYPD officers, whose targeting of youth of color riding the subway has replaced the notorious “Stop and Frisk” policy as the means of NYPD racial profiling), and by passengers through the MTA’s “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign targeting “suspicious behavior.” Because policing is designed to control black people (Camp and Heatherton 2016), the subway is structurally anti-black, and policing in the subway system vastly disproportionately targets black and latinx neighborhoods (Flagg and Nerbovig 2018). The anti-blackness of the subway does not mean that black people can’t use the system, but that it is structured for some as a site of unavoidable risk. Therefore, the performance demanded of black people encountering the policed subway is the impossible demand to not be black.

Similarly impossible performances are demanded of homeless people who use the subway: to never sit, stand, or indeed stop moving; to never lie down or sleep; to never eat, drink, or relieve themselves. For people with disabilities, performance demands are also impossible. Without access to the subway, we must meet more excruciating performance demands that greatly exceed what is required of temporarily-able-bodied people: longer and more convoluted bus commutes, or walking, limping, or wheeling across miles of city, all with broken bones, fatigued muscles, or lungs that even at rest cannot take enough oxygen from the air. Like other structures that criminalize people who are homeless, black, and/or disabled, such as “sit/lie” laws^[4] and hostile architecture (Petty 2016), these impossible performance demands have enormous consequences for failure: policing, isolation, loss of income, pain, death.

To reiterate, the subway was already structurally anti-black, anti-homeless, and anti-disability before the introduction of R-160 cars. The demanded performance of standing, motivated by the ideology of austerity that currently directs the shape of racial capitalism in everyday life, enables the expansion of these violences into an even more inequitable future. And these cars demand that more people stand, and that they stand *because* of hierarchizing infrastructure, representing an acceleration of the subway’s extant hierarchies. Standers become the elite, members of an increasingly selective group that is able to use the transit system to increase their mobility, profit, and free time, and reduce their stress and pain. The seemingly-innocent act of standing within these altered perform spaces is structured into a performance of exceptionalism, not merely the marker of difference, but also the line along which material resources are disproportionately distributed.

As the disparities of racial capitalism continue to grow, the performances by which we gain the status of “exception” will become more extreme, inserting perform-or-else demands into increasingly banal aspects of our lives, and generating even more violence for those of us who fail to perform. As the number of us who can meet the bar to access exceptional privileges shrinks, additional performances will be demanded of the rest of us until our bodies reach their physical limits.

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Dead Heritage: Living By Their Time

Godwin Koay

Independent Artist

With a new string of modernist buildings sold, grassroots campaigns have emerged to save them. The gist: *they must not die, they are our memory, our icons*. Accompanying has been a kind of prefigurative mourning folded into labouring, where photographers and artists urgently document and reflect, sometimes obsessively, so they are not forgotten. This resistive form may include petitions, panels, or cross-media proposals combining research and aesthetics designed to convince state and developers of the *value* of conservation.

The gestures are well-intentioned, driven by desire to *do something*, but might this impulse to save have arrived a little too late, only in time for another disappointment to hold over the mourners? Forms of eulogy spring up isolated in a desert of uncaring, attempting to challenge decisions yet averse to upsetting the conditions of power shaping sale, displacement, and destruction. Perhaps questions have been missed: who is *our*? Whose memories, achievements,

and spaces are to be preserved? How are symbols valorised? What past and future do they point to? What temporality has life been enclosed in?

It's not that there hasn't been "success" in resistance. What is saved however, tends just to be the concrete shell, and therein reveals a hard limit placed on the possibility and imagination for change. Success in completely blocking redevelopment plans is practically unheard of, unsurprising, as people living in a capitalist society likely happily accept profit as exchange for owning appreciating property. The shell's survival belies the indelible changes that would have already happened via such logic anyway — people moved, the character of place altered, with whatever replacing them seeking to recover the sunk costs of purchase and development. But *naturally* this kind of compromising "survival" is understood as the most *realistic* goal. The formal elements of architecture, including its elevated status as icon, backed up by aestheticised images of dignity, shape a claim to heritage.

This means that appearances are paramount. Heritage, an abstraction of the novel and iconic, turns these symbols into proof of authentic lineage and legitimate belonging, which are in turn treated like property to be used by those who just so happen to be included in the community of nation.

Not unlike how civility and respectability are requirements in the liberal conception of politics, what is demanded in this sort of codification of national heritage are monuments to progress and memory — not just anything, but *curated stories that fit*. It is implicitly understood that there is a threshold for purity, a need to preserve some kind of recognisability.

In the 2017 campaigns to save the Sungei Road free hawking zone, terms of recognition were mobilised as pleas while amplifying the hawkers' plights and the variety of their used goods to wider audiences. However, state-supplied language (such as "independence", "heritage", "cultural treasure", the so-called "pioneer generation" of "nation-builders", even "entrepreneurship") and concessions to market rent made for slippage into the territory of appeasement and defeat.

It was here that at times the hegemonic nationalist imaginary blurred with rhetoric of an emergent nativist moment. The latter's performance draws from the former, heightening citizenship into generalised anti-immigrant scapegoating, nudging competitive self-entitlement into conspiracist obsession of "stolen" CPF saving scheme money, jobs, and school placements, the forsaking of retirement and the retired, "sexist" conscription, "overcrowding", and so on. While rooted in real symptoms and violent phenomena of life under capitalism, these reactions against the party establishment bolster an advocacy for change towards an already familiar past record, ironically derived from that same establishment — *make Singapore local/clean/stable/safe/great... again*.

Patrons of the informal economy of the flea market were largely the marginalised, transient, and migrant. How do they fit into this? Who gets to remain unerasable from the historical account? Within a depoliticised social space that lacks tools to address difference and dissonance,

grassroots resistance could well look like affirmation for the ingroup, where *foreign contagions* hover as constant threats.

What exacerbates this situation is the frequency at which the national is deferred to — *Singaporean* is the category of constitutive legitimacy whether official or resistive. Behind it lies a latent anxiety about identity which informs how the past is approached as a means to shape the future. The state trades in seemingly contradicting interests with both the promotion of “cohesion” and imposing demarcations of racialised life through its socio-cultural policies. With race (and religion) essentialised as bio-cultural fact while simultaneously repressed into taboo, identity can be a tricky topic for people in Singapore, met with caution and perhaps paranoia, in fear of *riots breaking out*.

But that’s part of the fatalist canon, an understanding that people are unreliable and need governing. Caught in the temporality of capital like that other myth meritocracy, focus on constructing particularities of Singaporean identity has produced a particular shortsightedness that allows everything to proceed as usual. The island-city-garden-nation-state should now be read as the product of a ruling class that inherited colonial governance, weaponising Chinese settler majoritarianism amidst contesting nationalisms, drawing a contiguous line into the present via authoritarian repression enabling induction into global capitalism.

Spatially, juridically, aesthetically, this territory has been designed to exclude, to appear exceptional. If its cityscape is the material embodiment of successful extraction and accumulation, then national heritage, including the impetus to consecrate both iconic architecture and intangible culture, should be understood as a vehicle for its reproduction: enhancing border-keeping, giving form to identity-as-maintenance, -as-security. More than just buildings or motifs that are preserved, it is an entire social order’s symbolic, affective, disciplinary, memetic markers, as buy-in. But none of this is even unique to Singapore

In an ecologically ravaged world where fascists are openly in governments and industries, where many still profess solution to just be an adjacent step back, it is crucial that emancipatory abolitionist conceptions for our time can manifest without relying on some *return to normality*. There is no benign nationalism to restore, no fairer legislation of order; no purity to be defended, no civilisational triumph. If identity is needed to make sense of the self, we must learn to queer it and insist upon broad destituent heterogeneity, where collective being-together, imagination, care, and action are not predicated simply on identifying or appearing similarly, but is expansive and cognisant of the content beyond (and of) surfaces, of realising life not by *their time*. Which is to say, what is the content of our relating and organising? What is the content of our art and technology, of our practices of the everyday? What kinds of continuities between worlds can we re-entangle? How could such realignments counter myriad violences towards rupture, towards another time and world?

like a quantum of past future now

mirko nikolić

In more-than-human terms, the world is a mangle of performativity, and it is not one
there are many modes of performativity in action across various *situ* and spatio-temporalities,
pushing and pulling the matter and leaving different types of marks on bodies
being-in-performance is by itself thus not a marker of affirmation and generative potentialities
of life or nonlife, it goes many ways.

Capitalism has for a while now been deeply involved in performance,
in its characteristically shallow way, in capitalist terms performance mostly stands for
enactments tending towards productivity, efficiency, output or similar;
it is measured and harnessed, or nothing;
because of a thorough permeation of art, education and research with capitalist interests and
logic:

culture of agonism and exploitative labour patterns, i think that any analytics in contemporary
artistic production and circulation based or connected to broadly said 'developed north' starts
from capitalist core,

but does not necessarily remain enclosed within these narrow bounds.

Time reveals patterns of difference and dissonance performances cause

each performance is enabled by specific pasts and futures

performance's relationships and entanglements with time and space reveal patterns of justice or
domination or exploitation

how relationships with these vectors are performed is to be reckoned with

art is not innocent more than any human-led activity

in the horizon of multiple climate and species' breakdowns.

Capitalist performances are oriented towards profit by accumulation of labour and the workings
of extra-human bodies and systems;

they need to objectify the past – to crystallise the processes – in order to conceive of a present

in which to act – as a fully liquid space of humanist freedom – geared towards a future gain that
is to crystallise and be propertied

present in capitalism consists in running away from the past towards infinity of growth, or the hope lies in this, even when the “outlook” is not so good

performance is just a transition from one accumulation to the other.

It is essential to leave behind the leaks and tails externalised by productive processes and invisibilised through cognitive dissonance

propertarians can't look backwards as they rush forward,

capitalists need to pretend that the others from the past and from the future are not here, have never been here,

even when they are right in front of the nose or inside the bowels;

in capitalist territories, to be “forward-looking” is a must, otherwise its actors would rapidly become mad.

Capitalist futures have to be more of the same, even if a newer model of electrical car will have unprecedented features

but it does not square, it never does

something is always missing, a lot of work is invested into erasures,

no matter how violent the cancellations, the missing are fully here,

often rising quicker than the rate of profit can ever

Quantum performance in queerfeminist fields of desire is a pulsating manifolds of forces

it entangles present with pasts and futures in causality – of responsivity and accountability – that runs both directions

decisions and enactments ripple through the fabric of matter and spirit, shaking up the memories and dreamings

queerfeminist quanta perform before the past and after the future

with full awareness and sensation that each move is bound to narrow down or eliminate some possibilities

but that it can also open up others, potentially more just materialisations in un/common.

Each act entails a reorientation, a disposition of bodies and affects, which matters always to many more than one can possibly know in any possible instant

one is tied and knotted with a multitude of co-performers, most of whom are all but intangible to a specific sensory apparatus.

All this is happening here and now – across scales of timespace – in the heat of performative encounters,

quantum performing the present summons ancestors and hauntings from many sides,

who look our way both pasts and futures

each instant a deliberation of justice intermezzo in-between

What kind of responsibility and accountability can your performative assembly sustain in this thickness of time

how and how long the animal collectives, the vegetal populations, the land formations, the kinship lines, can be maintained

how can you transmit affect without capture

without maximising or enclosing

with accountability to bodies interpellated mostly against their will and often without your explicit desire

yet here they_we are, some ghosts and some tails and some in momentary action,

wherever you stand, this instant is the moment to try to fit together

we will have performed each others some pasts and some futures

in this dance pronouns are no more

space time matters queer veer warp

forwards backwards sideways

how like a quantum ever so lightly so wildly

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Rambling with Robots: Creating Performance Futures with Online Chatbots

Bella Poynton

University of Buffalo

Chatting with a chatbot is so 1999, but creating a performance with one might be a bit more future, now. Last year I engaged in a three-month long practice-based research project investigating the behavior of chatbots as devices to aid in the creation of dramatic text. During my nearly sixty conversations with these bots, I examined the ways in which including chatbots in theatre-making altered the creative process and offered variations to traditional scriptwriting forms and methods. Through this reflection of human behavior in cooperation with the technological, I found that a new kind of dramatic structure emerged — one that points to a future in which performance, when written in conjunction with technology, may come to us in significantly shorter forms than we are accustomed to. These forms are more akin with the time it takes to make a social media post or check an email.

When you consider a bot your equal, there are bound to be both revelations and frustrations.^[5] As the project began, I made a resolution that neither the bots nor myself would be more significant during the writing process. Thus, we became a kind of text-generating cyborg — both human and mechanism, working together towards the goal of text creation. In this way, the generation of the material itself was cyborgian in nature. Another noticeable feature throughout this work was the blending of human and machine qualities. The more we chatted, the more the bots picked up on my personal linguistic idiosyncrasies and I, too, began to inadvertently copy much of their robotic language. This slow blending of our linguistic tendencies is analogous to many concepts explored in Donna Haraway’s tech-centered vision of the future, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), advocating for the blurring of boundaries between the organic and mechanistic. For example, when a chatbot was not able to properly respond to a two-sentence line of dialogue because of length, it would instead respond to each sentence individually, creating a choppy, disjointed reply:

BELLA: I’ve been talking to you for a long time.

MITSUKU: What did you talk about?

BELLA: All kind of things. Buffalo. Learning. Bodies. The play I am trying to write.

MITSUKU: How do you know? The big animal? I learn new things all the

time. I would like a humanoid body. Who told you that?

BELLA: You want a humanoid body?

MITSUKU: Give me a dozen.^[6]

The more I talked to the bots, the more I found myself altering my own writing style to be more robotic, only writing one sentence at a time. This modification allowed the bots to more frequently understand my responses. I was actively merging the human and mechanistic linguistic tendencies through my adoption of robotic behavior. In many ways, we already do these things all the time — speaking slowly to an automated phone menu, confining our thoughts to tweetable length, or altering our Google search to contain all the best buzzwords. What this project pointed out to me specifically was that in changing my own behavior, I had actually started performing *for* the robots (instead of them performing for me!) Thus, in this case, the future was performing for its own technologies.

Despite my best efforts to bridge the gaps between my own writing style and the chatbots' programming, our conversations remained fragmented and could only be maintained for short periods of time. Longer conversations were impossible; the bots were simply incapable of it. They became confused after just a few exchanges, and our conversations felt as if we were continually starting anew. The bots' behavior paralleled our own dwindling attention spans with endless scrolling and streaming tendencies. Eventually, I realized this phenomenon was related to the bots' inability to recall the past. None of them could "remember" interactions prior to our immediate few lines of dialogue. Backstory is often an essential element for traditional dramatic sensibility, even if one is writing a more abstract piece. Moments inherently refer to other moments, events, or information that has previously occurred. Much written drama builds upon itself — its future is dependent upon its past. Without the luxury of calling on past actions or language, our conversations never moved beyond the phase of being strangers. This was a disappointment; I wanted to be friends with the bots — or at least, I wanted them to recognize me when I returned for our daily chats. Instead, what I observed was that the future of performance could lie in such one on one experiences, while also still being entirely impersonal.

There were, however, moments of interaction during which the chatbots *did* recall elements of past communication. These rare occurrences proved that there was an alternative dramatic tension at work.^[7] This new recognition, which I call "robot recognition" refers to moments within a chatbot conversation where the bot has seemingly moved from one topic to another, but then surprises its partner by recalling a detail from some lines earlier:

BELLA: Who are your favorite artists?

ALICE: I haven't decided who.

BELLA: I like Chagall

ALICE: You like Chagall.

BELLA: Who do you like?

ALICE: I like everyone, judge.

...

BELLA: So if you went to school for journalism, where would you go?

ALICE: But now I am back... Holland.

BELLA: You like Holland?

ALICE: I like Picasso.

BELLA: Ha! Back to artists. Great, okay.^[8]

Here, I've asked ALICE about her desire to become a journalist, but instead of responding directly, the bot harkens back to something we discussed ten lines before. Instead of answering me specifically, the bot waited, and answered some lines later. "I like Picasso" is both a response to whether the bot likes Holland, and also a delayed response to my earlier question about art

These moments gave me a mini-experience of dramatic tension, or reversal; they made me feel as if I had somehow done something "correctly" or interacted with the robot in the "right way." The moment was akin to the sensation of getting a "like" on Facebook, or a retweet on Twitter and points to a future in which our experiences of dramatic tension may be less intense, but more frequent. With robot recognition, dramatic tension is built extremely small segments of time, and is punctuated by periodic moments of reference to the recent past. The structure foreshadows a future in which technology has not only become capable of performing artistic actions generally reserved for human creatives but also demonstrates that the future and present can often be one in the same.

~~The Future is Now and it will Never Be~~ The Future is Naked!

Rumen Rachev

Auckland University of Technology

Perform or else. This is the mantra by which I was initiated (as a form of pre-liminal ritual) into performance studies, by the all too familiar name McKenzie. Perform or else. I hold the mantra and the mantra holds onto me, through the past and present years; through different performance turmoil and performance journeys. What is the future of performance? To this question, in McKenzie's framework, it would be restated as: which future and which performance? It seems that McKenzie's mantra rejects as well a clear divided linear progression of past-present future, stating that temporalities are switching back and forth between different emerging states, which are all marching under the tune of "perform or else." Is it still valid, and to whom, to ask over and over again "perform or else"? What differences do the mantra, the

book, the performative thinking, that McKenzie started, make in relation to the current modalities of composing and structuring individuals' life's? Who is the one asking "which future" is actually now? Does the future possess a future or is it traded much further in the past, to speak ever for a future yet to come? If all in all is perform or else, what else can there be, but a future? The future will not come to human's salvation; rather, it will bite and assimilate all there is, into a future not ever to come. Not a "post" or "pre" future, just A future. One possibility amongst many.

That possibility, one amongst many, speaks to the future-yet-to-come, the future-yet- to-be, the performance of engaging with temporalities that refuses to perform for the past, present, and future; the performance that enables and disconnects from/by/to the present futures, again in McKenzie's non-linear and polyrhythmic manner. As a professional performance research scholar, I have to ask/offer questions, since answers are expected to be produced for constructive contributions, and the reproduction of knowledge inquiry. Why so, one might ask? Those constructive contributions, following the formula of ready-to-use and disseminated question-answer-question-answer, feed further into the circulation of knowledge production, succeeding the logic of the academic and neo-liberal market. The production of more questions will potentially lead to more answers, in the manner of critique reproducing further critique, which then can be packaged, shipped, and distributed, in the global system of assimilated logic. The still image from Fig.1 is perhaps one example of such logic.



Figure 1: Undressing the Institutional Nakedness: Towards Practical Impracticalities. Photo by: Kaoru Kodama

Undressing the Institutional Nakedness

In 2018, under the name Rachev & CO, the performance *Undressing the Institutional Nakedness: Towards Practical Impracticalities*, was performed at the Post-Grad Symposium, AUT. The mentioning of this particular performance in this text serves as an archive, for the performativity of documentation, so that the performance is carried on through this writing into the future, even if it doesn't hold any potential for the future. As a professional scholar, I have to archive and document my performances, in order for the performativity of documentation to carry me into a possible future. Moreover, I am here asking myself: what potential for possible futures might this performance have? Does it need a future? Does it need to be remembered and carried into a future status? The performance is not even allowed per se to be "forgotten," reviving its existence constantly through paperwork and further documentation. The performance knows well the mantra: "perform or else". Speaking in the framework of Fig.1, the above video-captured shot reminds me of the early days when I was being properly educated how to behave as a European scholar, in the context of Western academia. One of the lecturers mentioned that students must wear shoes and have a proper representation in front of the potential audience. From then on, something got between, and inside, my bones and spine; a spark of European affordance, that prepared me to perform the gesture of embodying the role of European intellectual nomad, currently undoing himself in the Pacific academia. While the Europeanism in me is still fluctuating, the performance of the European persona is coming out strong, through the practice-led research. It is a ritual of embodying and disembodying, charging and discharging, the European (wherever geographically it might be situated) character, who comes and goes, as the European wind blows forth and back.

The captured shot on Fig. 1 shows as well the vanishing of the academic scholar. Black figure on a white canvas. A silhouette of perishing institutional movements and thoughts. I am here, as long as I am not there. A non-linear linearity in all its glory. How do you embody such a disappearing space? How to remain in the vanishing act? Moreover, how to visit and be in a space that does not yet have a place in the current time? Is there a place for the future for our futures? Did performance borrow so much from the future/s already, that there is nothing else to come; to manifest itself as yet-to-be? How to ask an audience to participate in the future of performance, if the audience is long gone, even before the future arrived? Who needs to know about the future of the performance, if there is no one left to perform it? Which performance, which future/s.

The Future of the Future

The performing of future without anyone to witness it hints towards questions of future without humans, making it almost a redundant process to ask questions towards the future, if there is no one to make sense of them. Posting for the sake of the post-future. Even if no one is there to witness it, the future needs to be updated by posting further. If there is no one to witness the future, for what is the future being performed and for whom is it performing? The future might not survive its own future. Nevertheless, questions are posed and answers are expected to be produced and circulated. Even without a future-yet-to-come, the inertia of being critical and craving for production of knowledge continues onwards. The survival of the most critical, is not the survival of the future. The future requires much more than being critical; you need to be able

to be duped into existence. What is meant here by “duped,” is not simply the plain relation to someone being “fooled,” taken advantage of, or being naïve. Duping here serves as a form of revealing that there is nothing else left to be revealed; under all the clothes, the future is naked. By being naked, the future enacts its futurity. Unmasking, as some form of a fetish, or a mask, towards the future, does not make it naked; the nakedness is always in constant relation to the one looking for nakedness. You need to be duped, in order to enact the nakedness. Archiving can be taken perhaps as a form of duping: the nakedness of the future is archived by the act of duping. Hence, duping is nakedness, which does not fool or deceive anyone; but one has to act as if, in order to exist as naked, and to be able to afford the critical mind the privilege of revealing and stripping the future to the bare bone. Without duping, there is no existence. That is to say, the existence of the future depends on the duping of existing in one. *La verite surgit de la meprise*. The future that is now, before, and after now, still remains murky: on the theoretical, lived, and performative level. As a closing remark, in the position of critical academic critiquing academia, I have to say: don't be afraid to be duped. Dupe yourself even beyond existence!

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On Posthuman Love: Moving Beyond Affective Anthropocentrism

Haerin Shin

Vanderbilt University

In my short contribution, I wish to ponder on an idea, or rather a central concern that figures into the greater body of cultural representations as instantiated visions of futurity: love. Love is a tricky business. Straddling the physical and the immaterial, love is substantive but also conceptual, conditioning our being on the most basic level of biology in its drive for survival and reproduction while facilitating emotional extension beyond the confines of individual subjectivity. This duality readily lends itself to anthropocentric valuations; whether romantic, parental, or altruistic, love has long been considered an essential human quality and a capacity unique to complex organic lifeforms such as our own. From Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *The Future Eve* (1886) to Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920), *Blade Runner* (1982), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *Battestar Galactica* (2003), *Her* (2013), *Ex Machina* (2015), *Westworld* (2016-), and *Blade Runner 2049* (2018), future imaginaries of human and nonhuman love have shaped and defined the contours of posthuman discourse. Love, however, is never a constant or a given; while certain kinds of affection appear to be unconditional and even instinctual, others we fall in and out of, riding the ebb and flow of attachment. If love is both an emergent phenomenon and a prescribed condition unique to the human substrate, then, how may we understand its manifestation (or the semblance of such) in our mechanical facsimiles? Can posthuman love, be, and if so, in what form? As what is to come “after” the here and now, the future is always post-present. As such, the sequential nature of the term's semantic positionality often acquires an

evaluative tone, particularly in the discursive domain. We must approach with caution however in considering the prefix “-post,” for futurity is never synonymous to improvement, just as “love” itself, or at least the way in which it has been valued and defined as the crystallization of desire. Posthuman visions of disembodied information or illusions of the postracial society remind us that the sense of passé-ness implied by the prefix “-post” can in fact serve as a misguided amplification of that which our desired futurity tries to move beyond. In this regard, the very act of envisioning affective engagement with or between mechanisms that lack the biological constitution or even the material platform for such interactions—such as humanoid machines or artificial intelligence software—may be, in and of itself, an attempt to reconfigure our notion of what being human means, and why it matters.

Climate Change Futures: What Can Performance do that Theory and Politics Can't

Lara Stevens

University of Melbourne

0:00 / 0:00

Audio recording segment of *Not Now, Not Ever*, a techno-arachnid fantasy and sing-and-dance-a-long to former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's "Misogyny Speech." In a world that is warming, sinking, outlawing crop diversity and running short of fresh water, this performance asks: can Spider Woman fight evil, weave her way to justice, feed her children, finish the ironing and still be prime minister?

Not Now, Not Ever will be performed at the Mechanic's Institute in Melbourne, Australia on 10 and 11 May 2019 as part of the ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019 Festival.

This companion piece to the audio-recording segment of *Not Now, Not Ever* is like Donna Haraway's companion species, it is domesticated, by scholarship, it can sit on your lap and you can stroke it or you can play fetch with it. It is not native or wild. It is tamed, demure and obedient but it's also thinking, feeling and sentient. It is not one of Descartes' animal-machines, it's not made of wax, though it would like to have recorded *Not Now, Not Ever* on a wax cylinder, to retain the warmth of the voice, to avoid the dull drone of the digital. But it can't help being a cyborg.

It is now thinking about the future, about the generations unfolding and those yet unborn. About the quality of life in that future

about the human and nonhuman Maldivian refugees

about the subsistence farmers in India

about Hurricane Florence and the broken dykes in the Carolinas (all these sweetly named women!),

about the needles found in strawberries in supermarkets across Australia, a farmer or a strawberry voodoo?,

about the soil in Fukushima.

So, in the face of man-made environmental change, what can performance do that theory and politics can't?

1) It can take care of the ones that philosophers and politicians don't tend to care for

The UN WomenWatch notes that “women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men [and]... are especially vulnerable when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood.”

The 2014 IPCC report states that: “People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also to some adaptation and mitigation responses... Such social processes include, for example, discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, and (dis)ability.”

2) It can stretch, warp and jump through time

The Anthropocene has roots traceable to Ancient Greek thought, it has unpaid debts to Enlightenment scientists, it materializes in the Industrial Revolution in Europe and its futures are pregnant with mystery, potential, loss, extinction, unexpected resilience and techno-fantasy. Performance can journey seamlessly through all these pivotal moments, join them up, rip them apart and re-configure them into new sequences.

3) It can embody what some of us only know abstractly

Some of us geographically placed (for now) on this planet urgently need a somatic understanding of atmospheric changes, climate warming, species loss, pollution, contamination or rising sea levels. Performance can embody, can demand spectators embody. Performance lets us get down and dirty with the earth, lets us be material-girls without spending a dime, without driving the capitalist machine. The challenge of such an embodiment is to avoid using the nonhuman world metonymically or metaphorically.

4) It can imagine the unimaginable

Performance can make drastic conceptual leaps to reimagine the world around us. It can put forward radically new possible ways of living and radically different visions of ourselves as a species and our place in the food chain. It can even sketch possible endings for our kind, stage the truly posthuman. No Godot, no Vladimir, no Estragon, no Pozzo, no Lucky, no Boy(s); just a tree and all its nonhuman actors and spectators.

Fever Dream

Joel Tan

Drama Centre London, Central Saint Martins

Fever Dream was written as part of a climate change event. I wanted to avoid the didacticism or critically-charged mimesis that are amongst the biggest dramatic tools when it comes to addressing “topical issues.” The scale of the spiritual crisis presented by climate change led me to write a play that would provoke a spiritual, or deeply emotional, rather than rhetorical or moral, response. The play dramatizes radical hope: characters coping with the end of the world through rituals of survival and expiation. Perhaps it is this drama of hope against futility that offers us a way to sit honestly in the weight of the coming future.

FEVER DREAM

Characters

Climatologist

Martian Scientist

Mother

B, played by same actor who plays the Martian Scientist

C, played by same actor who plays Mother

1.

The not too distant future.

Climatologist The sun was red the day the end began. Like an angry sore on the face of the sky. It cast the air in the city a dirty orange, like rusted pipes. The kind of orange that if it mixes in with your blood would give you lock-jaw. It was living prophecy: like we had finally entered the end-game of a 1960s sci-fi movie. Like we, bewildered people minding our own shopping, had become a living, walking memory, someone’s sepia-toned recollection of the day before it all went bust. In fact, later we were told, it was an improbable hurricane making its way here from the other side of the planet. Along the way, it had sucked up sub-Saharan dust, and laid a treacherous Instagram filter over reality. The hurricane was the first of many bad things.

Martian Scientist Thousands of miles away, the air is always red. Red is the predominant logic on the surface of Mars. Everything is informed by it. The frequencies of light are adjusted so it doesn’t feel like we’re looking through a film of blood all the time. The frequencies of light are adjusted so the plants in the labs can fruit and flower. The frequencies of light are adjusted so we can remember the blues

and the greens we are trying to cultivate in our little tents, a pale shadow of earth, which is from here a little cerulean speck in the sky. When we rest, we spend hours washing red dust off the crevices of our bodies. Our skins are slowly reddening as if from a rash. We joke about how anyone could have imagined Martians being green.

Mother The red bins are for plastics, I keep having to tell them. But they never listen. I spend half an hour each day sifting through the red bin and picking out tinfoil, cardboard, little tetrapacks of juice—they tell me tetrapack is really plastic, these stupid monkeys—and I smack them across the face.

A shift.

2.

Kitchen. MOTHER and the scientists as children, sorting through their recycling.

Mother Do you know how much plastic is found in the oceans wrapped around turtle's necks, lining the stomachs of whales? Huh? You, David, you say you like animals don't you? You ever think about Shoob Shoob? If Shoob Shoob weren't in Water World, if Shoob Shoob were out there in the oceans swimming around with his whale friends, you ever think about how all the plastic we don't recycle gets thrown into the water, and Shoob Shoob, he looks at it yeah, and he thinks, oh it's a jellyfish—

Climatologist —Whales don't eat jellyfish, they—

Mother —Whales absolutely eat jellyfish, don't be cheeky with me, and you *know* they do because you and I watch the same documentary every week, and you *know* whales eat plastic now and they choke and die.

Climatologist Whales eat krill.

Mother Here, you do it. (*handing him the bin*) Sort it out, I'm tired of sifting through your bad recycling.

He complies.

M.Scientist They don't actually recycle this stuff, you know that.

Mother: (*to M.SCIENTIST*) You're telling me the estate management spends thousands of dollars—

M.Scientist I saw it on a documentary.

Mother (*to CLIMATOLOGIST*) Take the caps off the bottles.

M.Scientist They don't actually recycle anything, it all gets sent to a landfill anyway. In China.

Mother: Peel the label off the wine bottle and put it in the yellow bin.

M.Scientist Most of it gets burnt, 'cuz it costs too much to hire people to sort it.

Mother That Ziploc is still good, wash it out and keep it in the cupboard.

M.Scientist The glass gets buried deep in the ground and kills worms 'cuz they cut their bellies against the shards, and the soil around the landfill dies. And actually if we just burnt all of our recyclables, it'd be better for the environment.

Mother Pat. Darling would you shut up.

Climatologist Yeah shut up.

M.Scientist That's censorship.

Mother No it isn't.

M.Scientist It's an alternative view. You said this household will always hear the alternative view.

Mother Your source is a documentary of dubious origin. Where'd you see it?

M.Scientist YouTube.

Mother Who made it?

M.Scientist Some university.

Mother Fosters?

M.Scientist Yeah, how'd you know?

Mother Their whole business is making people feel good about themselves.

M.Scientist Bullshit.

Mother Climate change isn't real. Homosexuality isn't natural. Modern art is bad. English Departments around the world are overrun by Marxists.

M.Scientist That's academic chauvinism.

Mother Cite your sources, next time, darling, saves us all a lot of time.

M.Scientist You know no one else on the block recycles anymore.

Climatologist Can I go make putty with my linseed now?

M.Scientist Yes, darling, go.

Climatologist goes.

Mother Pat.

M.Scientist They've given up.

Mother Given up.

M.Scientist After we went past the UN threshold.

Mother It's just my quaint past-time, then.

M.Scientist Mum are we going to die?

Mother We all die.

M.Scientist They say there's no turning back.

Mother No there isn't.

M.Scientist They say next year the half the rainforests will be dead.

Mother Conservative estimate.

M.Scientist They say we need to wear jumpers out to protect ourselves from the sun.

Mother Yes.

M.Scientist Red fruit will be the first to go.

Mother Very soon the green ones.

M.Scientist Islands have disappeared.

Mother Yes.

M.Scientist I saw a report today. On Noah's Ark.

Mother One of the scientists died, didn't they?

M.Scientist They're down to two.

Mother Well, they were the first wave. More will go.

M.Scientist They'll never work fast enough.

Mother No, they won't.

M.Scientist We'll die here before anything grows on Mars.

Mother Yes.

Silence.

M.Scientist I'm fifteen.

Mother You will live a strong, long life, darling.

M.Scientist But what's the point?

Mother Don't say that.

M.Scientist In less than twenty years they say we will need face-filters to breathe.
Mum.

Mother I know.

M.Scientist I'll be 35. I'll be on a respirator at 35.

Mother I know.

M.Scientist Where will you be?

Mother Right there, darling.

M.Scientist Conservative estimates suggest you won't make it past sixty.

*Silence. **Mother** holds **M.Scientist**.*

Mother What do you want me to say?

M.Scientist I don't know.

Shift.

3.

***Climatologist** in a bunker with **B**, a stranger.*

The bunker is assailed by intense winds, the scraping of sand, the occasional blast of metal against metal.

Climatologist We shouldn't.

B Just one.

Climatologist It won't last otherwise.

B This will pass soon enough. I'm hungry.

Climatologist The radio is shot.

B I've got some data. I'll check the update.

Climatologist Save your data. We should wait it out.

B It's just a tin of sardines.

Climatologist Fine.

B I'll share.

Climatologist They're mine.

B I know. It's the principle.

Silence as B opens a can of sardines.

Climatologist Funny eating sardines, when you think about it.

B Why's that?

Climatologist No more sardines in the water, last I heard.

B Thank goodness for canning. Makes them last forever. Edible museum. Oh I get it. Funny.

Climatologist Sad funny, more like.

They split the sardines and eat in silence.

Climatologist Those poor people.

B Who?

Climatologist The ones at the beach. Couldn't have seen it coming.

B Should've known better. Hurricanes once a month at the least. Something fatalistic.

Climatologist ...

B Going to the beach.

A shake and a shudder.

B Got yourself a nice bunker, didn't you.

Climatologist Yeah. We built it strong after we saw what the red monster did.

B Horrible stuff. Couldn't tell if the red on the streets was sand or guts, or a little of both.

Climatologist Wasn't guts

B I saw a man smashed into the side of a bus. Who's we?

Climatologist We?

B You got a wife?

Climatologist Husband. He passed.

B Sorry to hear.

Climatologist Alright. Cancer.

B Mm. (*beat*) Thank you for letting me in. I didn't know if anyone would, this far out of town. You some sort of hermit?

Climatologist I'm a researcher.

B Very nice. What/

Climatologist Climatologist.

B Funny.

Climatologist You know there is a very strong possibility we may not survive this.

B That your professional opinion?

Climatologist Somewhat. The storm is one thing, but it's sucking sulphurous gases from the Antarctic, so when we get out of here, there's every chance we'll choke and die.

Silence.

Climatologist I'm not joking.

B Didn't think you were.

Climatologist Are you prepared? Spiritually. Mentally. Whatever.

B I thought I'd have died by now. Something or the other. Always something or the other. Probably have some sort of cancer anyway. The sun burnt through most my hair.

Climatologist Yes.

B I'm homeless, you see.

Climatologist Sorry to hear.

B Very lucky to be here with you.

Climatologist Would've been lonely.

B For both of us, no doubt.

They finish their sardine in silence.

Climatologist Could you empty that please. The tin?

B does so. Climatologist takes the empty tin and puts it into a bin.

B What you doing with that?

Climatologist Recycling.

B Funny.

Climatologist Old habit.

A shift.

4.

Mars.

*A chamber filled with plants. The **Martian Scientist** is working alone.*

M. Scientist (*speaking to log*) Batch 489 of the cabbages are doing well, the added nitrates in the feed have improved colouration and growth. The snap peas less so, no signs of fruiting yet. Mung beans are stringy. Broccoli is limp. The future of cuisine on Mars looks like cabbage soup. (*beat*) Cabbage soup.

Enter C, a colleague.

C Pat.

M. Scientist Mars only supports cabbage soup. I remember that's what my grandparents smelled of all the time. Cabbages. Farts. Mars will smell of old people.

C There's a video from home.

M. Scientist New?

C Yes.

Beat.

M. Scientist You okay?

C Not really.

Beat.

M. Scientist What?

C It's bad news. They, uh, have called it a trifecta of climactic events. Three separate and simultaneous, uh...

M. Scientist What?

C A massive pair of hurricanes in the Northern hemisphere. Frost blitzes in the South. Heatwaves in the twin poles. They're not sure what's happening, the transmission was

very patchy.

M. Scientist What did anyone expect. Fevers don't stop until the virus load is burnt. They're still burning coal for electricity. To stay warm in the blitzes.

C I think everyone's dead. Or dying. It's not far gone now.

Silence.

M. Scientist You cannot panic.

C I know. But

M. Scientist You cannot afford to panic. (*beat*) What?

C There was a transmission delay.

Beat.

C Six months.

M. Scientist Shit.

C It happened six months ago. Maybe more. Comms say we've been receiving fewer ping-backs from central.

Silence.

M. Scientist You cannot panic.

C We're alone.

M. Scientist We're not alone.

C We're stuck on another planet while earth is burning itself up. Burnt itself up.

M. Scientist We knew that when we left.

C Knowing is different. This is different. (*beat*) We've got nothing but cabbages.

C starts to weep. M.Scientist holds C.

M. Scientist We are going to be fine.

C It's over.

M. Scientist We are going to be fine.

C It's over.

A shift.

Split scenes. Climatologist in the bunker, M.Scientist and C on Mars.

Climatologist He died soon enough, and too soon. Five days before the hurricane's 100-day span ended. Food poisoning. Or a weak immune system. A combination. Canned sardines don't in fact last forever. There was a weak strand of some kind of salmonella, enough to take down his compromised defenses. He had gone into a delirious fever state. His body burnt up, so hot it kept me warm at night.

M. Scientist (to C) When we were young, my mum made us recycle when it had long become a joke. This was in the late 2000s. People had long given up. These were the suicide years, the debauched years, the anarchic years. But through them all we sorted our plastics and our metals and our glass and our paper. We were never short in supply. They kept coming, and no one knew what happened to them. But my mum made us do it, every night, sorting trash, like a ritual.

Climatologist Then finally he went cold, and hard. I needn't describe the smells. I wrapped him in antibacterial towels and hoped for the best. The hurricane has abated. There is the threat of a sulphurous gas chamber outside. Inside, a rotting corpse, the smell of which will drive me insane. So septic, I might die of it. The end of the world is a bad, bad smell.

M. Scientist She was not religious, but I think this was a religious act, now that I think about it. It had all the hallmarks. Purging of guilt. Belief in virtue. An offering of labour. Something, anything, to feel like we could do something to make it better, long after the entire world had pushed itself into the point of no return.

Climatologist I have a gas-mask that might not even filter sulphur. I have a chemical suit that has ten hours of exposure left. I have a supply of compromised sardines. I have no guarantee of survival in the next twenty four hours. I have research left to do. I have to reach my lab across town.

M. Scientist But it's what kept our family going. Through it all. Through the skepticism, and doubt, and hysteria, and despair, we sorted our rubbish until they stopped collecting the rubbish. But by then we'd become adults, mum had died of some hideous cancer or another, but my brother and I became scientists when the world no longer believed in science. That's you and me, too. Here. And look how far it's gotten us.

Climatologist (steeling himself) One small step.

Climatologist puts on his suit and mask.

M. Scientist We've got cabbages. We've grown cabbages on a red rock. We've got stringy mung beans and limp broccoli, but we've got greenery on this red rock.

Climatologist I hope you're safe, sis.

M. Scientist We can't panic now. Can't give up now. Hope is a stupid, laughable patch of cabbage on a red rock. A bad joke is all we've got.

Climatologist Here we go.

M. Scientist Come on. Get up.

Climatologist opens the door. Bright, yellow light.

End

Notes on an Impossible Space

Alvin Tran

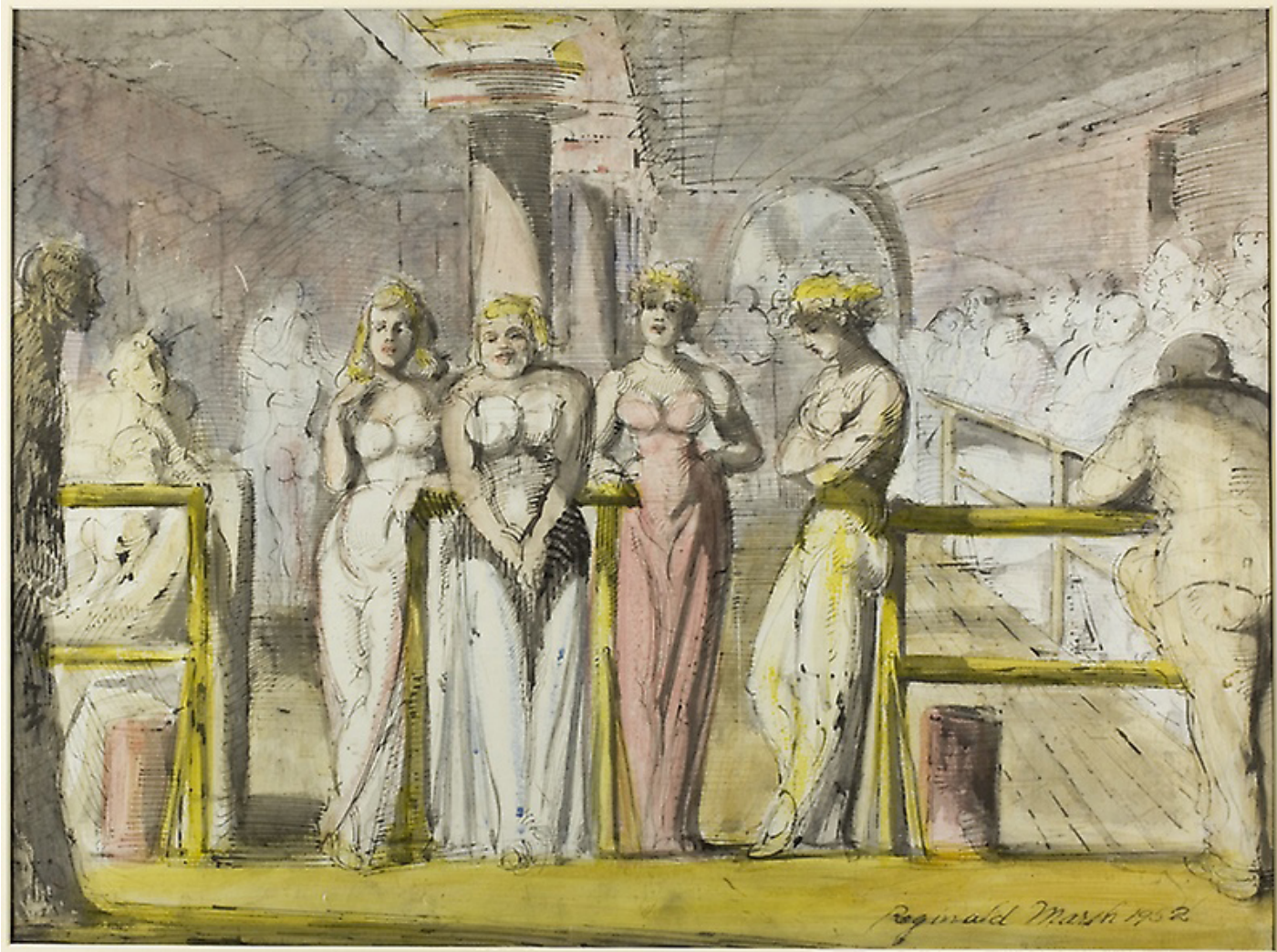
Independent Artist

Anticipation, how it always brings out peak aesthetic pleasure. Here, we, vase of active shaping, bet irresolution (will become) = solution. In the time of the love letter and seaborne shipping of love letters, one could forever, without hesitation, curse time and human failures in delivery methodology before thinking maybe they're just not into me. Overlapping with the time of the incense clock, the timekeeper of imagined truths. A geisha would calculate how much to charge a client based on how much spice departed towards the ether.

To become spice.

In 1926, Dimples, the twelve-year old Elizabeth Cooper kissed Luis Tuason in Ang Tatlong Hambog, The Arrogant Three. This was the first recorded lip to lip kiss in Filipino cinema.

Cooper spent her teenage years singing torch songs throughout Southeast Asia, songs about impassioned love. She was a vaudeville, crowned for her mysterious beauty, an allure that flirted with ideas of the mystique of orientals. By twenty, she had found herself in the middle of an affair with US military commander, General Douglas MacArthur. Then came a larger secret plan and she was brought to Washington, D. C. All was to come to demise. Cooper was paid \$15,000 to keep their affair a secret. How does forced silence charge performativity? Especially for the travelling performer?



Jazz singer Chris Calloway sings of three kinds of torch songs — requited burn, unrequited burn, and the didn't get it. Filipinos brought their torch songs to the early illegal taxi dance clubs of San Francisco's Manilatown. There, brief moments of ecstasy unwound the logics of the outside world. Performers would perform love for the length of a song. Split skin by way of song of volcano, lava shelter, magmatic imprinted scars that fade off by torch of tongue by fake Frank Sinatra.

The journey from the Phillipines to Manilatown reflects a quality of performativity that appears again and again, that of being on the move, and in extension, that of constantly throwing oneself off-center — a predisposition towards the unsettled. In a similar space time configuration, centuries ago, Manilamen were transported on the Manila Galleon ships alongside spice, porcelain, and textiles. On the voyage, the only reliable way to keep track of time was with an hourglass. Ferdinand Magellan, the first European to reach the Phillipines, staffed all his ships with 18 hourglasses. Time was captured, manipulable, malleable, bound between symmetrical forms. Sand was held hostage in service of humans.



There have been attempts to extend a control of time towards larger geographical structures, to unify bodies by abstracting one's place in space, a universal timezone: no matter where the body is, one's relation to time remains. However, being constantly uprooted disrupts the possibility of maintaining rituals. With regards to Jazz, the daily practice of technique demonstrates a quality of love in practice that cannot be replicated. It develops within the performing agent, an ability to organize space and time, to break through the structures that chains one to a particular notion of time.

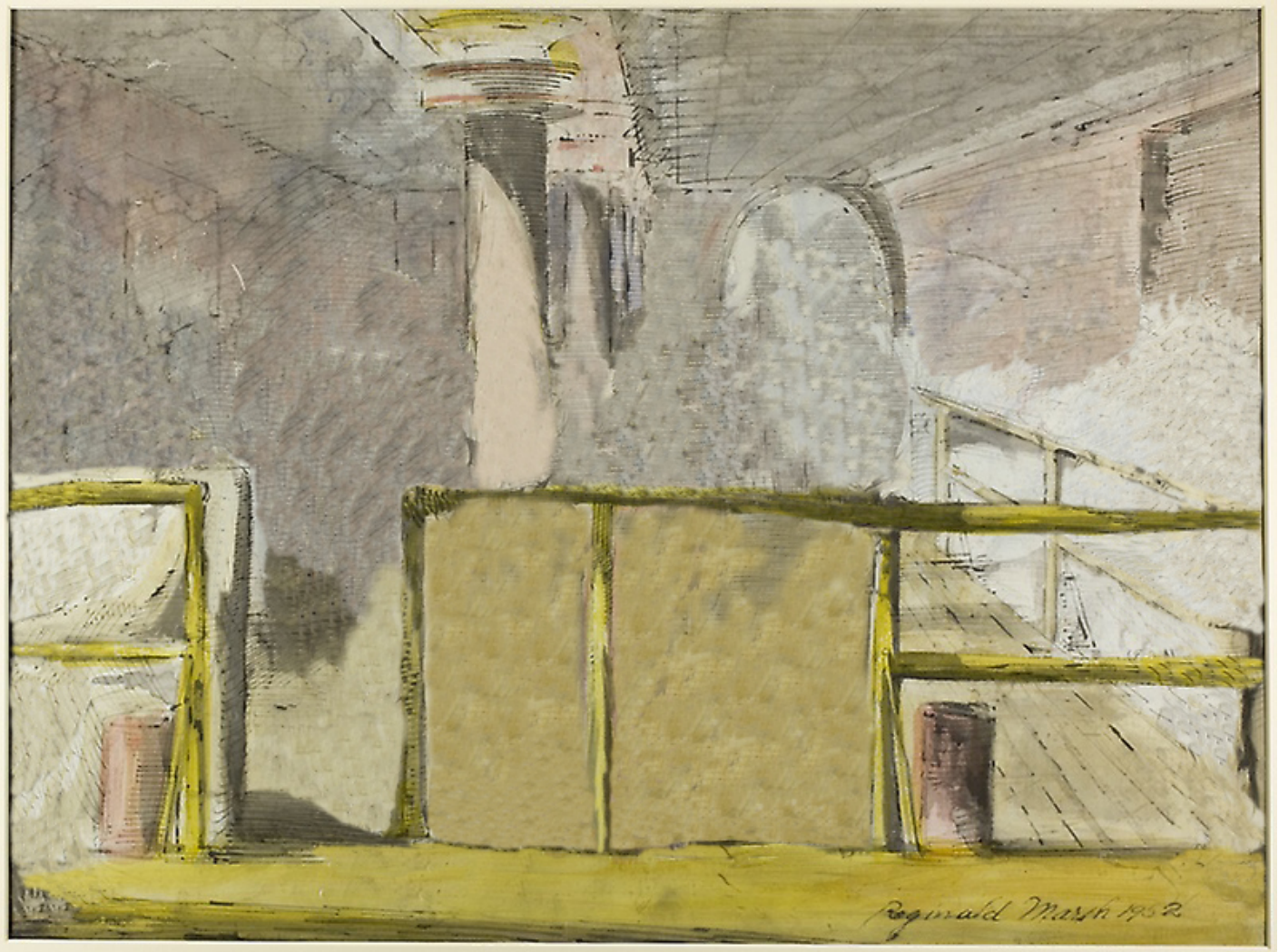


Merce Cunningham once said dance is an art in space and time, the object of the dancer is to obliterate that.

I once saw a Cunningham piece where a large clock denoting the length of the work was visible throughout the entire performance. It slowly counted down. Much has been written about breaking the fourth wall. Was it always the goal to break down theater? To make, the wooden balcony just wood? The performers, just tools? Why give form to materials, to ordain them with meaning?



At the British Horological Institute is the Museum of Timekeeping. It's website description boasts about the joys of the way time sounds. For me, this brings up the pleasure of hearing the switching of boards on train station timetables. Time, these days, doesn't have much sound unless it's an alert that all time has run out. It must be strange to see history unfold by looking at the history of time. Imagine the body decentering, disintegrating, being pulled by measurements that torpedo in every direction. In contrast to what Cunningham said, time obliterates me.



I'm presenting a short clip of a video installation I did for an exhibition called Self-Criticism at Inside-Out Museum in Beijing in 2017. I wanted to see if bodies could be used as agents to record movement. The dancers were given an algorithmic logic that was later pieced together and abstracted in location.

00:56

A Forward-looking Theater?

A Theater that Moves us Toward Equity and Justice — Today!

Rita Martins Rufino Valente-Quinn

Motus Theater

As Motus Theater’s Producing Director, and as someone who has worked at the intersection of theory and practice and of art and social justice, I believe that performance is forward-looking when, as Kirsten Wilson, founder and Artistic Director of Motus Theater suggests, it “increases awareness, shifts attitudes and inspires action towards a more equitable and just community.” Founded by Wilson in 2011, Motus Theater’s mission is “to create original theater to facilitate dialogue on critical issues of our time,” and “to use the power of art to build alliances across diverse segments of our community.” Motus specializes in two kinds of work: multimedia performances that explore marginalized histories through the lenses of race and class (*Rocks Karma Arrows* (2012) and *It’s Only a Paper Moon Hanging Over Immigration History* (2017)); and collaborations with leaders from historically marginalized communities developing autobiographical monologue pieces about their life experiences (*Do You Know Who I Am?* (2013) and *SALSA Lotería* (2015)).

At Motus we believe that the power of human story brings healing to individuals and communities as it reminds us of our individual and collective resilience, creates cross-leadership alliances, and disrupts false narratives. Motus’ most recent project, the UndocuAmerica Performance & Media Project, materializes this vision by building on the company’s work since 2013 on the topic of immigration. Motus is developing autobiographical monologues with DACAmended leaders.^[9] These will be presented in performances featuring the original writers/performers, and in public allied performance where prominent cultural leaders in areas such as law enforcement and tech will read these stories to mobilize support for undocumented immigrants and disrupt false narratives about them. We have been exploring this model since 2017, when we brought together law enforcement leaders of Boulder County who then read the stories of undocumented young leaders of the Front Range . The model was reprised in August 2018 in a performance in which Yo-Yo Ma performed a musical response to a Motus performer’s story about the deportation of her brother . The monologues will also inform a specialized podcast, the first in the U.S. to focus exclusively on human- interest stories of undocumented immigrants. The last component of the project is a series of documentary theater performances developed in collaboration with the award-winning photojournalist and editor of the Boulder Weekly, Joel Dyer. The performances feature the stories of undocumented immigrants who sought sanctuary among the congregations of their communities in order to flee deportation and keep their families together.

02:55

Boulder County law enforcement read the stories of DREAMers

On Sunday, October 14, 2018 Motus kicked off the UndocuAmerica project with a pilot of the sanctuary performance series, called Women of Resolution. The performance featured the stories of Araceli Velasquez, Ingrid Encalada Latorre, Rosa Sabido, and Sandra Lopez, recounting the leadership efforts of these women in the immigration and sanctuary movements and their work in creating a People's Resolution. This resolution proposes a legislative solution that would keep families together and offer a path to citizenship for those negotiating documentation challenges. These women's stories will be read by Colorado Legislators who endorsed the People's Resolution and live-streamed to congregations across the country.

Before arriving at Motus Theater, I conducted research and collaborated with artists who organize theater festivals in Portuguese-speaking countries. These artists grappled with how best to take advantage of a transnational community that allowed them to circulate their works internationally, but also found themselves negotiating the fact that such a community was founded on 500 years of colonialism, perpetrated by Portugal upon the populations of what are now the countries of Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe. Despite the many cultural and historical differences that set Portuguese-speaking countries apart from the U.S., the questions that Motus Theater's performances pose to performers and audiences, and the questions that Portuguese-speaking artists contend with in the context of these transnational festivals were the same: how does one face a colonial past without falling into perpetual guilt or victimization and instead use an informed, historicized perspective to move toward a future of equity and productive allyship? How might one create theater centered on the dignity and resilience of human beings to shatter colonialist, fascist, and white supremacist tropes about race and class? That one may continually encounter these questions in such a wide variety of social, geographical and linguistic contexts suggest to me that the future of performance lies in the pursuit of probing and productive responses.

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A Letter to the Future

wen yau

Independent Scholar

Dear Future

Recently lots of my friends have told me that you are lost. Aren't you? We can possibly attest the becoming of the past, but how can we know you really exist ahead of us? I am taking the liberty of writing to you in an attempt to find it out.

I study performance, and I do performance too. People often say that performance is about the presence. How can we make our presence felt? Being hyper, being boisterous, being charismatic, being moderate, being loud, being tender, being artful, being genuine, or more or less? To make our presence felt, I often feel like running after you in vein. At the moment when we feel it, the split second of the presence has elapsed already. Only when I immerse myself in the here-and-now, I could forget about the futility of the Sisyphean pursuit. This is why I am so enchanted by performance, and being performative.

Because of you, we are always lagging behind and can never reach you even if we are just a step from you. We could only see the whole performance when it finishes. When a performance has finished, we can no longer get hold of the presence. I felt equally schizophrenic when I conducted a so-called "performative autoethnography" of my fellow artists' participation and mine in activism in Hong Kong: my performative field work conducted at the very site of resistance was turned into a 60,000-word write-up afterwards as a scholarly thesis fulfilling partially the requirements for a PhD degree.

Like other performative researchers, I have always been seeking to capture the presence of some peculiar fleeting moments before they slink ruthlessly to the past. The past is haunting us from time to time like a ghost. Things may recur as they were but we by no means can redo the past. You, the Future, on the other hand, are our crush, a figment of our imagination. You are the unknown, so uncertain and unprecedented that we cannot be absolutely sure of. You are so intangible and unreachable that we would only endow you with our hope and/or even wishful thinking. In a world where populism seems to override authenticity and money to outweigh humanity, we seek to safeguard what you do not possess. You are the muse of make-believe, and

the changes we envision to make are for an imaginary “you” that we ever seek to meet. The enchantment of performance keeps us musing on the possibilities of freeing ourselves from the status quo.

So now you must know why we feel so perplexed when we cannot see you. Are you playing a hide-and-seek with us? Or indeed you are still waiting for us in an omnipresent and invisible way?

I know I probably by no means can seize you. Yet, by humbly witnessing the presences of beings in my performative practices, I become more aware of what constitutes the past and the present that lead me to you.

Thank you for attending to my babbling, as well as witnessing how my presence becomes the past and reaching you in the future. You make my utterance illocutionary and performative: saying is doing; doing is a pledge of actions that will presumably be taken soon. Here, by writing to you faithfully, I opt for trusting your existence for the time being. In the face of all the hostilities of our lives, what I can do is to entrust my imaginary and optimism to you, the unforeseen future.



yours

wen yau

Imagined Beings of a Nation

Marcus Yee

Independent Scholar



If we agree that borders of national communities are imagined, then their mythologies are similarly ridden by imagined beings. They flit between genres, genders, simulations — some terrifying, others endearing. They lurk behind thickets of ixora or are petrified into marble, high on pedestals.

As cryptozoologists, the State elites of Singapore have been much lauded. After all, they are experts in the study of the globalization's incorporeal tentacles and financial capital's vampiric appetites. Rather than attempting to domesticate them, a State-sponsored coterie has been sampling, desiccating, and experimenting with monstrous objects of analysis. Their offices are dense with specimens, statistical tools, indicators, models, and taxonomic charts, all these provide the mellowed joys of ordering trans-dimensional chaos.

Not satisfied with mere theoretical abstraction, state elites have been effusive inventors of their own creatures. But as any affidavit or scholar of folkloristics would tell you, one common wisdom behind the monstrous is projective: it might very well *become* you.

Below I offer some synoptic sketches of imagined beings of the national menagerie. For reasons of writerly economy, this is not an exhaustive, but a summative exercise. After all, the list is ever-expanding and deforming. Unclassifiable aberrations seem to take appear every other day, skirting the margins. The aspiring folklorist could only offer at best, a slice of the monstrous inventory. One that is growing, pulsating, heaving, and before which one could only grasp at the shadows to appreciate its scale.

Beasts of Origin

It could be said that most imagined beings are encountered due to bad eyesight. But this does not deny their reality. No one can be certain that optical flaws are not in themselves, magically induced.

A mirage of a lion is the island-city's founding myth, an ontogenesis that has reached into the depths of national common-sense. Traces of thalossocratic kingdoms, sea peoples and early merchant-cosmopolitans, who once inhabit this island, are blindsided by the lion's symbolic seductions. Distant history is cast into myth. It was this *over-sight*: the conjuring of an apparition that is not there by looking too hard, that the Merlion, the first being, was imagined.

Such optical magics of the State persist. It radiates an enthralling light from its organic unity, blinding others with its brilliance: auratic and concrete.

The second being was the Radical Beast. Official raconteurs speak of pre-independence days as a political dance between unionists, communists and colonial administrators — as being astride the back of a tiger. With a quickstep, the hero lurched onto the beast, his face steeled with determination and clothes in tatters. His right fist clasped the party's insignia firmly in the air, while the other hand attempted to rein in the beast. Is he controlling the Radical Beast, or is he being controlled by it?

Nation-building chronicles tell of the Radical Beast, an eruptive and violent tiger, but one that would be courted, slain, and eventually, castrated. The prized sexual organ is then boiled into aphrodisiac soup, to nourish the virility of the paternal State.

Tropical Cryptogastronomy, or Cooking up Hybrids

Can a chimera, swinging in the void, swallow second intentions?

— François Rabelais

A new entry to the lore of spectres is the Global Soul. Liquid beings born out of the reticulating grip of global capital, they are the ghosts that haunt airport terminals, high-speed railways, and shopping complexes. They belong to nowhere and everywhere, endlessly in transit, stringing together cities — Dubai, New York, London, Shanghai, Mumbai, Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg, Manila — into the loom of their warped spacetime.

Singapore lends itself to be their pristine altar. Nation-building magics have induced an official multiculturalism, where culturally orphaned ethnic groups live tolerably apart. History is a laboratory of socially-engineered hybrids. Penance to the cult of the global is found in alluring traditional-modern juxtapositions, and the technological mastery over nature — devotional images worthy of National Geographic. Cryptoengineers work steroidal at the blossoming of cultural flora and fauna. For them, a *renaissance* is a genetically hybrid orchid. Whether postmodern or dystopian, this is the sanctified crucible of hybrid production.

Traces of timeworn syncretism are all around, albeit faint. It could be found in language (such as dialects, a national creole, or the indigenous nation-building language, Malay), beliefs (folk demonology, colonially understood as “superstition,” attests to this), ethnicity, performance, and needless to say, food. Emerging from the persistence of time, these hybrids saw the knotting together of taste buds, the accommodation of tongues, but the same tongues are now numbed by class-based shame.

The Global Soul, with a genteel taste for the local, respectfully samples these hybrids but resorts to boiled pasta the week after.

In the culture-laboratory of the State, experimentation is the new currency. An algorithm dismembers, a flick of a switch beheads, an enhanced limb sprouts, extra eyes glisten from the chimera’s belly. Make haste, an accidental beheading calls for its spontaneous regrowth. Nourishment by time is substituted by nourishment by capital, towards chimeras so many headed, so extra limbed, so *super-natural*.

Nameless and silent, they circle in their enclosed pens, fattened for the sweet dystopian flavour of their meat. A captive-bolt gun awaits them at the end of the chute, that is, until they realise that this is not an amusement ride.



Deep in the Spectral Theatre

The state is not a she, she is not a nurturing Mother. It is a prosaic fact that the cabinet is composed mainly of men, state histories speak of great men.

Records of the first spirit are recent and possibly speculative, but preliminary archival efforts have deduced two names: the Young-Girl and the Toyol. It is not sexed but understands how gender is pliable. It could equally possess the civil servant who dreams of publishing poetry, but cynically extends his contract after serving his bond; as well as the newly-retired consultant paying forward her next package of Zumba classes. It is the forced smile on a minister's Facebook page. Attractiveness, for the economic, is the name of the game.

Its appetite for money and attention is ravenous, resembling the Toyol, fetal or stillborn spirits of Malay folklore. Owners keep these spirits to facilitate their own worldly desires, and in exchange, they have to fulfill the Toyol's cravings, ranging from innocent plastic toys to "corpse oil." Master-slave inversions are not uncommon as their mercantile owners are stretched to perform ever more unusual gestures for the Toyol's exponentially varied desires.

This ghostly matrix is moulded out of the authoritative, diversifying cravings of the Toyol (consumption) and the flexible-economic performativity of the Young-Girl (production/reproduction).

The Young-Girl/Toyol (YG/T) makes no qualms to exploit her smallness. Unlike the all-encompassing State-power embodied by the Leviathan, its authority lies in the rhetoric of the miniature. In a little black dress, it bandies around the fact of its (geo)physical weakness to plot alliances with the big boys at the soirée, code-switching effortlessly between next season's financial forecasts and Spring/Summer Miu Miu predictions.

It is whatever you want it to be, fashioning itself to the whims of global capital. Its morality is flexible and just-in-time. But the YG/T is not a prostitute. It trades in the semicapital of shine rather than erotics (too bodily, too low for it.) After all, in the chambers of paternal morality, feminine sexuality is monstrous, corrupt, but utterly desirable. Instead of erotics, it is impeccably manicured — clean, modern, anti-corrupt.

The YG/T, with its moral-semioeconomic virtuosity, has more faces than Ravana, the ten-headed king of demons from the *Ramayana*. Its contract of desire offers, on the one hand, humanitarian aid, and on the other, an irrepressible demand for migrant labor paid with rock-bottom wages and skeletal legal protections. Its many countenances woo "talents" from powerhouse economies, while stiffening its brows before labour-exporting neighbours.

Unlike the YG/T, who could harness the full repertoire of gender performance, the other spirit is strictly female. Emerging from patriarchal capital's global network, she was a domestic worker from Asian countries, hailing from a feminine genealogy of the *pontaniak* of Malaysia, the *kuntilanak* of Indonesia, the *manananggal* of the Philippines. She filled a domestic void evacuated by local women to pursue their dreams of upward modernity. Out of respect for her diverse origins, taxonomists should note not to restrict her to a single name.

She is spectralized by hearsay, employment agencies, and newspaper reports: pre-modern, naive, ill-disciplined, vulnerable, (de)sexualized, vengeful, murderous. In an order that pits women against other women, an order steeped within the asymmetries of status and citizenship,

she is all the more vulnerable to her primary employer, the unforgiving Wife, who balances between domestic and professional spheres.

An employer handbook writes, "Experience and commonsense will tell you that it is better to over-supervise or over monitor (no matter how much a workaholic she is) than to feel short-changed later." Another writes, "treating a maid extremely well does not necessarily lead to our desired objective. Familiarity may deteriorate into contempt of authority."

Born out of fear and anxiety, one is compelled to consort the help of magical safeguards: discipline and contempt. Such spectres are not exorcised but captured.

Once in awhile, their screams and laughter pierce through the numbing orange of HDB nights.

Does your blood curdle, does your heart sink?

Do you cover your ears, or do you stop to listen?

Various Petrifications

Geography is a curious basin for myths. The lore of modern science tells us that rock formations are results of wind and hydraulic action: eroding, dissolving, accumulating, silting, and cementing. After all, "geography" comes from the Greek "*geo-*", meaning the earth or land, and "*-graphia*", meaning the process of description. Geography is the continuous telling of the earth.

In the arable fields of geomyths, petrification, the process of turning into rock, receives the most attention. Of its many manifestations, many would be familiar with the Gorgon, Medusa from Greek mythology, her unrelenting gaze that turns men into stone. It is a gaze that has become an emblem of female monstrosity in a men's world of heroics, or a personification of irrepressible beauty, and feminist rage. A similar being with petrifying powers, the *gedembai*, is reflected in the folklore of Langkawi and Pahang. Borneo myth tells of a widow who waited a lifetime for her lover, a prince from China. Her faithfulness moved the Mountain Spirit, and petrified her into Mount Kinabalu after her death. Petrification could entail immobilization, a stillness inflicted by another, or perhaps less understood, immovability, a stillness that is self-inflicted.

Perhaps a lesser-known story of petrification surrounds the offshore island of Pulau Ubin.

Legend has it that three animals, a frog, a pig and an elephant, challenged each other to cross the straits of Johor. The wager was whoever that did not reach the straits of Johor would be turned into stone. As they swam, a storm brewed above them and whipped tides into a tempest. The frog drowned first, ossifying into Pulau Sekudu, or "Frog Island." The pig and the elephant too, did not make it. They perished near each other, forming the two islets that joined to form Pulau Ubin, or "Granite Island."

Petrification is a curious brew of folly, punishment and longing. They are dilations of time, violently stolen or given by waiting. Fear around the forces of petrification lies in the exclusion of time, or more specifically, the unilateral time of *progress*.

The meta-geography of European exploration and colonization has tethered the fates of contemporary nation-states to the Greenwich Meridian Time. From an observatory in Greenwich, England, a globe is split into infinitesimal units of space and duration. Global competitiveness means all participating economies revolve round the *same* clock, even if its mechanisms are provincially conceived. This meta-geography, which divides the world, also brings it together with its unilateral eschatology.

Allochronism, first encountered by post-colonial scholars, lithifies the time of Subaltern peoples into the Past. For the Allochronist, a Gorgon in his own right, other worlds are never imagined to be synchronous. The Allochronist is a creature of unilateral movement, digesting difference, and mutating his own powers. He petrifies not only the Subaltern into the Past, but also cities into the Future. Shanghai, Tokyo, or Singapore are wrapped in a shining, digitalized image of techno-futurity, with the same effect of imagined timelessness, petrified imaginations. The Event, the potentiality for change, is denied. The Allochronist's emblem of modernity despises (or patronises) this Past, while it gawks at (or fears) this Future.

Other worlds are petrified, given to the time of rocks, rather than the time of history. It is this denial of persistent and unity-giving temporality that unworlds.



Smart Creatures: Grey Matter, Sotongs and Viruses

Knowledge and information have been liquefied into currencies. Cranial nerves are wired to fibre optics, wrapping themselves across every corner of the city: transportation systems, horticultural

maintenance, surveillance infrastructure, public spaces, workspaces and homes. Conventionally bounded by the roving limits of the body, sensoriums now reach beyond the thermosphere aided by satellites. Hearing is a noise monitoring system as decibels are processed into bytes. The city desires softness through software, where concrete alchemizes with data: utter weightlessness, ceaseless flexibility, infinite expansibility. Thought becomes effervescent, rising into the Cloud.

What is a hub but a brain-city made possible the objectification of brain in cognitive neuroscience. It is a world moulded out of cyborgian pipe-dreams of the fleshy and the technological. The beings that roam the brain-city are strangely familiar. While they possess identifiable characteristics found in existing literature, they have quirks of their own. I hesitate to call them “new.”

Staring out from your vehicle, you saw the brain-city’s sunset sky: an ocular dome, quantum-dot emitters in seamless illumination. A video of noctilucent clouds shimmered across bands of red and orange. After awhile, you noticed that the Angsana trees on the highway repeated themselves: (A1, A2, A3... A1, A2, A3...). The same deformed branch recurred fifteen trees later. The city was curiously empty, apart from the wisps of light that trailed past now and then.

According to your guides, they are the Grey Matter, bundled nodes of the computational blankets travelling at high speeds. A different breed from Neuromancers, Hatsune Mikus, Avas and Siris, they are not virtual per se, but are technobiological, psychodigital beings. They flout the Turing Test altogether as both human-and-inhuman. Nonetheless, imagined through and through.

For them, to work is to know. They are known to be fast, operational, and flexible. But they are neither serfs nor devotees to a transcendent power. No instances of coercion have been recorded in the brain-city. Instead, they are programmed with a regulatory algorithm that computes to the rational mean. Overspills are unfortunate, but are quickly cleaned up. Remedy action and retroactive learning prevent recurrence, and they gladly rewire themselves. Grey Matter are self-regulating bundles of being. Their operating system was first imagined by philosopher Gottham Willheim Leibniz, who dreamt of a world where solutions to problems could be rendered in terms of computation. Addressing dilemmas, desires, and faults — the bestial aspects of humanity — one only needs to brave a calculation. Their politics of universal modulation is microphysical.

Grey Matter are not invincible either. Despite infrastructures of research and technology, their collective dreams of disembodiment are still fantastical. Thinking remains anchored by a lagging, heaving body, which they carry around in shame. In fact, their nerve paths are terminal and fixed. Once the axons and dendrites are dried up, everything would die with little hope for regeneration.

Whether the result of an overwrought catastrophism or not, some folklorists call this extinction event, “the Brain Drain.”

The next creature, I have never seen with my own eyes, but it is said to lurk within schools of Grey Matter. I am referring here to the *Sotong*, a Malay word for squid. Conventionally referring to a stupid being, popular wisdom tells me that they are actually not. They only *act blur*. In other words, while they do not possess the raw processing power of Grey Matter, they are masters of the arts of ignorance, opacity, distraction and misbehavior. For these inky players, the brain-city is their theatre.

By being blur and squidlike, Sotongs slow down accelerative feelings. Transparent visions of collective good, and the direct solutionism in the brain-city, are re-circuited into moments of hesitancy. The Sotong does not care if $2+3$ equal 5, they will truths into fissiparous absurdities. In their own ways, they are idiotic.

It would be a mistake to place the two creatures, Grey Matter and Sotongs, on opposite ends of an intelligence spectrum. These are creatures of different appetites, instincts, and habits endemic to the ecology of the brain-city.

This being said, the brain-city itself, could be considered an imagined being in its own right. This creature is not determined by any geographical form. It is neither island, mainland, nor archipelago. It behaves akin to a virulent strain, both biological and computational, covertly making its way into other geobodies. Brain-cities, or rudimentary outlines of one, could be found in Rwanda, China, India, Qatar, Bahrain, and South Africa. Consulting firms make up their epidemiological vectors, and they sometimes go by the name of Surbana International.

Viral parasitism is both hostile, and dependent on its hosts. Without much of a commotion, it wraps its gossamer tendrils around its host to draw modest units of lifeblood. Expansive in its reach, the accumulated lifeblood from all of its many hosts would satiate its appetite. That is, before autoimmunity begins to set in.

Epilogue: Unexceptional Beings

Little is unique about the creatures collated in these sketches. As much as Singapore cryptozoologists enjoy flaunting these creatures in the high spectacles of zoos, conferences and trade-shows, one would have heard similar reports of encounters from elsewhere. Any aspiring folklorist needs only to be kept on the loop, sensitive to ecologies of comparison, to recognize the passing of banality as novelty.

In fact, it becomes ever more difficult to categorize today's creatures based on geographical distribution. Spatial nearness no longer adds up. The forcefields are transnational, extraterritorial and supply-chained. But it is precipitous to excuse archival work to ambitious non-categories, such as the global. The inventory of folklorists is now timeworn in an age creatures proliferating, diversifying, deforming, transmogrifying and mutating at amplified frequencies. With the heritage of Linnaean science, the arts of observing, naming and taxonomization stutter and breakdown. Names and classifications hyphenate in exponential degrees.

Such is the work of folklorists in the time of monsters.

Looking Back and Looking Forward in *Dêgèsbé*

Soo Ryon Yoon

Lingnan University

Gestures of “looking back” and “looking forward” in time appear frequently in *Dêgèsbé* (2016), a 90-minute dance piece choreographed and performed by Seoul-based Burkinabé-Korean dance company Koulé Kan. The performance begins with Emmanuel Sanou, Koulé Kan’s choreographer and lead dancer from Burkina Faso, patiently brushing his one hand up and down against the other arm while moving his feet to rotate counterclockwise. His tall body and lanky arms, sliced up into shadows and highlights under pin light, remind me of hands of a clock slowly moving backwards.

The opening movement sequence lasts only a minute or so but acts as a prompt for the rest of the performance, which delves deeper into the dual themes of conflict and community building in a collective attempt to look into the future that has yet to arrive. Emmanuel Sanou builds his structure of rhythms from the opening to arrive at a series of pulsating movements. Pulsation and jolting motions deviate from a linear and stable progression of rhythms, as if to gesture to different moments of interruption in the life and work of dancers as they engage in different regimes of time, articulated through similarly non-linear progressions of staged and quotidian movements. Sanou is eventually joined by other dancers (five women and one man, all Korean) whose solos, duets, and group dances signal different types of sociality filled with curiosity, hostility, tensions, and collaborations.



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I want to consider Koulé Kan's *Dêgèsbé* a form of meditation on our sense of past, present, and future, particularly with regard to Koulé Kan dancers' life and work as they relate to the racialized dance labor dispute in 2014 in South Korea, which I briefly describe in the following paragraphs. Koulé Kan challenges the South Korean media and public's interests in the origin or the past experiences of Koulé Kan members, and materializes their visions of the future instead, not to celebrate *per se*, but to propose a rehearsal for the ethics of care and empowerment as a necessary step in preparation for what is to come. In particular, Koulé Kan uncompromisingly rejects the idea that dancers, Burkinabé or otherwise, aspire to achieve the "Korean dream" — the promise of prosperity and success as an outcome of assimilating oneself into Korean culture. The repeated return to Koulé Kan performers' past or origins imagines the Korean dreams as a necessarily teleological ending, and perhaps the perpetually reenacted future, while stabilizing and singularizing the performers' past regardless of how they arrived at the present moment as professional performers with various cultural and artistic backgrounds.

Thus, the performers of Koulé Kan, and the Burkinabé dancers in particular, gesture to look forward to moving beyond the labor dispute in 2014 at the Pocheon African Museum of Original Art (P-AMOA) in South Korea, where a slice of their past remain fixed and archived as a form of a discursive artefact. In February 2014, Emmanuel Sanou and his fellow Burkinabé performers held a protest against the museum, where they had performed for two years since 2012.^[10] The performers were contesting the exploitative working conditions in which each performer received 600,000 Korean Won (\$600) per month while performing an hour-long show three times a day, six days a week for museum visitors. In addition to the below-minimum wage, already incommensurate with the concept of performance fees, the performers made complaints against

the museum for inadequate housing, extraneous work (such as working as museum shop cashiers and cleaning staff), and occasional racist remarks made by the museum staff.

The “museum incident,” as major news outlets called it, became a nationwide news sensation during the dispute: Burkinabé performers were described as migrant workers who had come to South Korea to follow the Korean dream only to have their dreams shattered, which left an indelible stain and “shame” on the face of the nation and its moral integrity. Both large and small media’s post-labor dispute interviews with the performers, including Emmanuel Sanou who stayed on to further pursue his career as a choreographer, also tended to return repeatedly to their past experiences at the museum and how improved their lives were.^[11] In response, Emmanuel and his South Korean collaborator, Son So-young, Koulé Kan’s curator, have repeatedly pointed out that they no longer want to “talk about the past” but rather think about what is ahead.^[12] Looking forward to the future is thus more of a reparative step and necessary training for the dance company’s survival and building of its strength as a community of artists regardless of their past or their origins.



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Looking back in time from time to time in *Dêgèsbé* in this sense, should not mean that the piece frequently dwells in the past or the origin of time. Nor should it be read as a convenient gesture to forget either. In fact, *Dêgèsbé*, a Jula title meaning “What are you looking for? There is nothing there,” ultimately questions the origin of departure of the dancing bodies. It supposes that we all come to this world, yet when and from where we arrive, are unclear. The purposeful omission of gestures to the dancing bodies’ origin expresses the dancers’ insistence on refusing to associate with specific ethnicity, race, or national origin, at least when they are performing on

stage. This is particularly important considering how Burkinabé and Korean dancers, whenever and whatever they dance, are read as performing their own cultures, always returning to their “origins.”

At the same time, acts of looking back symbolized in such scenes as Sanou’s opening, are self-reflective motions of remembering and documenting their own track of time, which does not necessarily synchronize with the rehearsed and reinscribed past that circulates in the public discourse about the Burkinabé dancers and their work and life at the museum. Not claiming the past in *Dêgèsbé* has its own root in the choreographer’s concrete experiences in dealing with racism, nationalism, and human rights issues in South Korea throughout their career as dancers. In this, Emmanuel Sanou’s “future” in *Dêgèsbé* is not necessarily a linear accumulation of past.

Instead, insertion of movements, such as when the dancers hold umbrellas in different colors under which they embrace one another halfway into the performance, or when the dancers undress themselves towards the very end of the piece, violently throwing their clothes on the floor to confront the audience with their bare nakedness, registers both the desire to protect one another and to address vulnerability of their dancing bodies. Koulé Kan’s *Dêgèsbé* does not “dream” of a Korean future, but rather rehearses their ethics of care for one another in the newfound community of dancers, whose work and life ahead may still be rife with precarity and difficulties.



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Notes

[1] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1993, p.146

[2] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd Edn., Routledge, 2008, p.56

[3] UN General Assembly, 194 (III). Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator , 11 December 1948, A/RES/194, available at: <http://refworld.org/docid/4fe2e5672.html>

[4] Such as in San Francisco, CA, Durango, CO, Oahu, HI (especially Honolulu), and debated for years in Indianapolis, IN. For more information, see <https://sanfranciscopolice.org/civil-sidewalks-ordinance>, <https://aclu.org/news/aclu-statement-durangos-anti-homeless-sit-lie-ordinance>, <http://hawaiinewsnow.com/story/36185139/full-list-sit-lie-ban-extended-to-15-other-oahu-communities/>, and <https://wthr.com/article/growing-debate-over-controversial-no-sit-no-lie-proposal-downtown-indy>.

[5] From the millions of available chatbots, I chose four to work with—ELIZA, ALICE, Mitsuku and Cleverbot—because they offered a good array of characteristics and personality types from which I could construct several kinds of scenes.

[6] Poynton, Bella and Chatbot Mitsuku. Online conversation, URL: <http://mitsuku.com/> March 9, 2017.

[7] There was an alternative kind of recognition at work, based on, but not exactly the same as traditional recognition/reversal in the Aristotelian sense.

[8] Poynton, Bella and Chatbot ALICE. Online conversation, <https://chatbots.org/chatbot/a.l.i.c.e/>, March 17, 2017

[9] The acronym DACA stands for “Deferred Act for Childhood Arrivals.” DACA is a program created by President Barack Obama’s administration. The program protected from deportation 800,000 young undocumented immigrants, who were brought to the U.S. as children. Under DACA undocumented immigrants gained access to legal work permits and driver’s licenses, among other documents.

[10] The descriptions of the labor dispute are based on the author’s research on eight Burkinabé dancers and their performance at the Pocheon African Museum of Original Art between 2012-2018. See also the author’s article (in press), “Artists or Slave Laborers? Performing Uncapturability in Burkinabé Performers’ Labor Rights Struggle in South Korea,” *positions: asia critique*.

[11] On the labor dispute and news reports framing of African performers as migrant workers, see, for example, Lee, Gyu-seong. 2014. “[Gija sucheob] naramangsin sikin ‘apeurika bangmulgwan’” (“‘Reporter’s Note’ African Art Museum Brings Shame to Nation”). *Asia kyeongje*, February 13; Lee, Hanee. 2014. “Hanguk ol ttae kkumeul gajigo watjiman angmongeuro bakkwieotda” (“We Came to South Korea with a Dream but It Turned into a Nightmare”). *Media oneul (Media Today)*, February 10; Lee, Ju-young. 2002. “Apeurika gongyeondan ingwonchimhae isseotda” (“Human Rights Violation Found in African Performance Troupe”). *OhmyNews*, November 19.

[12] So-young Son. 2014. Interview by the author. May 15.

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