

# A Constellation of Imagined Theatres: Technology and Performance

Edited by Daniel Sack

In the high modernist quest for medium specificity, the theatre appeared the greatest of adversaries, shifting with protean ease as it welcomed all and sundry arts to its ever-expanding stage. So also has it incorporated all manner of new technologies, such that a screen onstage feels nearly as welcome today as a telephone or radio. Bearing this slippery ontology in mind, I would like to provisionally suggest that, among its many other applications, the theatre is itself a technology for imagining times to come, a means to theorize about our world as if it were another. This is the supposition guiding the following pages, a selection of texts derived from the book I am currently editing for publication with Routledge in 2017.

*Imagined Theatres: Writing for a Theoretical Stage* brings together very short conceptual performances exploring what is possible and impossible in the theatre, as written by close to a hundred theorists and artists of the stage. Each writer offers a text that is one page in length, describing an event that may or may not be staged in some theatre of the future. These “imagined theatres” might seem illogical or fantastical; they might break the laws of physics or those of accepted behavior. Or perhaps they could be staged in some ideal architecture where the finances, conventions, ethics, or other practicalities of actual production do not hold sway. Each is a thought experiment about the expectations of the theatre, a parable or paradox that touches upon its nature, and elaborates on the many ways in which that nature might be conceived. *Imagined Theatres* gathers together what may initially *seem* impossible in order that its readers might interrogate where that impossibility lies, and what lies are obscured by calling it “impossible.” (For is anything truly impossible in a theatre?)

A second single page of text faces each imagined theatre: a *gloss* written by the same author or another, outlining a critical context, history, or personal reflection, which models one of many possible responses to the hypothetical event. Discourse around the theatre usually presumes a binary that sets “practice/performance/art” on one side and “theory/criticism/scholarship” on the other. *Imagined Theatres* prefers to see a continuum in place of an opposition: an imagined theatre lies closer to the practice end while still connected to theory, just as a gloss lies closer to theory while still participating in creative practice. Theory in the theatre most often happens in response to performance, in an aftermath that frequently circulates in conversations that do not include or affect practitioners. But what if the theoretical happened as an event in itself? What if the act of imagining a theatre were an event with real consequences? And what if the theatre were taken seriously as a mode for theorizing?

What follows is one of several overlapping conceptual constellations of texts that collectively form the larger book: ten pieces from amid more than 120 imagined theatres.

Each text and its answering gloss also belong to other constellations (on nonhuman performance, on theatrical space, on acting, on community, and so on), but viewing them under the lens of technology highlights certain aspects that might otherwise be obscured.

Some of these imagined theatres take place in traditional theatrical spaces, forcing us to rethink age-old theatrical conceits in light of new technological possibilities. Perhaps such technology augments performance with another layer of expression, not as an additional surface across which simulation might play, but as a depth revealed. Christopher Grobe's *Stress Melody* imagines an exquisite machine for intensive acting, literalizing the actor's "instrument" in a novel way. If this communication of interiority recalls other technologically inspired promises to access a performance without consciousness—the thrill of the candid camera, for example—then how does the reuse of such material in the theatrical frame change our understanding of doing and acting naturally? Minou Arjomand's restaging of cat videos, *Animal Friendship*, alienates these performers on the bare boards and prompts Broderick D. V. Chow to locate the nature of theatricality in the difference between a simple motion and its affect-laden display.

Through architectural frame or scripted line, theatre gives body, breath, and voice to a fictional life. Yet, new technologies might allow us to write code that literally lives or to fashion performances that outlive the organic body. Consider how Natalie Alvarez's *TALES* imagines genetic engineering rewriting storytelling into a kind of life-making, where the emotions we invest in dramatic character take on a paternalistic quality. In her gloss, Ju Yon Kim asks us to consider what might happen to this newly authored life after the lights go down and the candles are blown out: what does it want? Ant Hampton's *NOT I (not)* invokes an updated version of the age-old stage machinery used to summon phantasms—Pepper's Ghost alighting on plates of glass—to imagine a theatre that keeps actors working long after their bodies have shut down. His holographic actors allow a posthumous Beckett, that writer most concerned with theatre's suspension of life on the cusp of disappearance, to finally realize a truly purgatorial existence.

Long-running performances might already show us such copies existing in an afterlife; repeating themselves as if for the first time again and again, as Peggy Phelan writes in her gloss: "living performers become holographic before their time." This attention to the working bodies that support whatever beautiful or productive gesture informs Phelan's own imagined theatre. *Plant Life* shows us the labor of the dancing body as the lifeblood for a future possible world, where the exertions of young performers sustain a mysterious vegetative plant's survival. "Let it be a *lehrstück* for vibrant materiality," as Una Chaudhuri writes in response, speaking to the ecological relation between human and nonhuman that seems so beautiful at first glance. Later, technocrats reframe the "plant" as factory, displaying Taylorism's technologizing of the worker's body in its most gracefully brutal consummation.

Just as new technologies teach us to reconsider the actor's work, they also reorient our understanding of the author or director. Caden Manson and Jemma Nelson's *Theatre generated by a probabilistic language model with grammatical artifacts retained* imagines not the death of the author, but its recombination through an algorithmic operation. Is this awkward grammar the signature of a nonhuman author still learning a new language, or are these the inventions of a latter-day Shakespeare colliding words into

neologisms? Is the flash of random mutation a first or last expression of that demon singularity hailing a new genesis without us?

These are dreams verging on science fiction while remaining tethered to a reality that feels quite proximate. (As I write these words, the short science fiction film *Sunspring* has just been released, its nine-minute script authored by an artificial intelligence program.) Such speculative fiction has much in common with the theatre: both reconfigure our world in order to pose other possible worlds extending just beyond our horizon. So Claudia La Rocco's *poolside* recounts an extraterrestrial spectacle in some distant future where the horizon surrounds us quite literally in a new kind of "Globe Theatre." This amphi(bious)theatre seems on the verge of forgetting the words that used to identify earthbound orientation and time's passage in now obsolete differences between night and day. Joe Kelleher's gloss casts us even further forward in time, projecting a theatre historian's report written many centuries hence. His archivist wonders at the fragment of a first-person account of this theatre, much as we look back on ephemera describing Shakespeare's performances.

Other pieces reflect the seamless integration of media technology into our everyday life today. *IRL*, a collaborative text by Joshua Chambers-Letson and artist Joshua Rains, makes use of the theatre's rituals of rehearsal and repetition to shadow cycles of desire and loss in contemporary hookup culture for queers of color. Here and in their accompanying gloss, the theatre is so fully imbricated with social-networking technologies that they pass unnoted, both means without end. For Isaiah Matthew Wooden's *Touching Touches*, the many valences of touch pass from hand to hand and screen to screen in an endlessly interleaved skin that might be the internet itself. There is no separation between spectator and actor in a theatre where everyone is in constant contact, but it becomes increasingly difficult to feel without difference. He asks us to recall the theatre as a place of embodiment not only for performers, but especially for spectators.

Here, we might pursue an alternate, older notion of the digital and speak of the touch of a finger flipping through pages. For these pieces, like all of *Imagined Theatres*, address the page as a stage, returning to the technology of the printed word and requiring it to contain "the vasty fields of France" and beyond. They tap, then, into questions about the burden of theatrical imagining more than 400 years old:

. . . may we cram  
 Within this wooden O the very casques  
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
 O, pardon! since a crooked figure may  
 Attest in little place a million;  
 And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
 On your imaginary forces work. (*Henry V* 1.1.13–19)

No "wooden O," these crooked figures and ciphers—these printed words—must fill the compressed confines of a single rectangular sheet. In this, *Imagined Theatres: Writing for a Theoretical Stage* deals with the specificity of the book as a technology in its page-by-page progress. And the book format imposes limits distinct from other technologies; in order to find some decisive shape, it only includes writers from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. A website ([www.imaginedtheatres.com](http://www.imaginedtheatres.com)) launched alongside the printed volume will expand that geographical confine in stages, with issues every few months featuring new contributions by artists and scholars from other parts of the world. Unsolicited submissions will also be reviewed by an editorial board for inclusion in what will become an expanding archive of imagined theatres.

In the end, our imaginings look forward in hope and fear toward what might be possible. The theatre might, as performance-maker Annie Dorsen has it in her *Universal Theatre Machine*, be a technology for resolving all the world's problems, available to us all, every day and night, but always inevitably failing. Here, as Grobe proposes in his gloss, the *theatrum mundi* is reconfigured as tragic computer. Recall Beckett's oft-quoted words: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Perversely utilized as a slogan for technological innovation in this current age of neoliberal capitalism, this phrase also still recalls the daily imagining that the theatre and the book rehearse with every passing performance and every passing page. We begin with the same means—the empty stage, the blank page—we take up those old technologies and we imagine other worlds.

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*Stress Melody*  
Christopher Grobe

**Part I**

A single, hard-edged light fades in, rising out from a pinpoint to a pool of light. It shines down on a figure seated in a simple chair, head shaved, teeth bright through the parted lips of an enormous grin. This is an actor—simply an actor—and a paragon of calm well-being.

Wires and tubes surround the actor—arms, head, and chest—and as the pool of light slowly spreads, our eyes can follow the tangle right back to a hulking machine. After a moment (*click, whirr*) the lights on the machine start blinking, and we begin to hear through every speaker in the house a pulsating drone—three notes spaced across three octaves.

With a wink at the audience, the actor begins to breath deeply. Slowly at first, unflappable, but then faster and with a look of panic. (Can we even manage some tears?) When the actor's breathing first changes, so does one note in the drone; then, with the rising intensity, the other notes change. Together, they meander into harmony or tumble into dissonance as the chord grows deeper, stranger—haunted up high by harmonics, disturbed down low by undertones.

After several minutes of this, all of a sudden, the actor goes blank—then resumes the starting pose and expression: remember those teeth, that grin. Gradually the harmonics die out, the music slims back down, and the chord reverts to its octaval drone. Once it has, a five count, then the stage lights and the machine snap off together.

**Part II**

Thirty seconds pass. Then, in the dark, a machine whirrs up, lights blink, and the familiar drone fades in. Soon, the drone begins to morph into music—its three notes moving irregularly, with unusual rhythm and cadence. If part I was an *étude*, then this is a concerto. Just listen to the harmonics. They curl around the melody like smoke.

A hard-edged light snaps on, shining down on a chair, on a machine—on a loose nest of tubes and wires. The melody continues.

### Gloss by Christopher Grobe

*Inchoate* is one of those mysterious words, like *cleave* or *quite* or *nice*. Depending on the context in which it appears (the sentence, the city, the subculture, the century) it might mean one thing—or its opposite. It can describe utter chaos—or else the beginnings of order; the sound of choking—or of a voice breaking through. This play—every play?—stages an inchoate relation among human and nonhuman actors.

In part I of *Stress Melody*, we see an actor play a polygraph as if it were a theramin, or—who can tell?—we see a machine play this resonant body before our eyes. In part II, however, in the dark, something else is happening. Who is playing the song of the psyche now? It is the audience, I hope—it was the audience all along—“playing” the actor’s body into psychic depth, “playing” the melody of a machine into meaning.

The interiority of actors has always been produced this way: as a collaboration among performers, audiences, and things, by a collusion of techniques and technologies. The telegraph and the telephone, the radio and the robot, the polygraph and the Rorschach blot—these technologies and others all queer the boundaries of the self. They don’t just allow the self to seep out in new ways; they also worm their way into the self, slowly altering the mechanics of expression, gradually changing the tectonics of the human interior.

Philosopher and physicist Karen Barad has coined a term to describe this sort of entangled, performative process: *intra-action*.<sup>1</sup> Rejecting the familiar term *interaction*, which implies that several discrete entities exist before they interact, Barad uses *intra-action* to describe how things are mattered in and through their emergent relations; *intra-acting*, they precipitate like salts from solution. What if we thought of the difference between human and nonhuman, actor and thing as the result of *intra-action*? Every boundary marked clearly on a map is the result of many forces—human and supra-human. So also the boundaries among mattering things, but technological performance can take us to the borderlands.

Champions and critics of the technological stage seem to agree on the nature and laws of this borderland. Here, technology must disrupt the humanist norms of the stage; it must constrain the natural responses of actor and audience. But why exactly must this be so? Haven’t we cracked enough mirrors in the name of disruption? Now it’s time to enact new techno-human possibilities.

In this play (and in my recent research) I’m on the lookout for new forms of organic technicity—for moments when bodies become technical and technics take form before our eyes. Often this occurs when simple machines (the telegraph, the telephone) are first brought to the theatrical stage, but it happens more palpably, I think, and more powerfully when novel machines are designed with stage performance in mind. These machines must know how to play, and if they do, actors will clamor for their services as scene partners. In order for this to happen, however, we can no longer settle for setting our machines (or ourselves) up for a pratfall. (Hey, look: a disruption, a failure, a constraint!) In other words, let’s have no more rude mechanicals, we need exquisite machines. Now, who will build them?

<sup>1</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31.

*Animal Friendship: A Docudrama*  
Minou Arjomand

I

*Floor, a small box, a giant hand. The hand slowly pulls the box toward the audience, Maru looks at the audience through the box, crawls into the box. Curtain.*

*Floor, a small box, no hand. Maru runs and slides into the box, the box slides with Maru inside. The box with Maru inside hits a table leg, which the audience only now notices. Curtain.*

*Floor, two small boxes lined up one next to the other. Maru runs, slides into both boxes. The boxes stay put, Maru stays put, tail twitching. Curtain.*

*Floor, Maru lying down, his torso contained within a small box that is open on both ends. His front and back legs extend from either end of the box. Maru stands up, wearing the box, exits. Curtain.*

II

*Bright lights, the sound of purring. A figure comes into focus. It is Max-Arthur dressed as a Great White Shark. Lights out.*

*Lights up on Max-Arthur in his shark costume. He is sitting on a Roomba, which describes fragmentary circles across the stage. From stage left, a Baby Duck enters. The Baby Duck scampers across the stage, pursued by Max-Arthur on the Roomba. The Baby Duck pauses at the center of the stage. Looks out at the audience with black, inscrutable eyes. Beat.*

*The Baby Duck turns and pursues Max-Arthur on the Roomba. Max-Arthur rides into the horizon, collides with the back wall. Enter Sharkey, from stage right. He is dressed as a Hammerhead Shark. Max-Arthur, the Baby Duck, and Sharkey begin an oblique trio. Then, the Roomba stops. Silence. Max-Arthur, Sharkey, and the Baby Duck all turn and gaze out into the audience. Beat.*

*Max-Arthur licks his lips. Sharkey licks his lips. The Baby Duck stares. Beat. Curtain.*

III

*Lights up on Goo and Yat Jai, upstage, facing each other in profile to the audience. Behind them, two large computer screens. From the rear, light floods the stage.*

*Goo and Yat Jai each raise their front paws. They reach out and their paws meet, first Goo's left paw and Yat Jai's right paw, then Goo's right paw with Yat Jai's left paw.*

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Patty-Cake, Patty-Cake, Baker's Man,  
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.

*Goo and Yat Jai play patty cake. They stop, then begin again. They stop, then begin again. They stop, then begin again. They stop. Curtain.*

## Gloss by Broderick D. V. Chow

What accounts for the astonishing proliferation of “performing cats” on the internet? The current consensus, according to Bryan Lufkin in *Gizmodo*, is that cats *don't* seem to be performing.<sup>2</sup> Whereas dogs are like shabby vaudeville front-cloth comedians, constantly looking at the audience and begging for approval, cats are the naturalistic, fourth-wall, ideal actor in furry form. Dogs are Seth Rogen; cats are Heath Ledger. Cats simply *behave*: they don't seem aware of whether this behavior is “twice-behaved” or not.

Minou Arjomand's *Animal Friendship: A Docudrama* presents three of the internet's most popular cat videos live onstage. The subtitle, “a docudrama,” provokes us to consider the relation of documentary theatre, and by extension the theatre itself, to reality. It is, of course, an impossible piece. Watching cats on the internet is pleasurable specifically because the minute-long YouTube clip reframes “natural” behavior as performance: Maru playing with a box becomes a spectacular circus act. But the animal onstage becomes a theatrical *problem*. As Nicholas Ridout writes, “the impropriety of the animal on the theatre stage is experienced very precisely as a sense of the animal being in the wrong place.”<sup>3</sup> It is in the wrong place because it cannot have *intended* to be part of the dramatic fiction and thus troubles the “psychological illusionism” of the stage. For Ridout, these moments point back to the economic conditions of the actor's labor, for the animal does not participate in these conditions. More accurately, it has different economic conditions—a treat upon completion of a trick—an economic model that in some ways seems far preferable to profit-share.

Despite their troubling nature, this hasn't stopped theatre-makers from putting animals onstage. Horses, cats, dogs, and other nonhuman animals have appeared in the theatre of Romeo Castellucci. In 2010 French theatre company Footsbarn presented *Sorry!*, which featured, intriguingly, a “Dressage of Cats” by Marie Werdyn. When I quizzed producer Leanne Alicandro at the Barbican (which co-produced the London presentation of the piece) about this aspect of the performance, she was rather more circumspect: “the cats just walked across the stage. . . . Some nights they did, some nights they didn't.” The Belvoir Theatre's stunning adaptation of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, played within a Plexiglas box, featured a live duck that flapped its wings at inopportune moments, interrupting monologues by splashing water over the actors.

However, *Animal Friendship*, by *re-presenting* celebrated instances of cat performance, goes beyond these examples of the animal onstage. It raises issues of acting in documentary theatre: if these cat videos are taken to be documentaries akin to nature programs, would different cat-actors be performing in the staged piece? And if cat-actors are *acting* in *Animal Friendship*, what do we value in their performance? Is it simply that they go through the motions of riding a Roomba or jumping in a box, or that they create the psychological illusion of this act taking place for the first time and its associated emotions—joy, terror, pleasure? This impossible piece, then, makes us question what it is we desire and value from the actor in the theatre. Is it that they simply represent “reality”? Or that they betray some *excess*, some remainder of intention and will to please—what we might call “theatricality”?

<sup>2</sup>Bryan Lufkin, “Why Cats Rule the Internet Instead of Dogs,” *Gizmodo*, September 11, 2015, available at <http://gizmodo.com/why-cats-rule-the-internet-instead-of-dogs-1728316152>.

<sup>3</sup>Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98.

**TALES**

**Natalie Alvarez**

*He's perfect, she whispers. He is, he replies. A couple two rows in front turns to them and smiles in agreement.*

CRIS stands on the bare stage under a warm spotlight. There would be time to take pictures with him after but for now they just want to take him in. He was theirs and they hadn't seen him in a full year. *He's growing so fast, she whispers. He is, he replies.*

This is the third year of TALES and he is exactly three years old today. They had been coming every year since his creation. The audience was now, by default of this performance experiment, extended family; although, they didn't yet know each other by name, only by the key roles they played in the lab exercises. *He's the one who caught the typos in the allele mutations to ensure light brown hair, isn't he? No, that was her. Was it you who animated the inexpressive gene in the 15q region? Yes, that was me. I thought so.*

CRIS grows restless in the spotlight.

Initially, the audience thought it would be cute to name the boy after the new frontier of research that created him: Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPRs). At the time, it captured their romantic investments in this participatory form of genetic *écriture*, a new form of collective creation the scientists cheekily called TALES (transcription activator-life effectors) that allowed them to write him into being. But now there was a general sense that they had failed on the name. CRIS reduced him to the acronym that made him, and they didn't want to make him reducible to that. He had become so much more than the inscrutable sequence of dashes and dots that defined him at the beginning—palindromes they soon learned to read and rewrite so intimately. One participant got segments of it tattooed in commemoration, a twisting vine of code curling around his forearm. Another woman tattooed an excerpt from her heel up along her calf and torso, tracing her spine to the back of her neck. Beneath her skirt it looked like the decorative backseam of her stockings. Proud parents.

CRIS squints as he tries to get a glimpse of his extended family sitting in the dark beyond the stage lights. He's old enough now to recognize that this is a theatre space, which comes with a certain set of expectations, and that he is the object of interest. His attention drifts to a dance of dust particles taking flight from the stage floor up towards the blinding well of light. He tries to catch them, inadvertently beginning a dance of his own. The artless élan of his movement elicits ecstatic sighs and applause from the house. The response startles him and he stops.

From the wings, the ushers emerge with the cake, carefully shielding the three, lit candles so they won't extinguish by the time they reach CRIS at center stage. The audience joins in a loud chorus of Happy Birthday. *Make a wish!* someone cries. With wide-eyed excitement at the sight of chocolate cake (his favorite), CRIS blows out the candles.



### Gloss by Ju Yon Kim

*Recent developments in genome-editing technology—namely, applications of the CRISPR-Cas9 system—have invigorated concerns among scientists and the public about the ethics of genetic modification. Even as scientists caution that the tool is still too imprecise and unpredictable to use on human embryos or reproductive cells, the efficiency and elegance of CRISPR-Cas9 has made it possible to envision an imminent future in which “designer babies” are not just the stuff of science fiction, but a serious option for aspiring parents. Far superior to previous tools, including TALEs (transcription activator-like effectors), this technology joins CRISPR sequences (“palindromic” sections of DNA linked to early immune responses) and CRISPR-associated proteins (the Cas-9 enzyme) that together enable scientists to cut and paste genes with unprecedented ease. Researchers have already begun using this system to make agricultural interventions and to study a variety of diseases. In 2015 and 2016 China and the United Kingdom approved limited experimentation on human embryonic cell lines. While a significant gap remains between what this technology can do now and what it would need to do to make “designer babies” feasible, it has nevertheless lent new urgency to imagining this future—whether as a transhumanist dream or a dystopian nightmare.*

Theatre, in *TALES*, offers a medium for managing the anxieties stirred by genetic engineering while allowing audiences to test and witness its possibilities. Scientific and artistic experimentation seem to join here in productive harmony. Acronyms like CRISPR and TALEs suggest a delight in wordplay shared by lovers of both biology and language, as well as a common desire to write life—whether through genetic codes or stories. Bridging play and research, creation and reception, the audience enjoys the privileges of spectatorship only after helping to produce (literally) the show’s star. Thus claimed by the entire audience, CRIS promises not the transmission of “superior” genes across a single familial line, but the formation of new kinship structures indelibly linked to a shared theatrical experience—one marked by awe, warmth, and delight as CRISPR becomes CRIS, a whimsical dancer and lover of chocolate. Equally crucial to this experience, however, is the strict stage/seat divide that keeps CRIS alienated and contained. This is not the future of the human race, the performance insists, but a singular marriage of science and theatre. Life outside this space of wonder will remain unchanged.

And yet, can this theatre hold off CRISPR’s other possibilities? If whispers of “he’s perfect” echo the standard greeting for newborns, they do so in an uncanny way. Is the audience marveling at ten fingers and ten toes, or is this the kind of perfection only achieved through careful genetic manipulation? The preference for light brown hair and the neatly matched couples—one woman, one man—seem innocuous as long as we do not dwell too long on questions of who has access to this laboratory-theatre, or what constitutes a proper parental unit and an ideal human being in this world. It is the familiar in the strange, the old in the new, that unsettle us when confronted with dystopian visions: we fear our present locking us into a future that is, simply, its worst possibility. While this imagined theatre refrains from conjuring the usual nightmare scenario of a “designer baby” society in which inequities are biologically perpetuated and mandated, it nevertheless nudges us to ask what happens after the cake is eaten and the audience goes home. Who is CRIS outside the stage, and what is *his* desire for the future? We seem to stand at the cusp of a turn, at that moment when theatre becomes both too much and not enough.

*NOT I (not)*  
Ant Hampton

During November and December 2014 I staged a production of Samuel Beckett's *Not I* as a three-dimensional holographic projection. Nobody realized that it wasn't real—that there wasn't anyone there on the stage. It was the kind of hologram that doesn't require the audience to wear goggles.<sup>4</sup>

Despite her age and frail condition, Billie Whitelaw, who had originated many of Beckett's greatest roles, agreed to be captured for the project as long as it could be done at her nursing home. The performance was excellent, in large part due to Billie's extraordinary talent and experience, but also due to the care that went into the editing. My guess is that Beckett would have preferred to edit his shows and actors rather than direct them.

When he came to audit the performance, the guy from the Beckett estate wept and told me it couldn't be closer to the playwright's vision. He asked if he could speak to Billie, to congratulate her. I told him she was too tired.

Press reactions were also very positive. There was great interest in Billie's return to the stage, so demand for tickets quickly soared. The theatre seated only seventy people, so we started running the show every half-hour, every day of the week from midday to midnight. We were soon averaging audiences of 1,500 a day. Questions began circulating about how a woman of Billie's age could endure the performance schedule.

On December 21st Billie Whitelaw passed away. All shows were cancelled, but on Christmas Day I issued a press release announcing that Billie would resume performances.

The Beckett estate guy called up and demanded a ticket. During the performance he sat still, apparently frozen, until just after the first of the auditor's four small movements. At that moment he disrupted the performance by yelling and running onto the stage, but found himself tangled in the Musion NotEyeliner™ and had to be assisted. On Christmas Day I received an email saying the estate would be suing me for the production, which they deemed a counterfeit. Only *live* performances of *Not I* are tolerated.

It eventually went to court. The judge wanted to see the show for herself. She wept during the performance and declared that the experience was certainly "live." She ruled in my favor, saying there was nothing to distinguish this production from another performed in real time and space by a human, beyond the knowledge, only now, that Billie Whitelaw was no longer with us.

This year (2015) has seen a number of other holographic performances of Beckett's work—notably *Catastrophe*, *Footfalls*, *Act without Words I* and *II*—leading us to wonder whether his plays lend themselves more favorably to performances by the edited dead, than the irregular living.

<sup>4</sup>According to the website for Musion, the world's leading provider of holographic projection: "Eyeliner is the core of our technology, with its imagery often referred to as a hologram. A 21st-century twist on a Victorian theatre trick, the Eyeliner utilises a technique called Pepper's Ghost. . . . Famously used to bring back on stage the late rapper Tupac Shakur at Coachella festival, millions worldwide were wowed by the Tupac illusion. Our specialist foil, invisible to the naked eye, is suspended across the stage, creating a lifelike 3D image. . . . Extremely flexible, scalable and quick to install, Eyeliner will bring your event alive in any environment" (see <http://musion.com/eyeliner/>). For the production a slightly adapted version was created, called Musion NotEyeliner™.

## Gloss by Peggy Phelan

### Hologram

Rendering Samuel Beckett's *Not I* a hologram, Ant Hampton exposes the play's uncanny poise between the there and the not there. Where is Mouth speaking: in a courtroom? In a nursing home? In a home for the mentally ill? On a stage? In Beckett's mind? Mouth's dilemma is that she cannot quite locate herself, caught as she is by her incapacity to inhabit or utter the "I" that grounds self-presence. Feminist scholars have often pointed out that Mouth's struggle to say "I" mirrors the struggle women often face within phallogocentrism. Spoken, rather than speakers, women sometimes are cast as holographs in patriarchy's relentless (all-too-real) drama.

### Billie Whitelaw

What is the strange transubstantiation between the writer's voice and the physical embodiment of that voice? In theatre and performance, that gap is what ties the performer to the writer. Beckett said he wrote *Not I* "for" Whitelaw, and her legendary performance at the Royal Court in 1973 has become the standard, nay, the hologram that flickers behind all other subsequent performances. A feat of endurance, speed, and tone, Whitelaw's performance emerged from her conviction that Beckett had written an "inner scream" she immediately heard and understood. She also said that rehearsing the play with him was like working with a conductor; it was the rhythm and pace that mattered most. Her performance, an intimate concerto of spittle and stutter, trembling chin and vibrant tongue, is inseparable from the "meaning" of Beckett's words.

### The Edited Dead

Beckett died on December 22, 1989; Whitelaw on December 21, 2014. In the twenty-five-year interval after his death and before her own, Whitelaw did not appear in any of Beckett's work. That is, until Hampton placed her hologram in *NOT I (not)*. Whitelaw's decision not to perform Beckett's work after his death allowed her to avoid any potential denial of rights from the artist's estate. Under the direction of Beckett's nephew, Edward, Beckett's estate has retained such strict control over productions that his work risks being transformed from live art to a complex algorithm. Hampton's *NOT I (not)* warns against the risk of "protecting" Beckett's work by suffocating it entirely. The Whitelaw hologram avoids fatigue and pain and can play repeatedly. Just as the play insists on a gap between she who speaks and Mouth, the hologram reveals the chasm between the copy and the live event. The hologram *Not I* gives us *NOT I (not)*.

### Other Catastrophes

Celine Dion began performing "a residency show" in Las Vegas in 2003. She performed the show until 2007, took a break, and returned with a new show in 2011. Although she has taken breaks to care for her family, the sheer repetition of this kind of live performance schedule also gives pause to those committed to the liveness of the live performance. After some 700 performances of the first show, it was "impossible" to take seriously the title of Dion's performance, *A New Day*. Thus while most holographic performances seek to resurrect the dead (for example, Tupac Shakur or Nat King Cole) or absent (Narendra Modi) performer, sometimes living performers become holographic before their time.

*Plant Life*  
Peggy Phelan

**Prequel**

*Slow illumination of stage covered on ground with real or synthetic ice, and with real icicles dripping from stage lights. Twelve dancers/performers on ladders just below lights. Dancers improvise on ladders, tasting melting ice, sliding and climbing up and down the ladder. Performers are absorbed by these tasks, moving silently, without looking at one another. Music is George Winston's December, but the dancers are not moving "to" it. It is rather in the landscape around them. This "view" lasts about five minutes. Then darkness.*

**Scene 1**

*Lights up, slowly. Two tent-like translucent structures about six feet high and three feet wide, soft light inside structure on left. Two teenagers (gender/race/size not relevant) both wearing body suits. Teen 2 has hood on; Teen 1 holds hood in hand at start. Each tent has a zipper door that faces the audience. Tent on right has no one near it. Teen 2 is inside the tent on left. Teen 1 stands near the tent door. As lights come up, Teen 2 emerges.*

TEEN 1: How long did you last?  
TEEN 2: Not quite three hours. It's super hard.  
TEEN 1: What's the hourly pay today?  
TEEN 2: Five meals or two hundred dollars.  
TEEN 1: What did you take?  
TEEN 2: The meals.  
(Teen 2 steps out of body suit, hood first; Teen 1 puts on hood)  
TEEN 2: Good luck. I'm going to eat.  
TEEN 1: Thanks. Enjoy.

*Teen 1 moves to open door of tent. Teen 1 zips hood and wades inside, then attaches cables from each wrist to a large plant system that looks like sea algae but with more definition. The plant only stays alive if the teen moves, dances. The teen's dance is in the same spirit as the ladder dance prequel. Three minutes. Music is William Ackerman's "Anne's Song." Lights fade.*

**Scene 2**

*Same as before, Teen 1 inside illuminated tent, dancing.*

*Enter two men, late 50s. One in overalls; the other in business suit. Both with digital tablets.*

EXEC: How long can these kids stay in the tent without a break?  
OVERALLS: (Glancing at tablet throughout) Most last about 150 minutes. There are a few outliers below that and one spectacular teen who can stay almost 400 minutes. She is epic!  
EXEC: Are you paying her more?  
OVERALLS: Nope.  
EXEC: Who is interviewing them when they come out?  
OVERALLS: Interviewing the kids? I don't think anyone is. We give them all surveys once a month but they only fill them out if we provide a meal. And even then I don't think they are telling the truth, or maybe even reading the surveys. Seventy-eight percent of the responses to the survey circle the first choice on every question.  
EXEC: Did you tell anyone we have bad data?  
OVERALLS: No. No one asked before now. Before you.  
EXEC: Why is one tent empty? We need two at a time, all the time!  
OVERALLS: We are having a harder time recruiting teens. We either have to pay them more or go to a younger group.  
EXEC: (Pause. Considering) What about senior citizens? We can get them cheap, especially if we tell them it is all for the next generation—they love that!

## Gloss by Una Chaudhuri

"O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"  
—William Butler Yeats, "Among School Children"

Yeats's faith in artistic plenitude is far behind us. The dance now—and movement, action, life itself—appears instrumentalized and commodified, embedded in brutal systems of labor and exchange. A doubly alienated labor: not only is it not dance, it may not even be the agricultural contribution it appears to be. It may just be "science," and not even good science: shoddy protocols producing "bad data."

But the kids are amazing; one's even "epic." If they keep at it, they'll maybe generate some future version of the Green One, ancient archetype with many forms, from Greek Pan to Islamic Khidr, patron saint of healing waters; from *Gilgamesh's* forest guardian Humbaba to the foliate-faced Green Man adorning the walls and doors of medieval churches. The teens' version looks to be a mashup of the *Cyborg Manifesto* and a Rachel Rosenthal performance, the one in which she danced "Earth's astounding motion: Earth moves, Earth bounds. Earth careens. Earth cavorts. Earth does the tectonic shuffle."<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, you gotta eat. Take the meals instead of the money, fuel up for the next shift—or next workout, if that's what it is. Then suit up, and go in—or go on, if it's only a show. Either way, you're working, and living. And something—your dance, it seems—is making the plants grow. Let it be a *lehrstücke* for vibrant materiality, a teaching play about biocentric harmonizing, a mindful biopolitics for the post-abundance era.

Or let it be a new human embroidery on the skin of the earth. From translucent, tented incubators, the hooded teens weave filaments of future nourishment, their fingertips hot with prophecy. Never-before-recorded spectra of energy waves shoot out from the elbow crooks, ankle flexes, and cuff rotations of the work-dancers. Dilemmas left behind, the epic omnivores perform Artaud's insight: "if it is important for us to eat first of all, it is even more important for us not to waste in the sole concern for eating our simple power of being hungry."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Pangean Dreams*, directed by Rachel Rosenthal, DVD (Los Angeles: Rachel Rosenthal Company, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 7.

*Theatre generated by a probabilistic language model with grammatical artifacts retained*

**Caden Manson and Jemma Nelson**

*The stage is empty and in darkness. In a flash the following unfurls.*

A lightning strike melts away into an ocean storm. A burning plane amends into a knife and reconstructs into a shark convulsing for breath out of fog. Andy Warhol transforms into a footlong sandwich and restyles into a swelling cloud of mist that disperses into a set of chattering teeth then adjusts into a speeding train. A raging river revises into and a laughing child then reorganizes into a footlong sandwich that restyles into a gleaming obelisk. A table adapts into a diaphanous jellyfish that mutates into a towering mountain. A gleaming obelisk converts into a spotlight and transfigures into a suicide bomber that remodels into a laughing child that reorganizes into a gleaming skyscraper. A lightning strike melts away into a field of rocks that metamorphoses into a fading light that evolves into a knife and then into a corpse. A massive boulder transfigures into a revving sports car. A memorial service disintegrates into a screeching fighter jet that modifies into an enveloping cloud of seagulls. A pile of remains transmutes into a silent monolith. An enveloping cloud of fog metamorphoses into a shark convulsing for breath out of water. A suicide bomber remodels into a laughing child. A pile of rocks metamorphoses into a diaphanous jellyfish that mutates into a towering mountain and evaporates into a spotlight. A footlong sandwich restyles into a silent blue whale that reshapes into a smoking gun. A suicide bomber refines into an obelisk that changes into a thunderous tornado. A wedding party dwindles into a towering tree that remodels into a pile of seagulls and reorders into an enveloping cloud of dirt. An ocean storm vanishes into a gleaming skyscraper. A swelling cloud of human remains transmutes into a stinking pile of dirt. A massive boulder transfigures into a speeding train. A surprise party dissipates into a raging river. An enveloping cloud of rocks metamorphoses into a swarm of bees and reorders into and a burning plane. A burning cross reorganizes into a gleaming skyscraper. A family sitting in fog metamorphoses into a swelling cloud of rainbow fish. A massive boulder transfigures into a public march that disappears into a suicide bomber. A fading light evolves into and a surprise party. A beeping heart-pump reshapes into and a wedding party. An ocean storm vanishes into mist that disperses into a silent monolith. An enveloping cloud of fog. A gleaming skyscraper refines into a knife in a pile of debris. Andy Warhol grabbing is bleeding stomach. Andy Warhol revamps into a swelling cloud of fog. A suicide bomber transforms into a lightning strike. A flock of seagulls reorders into a towering cross. A diaphanous jellyfish refashions into a footlong sandwich. A fading light evolves into a towering mountain. A beeping heart-pump evaporates into a burning plane. An ocean storm—darkness again.

**Gloss by W. B. Worthen**

*"The danger is in the neatness of identifications."  
—Samuel Beckett, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce" (1929)*

A rule is a knife, reshaping and reordering a pile of rocks to a gleaming obelisk or a towering mountain, dissipating like any gleaming skyscraper to a field of rocks. A rule converts a rule: a convulsing shark transfigures to a laughing child, then like a suicide bomber vanishing, no remains. The stage is empty and in darkness, a spotlight mutates a swelling cloud into and a wedding party, or Andy Warhol into and a swarm of bees, sometimes dispersing a lightning strike a thunderous tornado a speeding train into and debris. As a diaphanous jellyfish on a field of rocks, or a swelling fog evaporates, reordering and restyling into and a lightning strike, but sometimes a corpse. But if lightning strikes, so does a knife; if a knife adapts, so does a shark; if a shark mutates, so does a screeching fighter jet; and if a screeching fighter jet dwindles, so does a surprise evolve and disperse, and even a corpse vanishes, beeping and chattering into the swelling cloud of fading light.

*poolside*  
**Claudia La Rocco**

... but every *evening* we would go down to the pool and—well you understand the pool wasn't exactly *down* because the ship of course was in constant rotation, or perhaps I mean to say continual, but in any event it felt good to say "Let's go down to the pool," it felt like a going out on the town, as it were, a remnant of what had been—since we couldn't actually go *out* anywhere, our respiratory systems not yet having adapted adequately to new, what you might call . . . environmental . . . realities—but where was I . . . yes, to the pool, we would get all dressed up, tinfoil and bangles and gossamer and the like, the usual fripperies and fineries, perhaps stardust on a Friday (yes yes at that point we still kept the days), all of the sections converging in the center, for ours was a spherical pool, always a trick to find the shallow end, its contents glittering darkly under and above the far-away lights of the arena, the waters shifting and lapping according to great yet self-contained waves of a certain velvety nature, and all of us finding our seats according to a strict and strictly non-discussed hierarchy—oh if you asked us it didn't exist at all—until we were all in place yet not at all still, hats and stoles and feather dusters and falsies fanning up and out and rotating somehow (you never believe me but it's *true*) counter to our direction so that one could always manage to snag something pleasing and play dress up in another section's, er, livery, I suppose you might say, no harm no foul as long as it was returned at the end of the evening, set loose in the arena to find its way home (and yes of course by this means many a covert message was managed), and by this time the after-dinner sea leopards had wended their way all throughout the great hall, glowing and pulsing and generally making a big show of their teeth, and let me tell you no matter how many times you'd seen a sea leopard's teeth the vision of that otherworldly maw never grew less, how shall we say, *itself*, and even if the beasts were completely disinterested in any grand malarkeys involving limb-rending and the like, still I'd seen many an attendee twirl his mustaches in a heightened manner approaching *great* nervousness, the sea leopards using this consternation inevitably as an excuse to find themselves on the business end of the more eligible ladies' skirts, such that one always felt the slightest twinge of excited apprehension upon eyeing the newborns that, ermmm, *resulted* from time to time after a particular skirt-sea leopard conflagration—well no of course not an *actual* fire, don't be hysterical—it's just that, well, things could get a little funny up there in the early days of The Great Travel, and certain things that you might all take with nary a second look seemed to us of the most miraculous import and happenstance, perhaps I should say happenchance, such that we were all, already, primed for what was to come each *night* and yet at the same time absolutely gobsmacked by what we all knew to be only the usual by-ordinance entertainment, heh heh heh yes indeed the *audiences*, that word having a particular interstitial meaning at the time, they did ever get restless—yes yes of course I mean "we" by "they," don't go daft on me now—so that by the time the waters had begun swirling in that particular pre-show way we all as one leaned forward (or, at times, back) in our amphitheater seating, fans tensely at the ready, waiters making the most of their trays and tentacles, the bubbly spilling up and out and over us such that we had only to open our mouths to imbibe, and always one wanted to close one's eyes and yet one didn't, because there it was now just about to become a thing that one could look at, just about to come into its very own being and move from what could only be sensed—



### Gloss by Joe Kelleher

It is remarkable to consider that the only remains we have today of the legendary *Evidences* is the famous so-called *poolside* fragment, and the even shorter accompanying *Notes for a presentation*, also known as *The Gloss*. Both have come down to us in *written* form, which was in wide use for a long time, although differences in *platform*—to borrow a term from *The Gloss* itself—suggest they were produced lifeworlds apart. Speculations that both are outputs of the same lifeworld and were later effectively modulated in transmission—even that the authors could conceivably have known each other—have not been sustained. Players will note the remarkable—and justly admired—movements and dynamics of *poolside*, as against the relative banality of *The Gloss*. According to experts, the contrast is even more marked in the originals. As is well-known, much of our own great cultural invention The Entertainment derives from suggestions to be found in these two short pieces. Imagine what else might be “unlocked”—informing even our own lifeworld—if *The Evidences* in its entirety was still with us.

### Notes for a Presentation

The number of items in *The Evidences* is vast, estimated in the quillions, at least. But even these estimates are meaningless, as there are still ~~platforms~~ ~~formats~~ platforms that have not been unlocked yet. ~~The total amount of material could be~~ It goes without saying that the very small selection of items that I will present on today etc.

1. Poolside
2. Far away
3. Collars
4. Sea legs

~~As everyone knows, The Evidences is a massive collection of material which~~ Really, our understanding of ~~The Dry Times~~ is just beginning etc.

*Poolside*. Interzone litter? Extract from a larger item? We know that the gathering of items (“anthologies”) was happening before establishment of the universal *Evidences* project. Everything had been lost. Great Travel—era of fascination for later times. Interspecies. Teeth and tentacles. Also the violence. My thesis—*poolside* is not a forgery. The ~~impression~~ ~~indentation~~ incision of the experience on the reporter is authentic. “Come into its own sort of being” at end is its own sort of evidence. See also miracle. Entertainment. Of what cannot be evidenced, only experienced. Belongs to us also. Sea leopards, compare with white tigers, unicorns. Also nonexistent, but convincing.

Conclusion. From a superficial reading we could get a “sense” from it that life was ~~intenser~~ more intense, more vivid in that form. But it is my conviction that there are experiences also that we have not had yet etc.

*IRL***Joshua Chambers-Letson and Joshua Rains**

The interior of a very old theatre that very few people have entered for a long time. A good amount of dust has accumulated. Everything has been cleaned except the stage, where a layer of dust remains. A microphone. THEY enter and begin to move the dust around. A SPECTATOR from the audience approaches the microphone. No one is white. THEY hand over their phone. The SPECTATOR reads a conversation from a hookup app (Grindr, Scruff, etc.) into the microphone. The conversation begins with a salutation, a breach, the beginning of an exchange. The conversation is happening between THEM and the person on the other end of the app in real time. The SPECTATOR recites the exchange as a single, concrete statement.

All of this is happening in real time such that THEY are not really on the stage even though THEY are actually on the stage. As the SPECTATOR reads, THEY carefully push the dust on the stage into a blueprint of the apartment or home of the other person(s) with which the conversation and encounter is happening. THEY include oblique references to details from the encounter in the blueprint: perhaps where they fucked, or where the other person(s) broke down into tears, or where the other person told a story about their recent breakup. The SPECTATOR recites the entirety of the exchange.

SPECTATOR: (Example of possible text) Hi. Hi. Looking? Could be. Really want to blow you and swallow your load man. Hit me up some other time. When you free? Hung? Just saw this. 7.5 UC. You? I'm around a lot in the evenings. 7.5 uncut also. Off today and tomorrow. Dick pic? Sure. You? I want to swallow your dick man. I do and you? Nice dick btw. I am thicker. You may be a bit longer. Cool. You too. Free now? Would love to suck you man and swallow your nut. HIV—DDF here. Rarely hook up. I am off today and tomorrow. Can I blow you after the gym? Sweaty? Yes, Sure. Where are you? 2035 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd, apt 3. Cool. I'm leaving in about ten. On the way. Be there by 8. Ok. Here. Coming down. (The conversation continues IRL)

At some point, the exchange on the app ends as THEY and the other person(s) meet in real life to fuck. The other person(s) are not actually on the stage. The SPECTATOR may put down the phone but continues to recite the conversation as it is happening. A verbatim performance of every word and every sound they make until the other person penetrates THEY. At this point, THEY stop making the blueprint from the dust and wipe it into oblivion. Every time the SPECTATOR gets to the point in the conversation when the other person penetrates THEY, THEY stop to destroy the blueprint and start the cycle again. Each time, the same motions, but each instance is singular, particular, and a variation on the theme. This continues perpetually. It does not end. When the SPECTATOR gets tired, they may stop reading as another SPECTATOR takes their place. Audiences and SPECTATORS come and go. THEY never leave the stage.

Dust continues to accumulate.

There is no blackout. There is no conclusion.

Just the endlessly renewable present and dust. Always more dust.

### Gloss by Joshua Chambers-Letson and Joshua Rains

When Joseph Roach described performance as “the process of trying out various candidates in different situations,” we don’t believe he was referring to the ritual of anonymous sex (the hookup).<sup>7</sup> But the hookup is an act comprised of an endless chain of repetitions: a standard series of salutations, flirtations, seductions, the rise, the fall, the excitation and boredom, the mundanity and the surprise, the push, the pull, the sweat, shudder, howl, and cum, the collapse, and the what-comes-after that is either a kind of dawn or dusk. And then, as Jay-Z might say, “On to the next one.”

What we are not positing is an abstract, immaterial sextopia. Like performance, hookup sex can be hard work. There is the commitment to form: the willingness to submit oneself to having the same conversations, to doing the same set of actions, and perhaps above all the exposure of the performer’s body to others and the exposure of the exposed body in performance to failure. In performance the body is never unmarked, though it can reorganize the marks that bind it. Jean-Luc Nancy describes the *aesthetic body* whereby what is “exposed are all those aesthetics whose assembly—discrete, multiple, and swarming—is the body.”<sup>8</sup> So if we have only vaguely defined the bodies onstage, it is to leave the performance open to the wide range of aesthetic bodies (of genders, races, sexes). It is not that THEY has no race or has no gender, but that we have withheld this information and left it up to you to make sense of it and to reveal your own biases in so doing. That said, we must insist that “No one is white.” We cannot allow any reader to make this all about white people (or heterosexuals). As Nina Simone said, when introducing an audience to “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black”: “Now, it is not addressed primarily to white people. Though it does not put you down in any way. It simply ignores you.”

Queer of color sex (like performance) and hookup sex as a genre of performance opens up new possibilities for being in the world together. Each fuck is a citation of all fucks before it, while simultaneously breaking from its context in order to become something new. This is what imbues queer sex with the world-making capacities José Muñoz insisted we attend to. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner describe “the queer world [as] a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies.”<sup>9</sup> And if we live in a world of catastrophe and negation, breakdown and bad breaks, a world in which we demand the future precisely because it seems impossible, then we are more than ever in need of new worlds and alternative possibilities for being in this world together. The perpetual ritual of the queer hookup as a means without end is a world-making practice that can lead to what Nancy calls for in his plea for a collective endeavor to “work with other futures—but under the condition of the ever-renewed present.”<sup>10</sup>

Bodies never go away. There is a truth to Ecclesiastes 3:20: “All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.” Nothing is lost forever. Not really. Every time you breathe in dust, you take the remains of another’s body into your own and, like sex, this is another combination of penetration and bodily (dis)integration. Which is also to say that breathing, like sex, is a way of being together, being inside each other, and taking each other inside of ourselves.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>8</sup>Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>9</sup>Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 558.

<sup>10</sup>Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), 37.

*Touching Touches*  
**Isaiah Matthew Wooden**

Ten thousand strangers meet on an empty stage  
They are as unique as the snowflakes that blanket Paradise each year  
They gather to touch each other's lives  
To touch life  
To touch

They form two concentric circles  
Outside faces in  
Eyes meet  
Breaths sync  
Hands reach

Touching  
Feeling  
Freeing  
Believing

Some are clinical  
Others pedagogical  
Each imparts theory  
Identity  
Ways of being

Touching touches  
Genuinely  
Enthusiastically  
Limitlessly

Partners change  
Scenes fade  
Still  
Touches remain.

### Gloss by Isaiah Matthew Wooden

It is late summer 2014 and I am scrolling through the pages of the *New York Times* online. A question captures my attention: “Are we losing touch with the sense of touch?”<sup>11</sup> It is a philosophical query put forward to invite reflection on the significance of what Aristotle designated in *De Anima/On the Soul* as the primary form of sense—touch—in our modern world. What does it mean to touch in the age of the Facebook “like” and the Tinder “left-swipe”? Is touch still the most indispensable of the senses as Plato’s contrarian pupil once proclaimed?

I am immediately reminded of an earlier op-ed piece the *Times* ran, a condensed version of the commencement address that Jonathan Franzen delivered at Kenyon College in 2011.<sup>12</sup> Franzen’s essay opens with an evocative description of his infatuation with the BlackBerry Bold he’d recently purchased. The award-winning writer explains that he cannot keep his hands off the device, fondling it in moments even when he does not need to use any of its many features. He loves the thing. And that love, he suggests, is emblematic of the ways in which our technological obsessions have come to trouble “real love.”

Now more than ever, it seems it is possible to touch without feeling. What does this new reality perhaps signal about our sense of touch? Our capacity to feel? Our ability to love?

My thoughts return to Aristotle and his penchant for calling into question the prevailing beliefs of his time. In the same way that the philosopher attempted to recuperate touch as a vital sense and declare it as the most significant characteristic differentiating humans from animals, he also endeavored to reclaim theatre as an important art form.<sup>13</sup> That he cites the capacity to stir profound emotions and bring about renewal—catharsis—as critical features of tragedy is noteworthy, I think. In Aristotle’s estimation, tragedy—theatre—must touch. Touch, in other words, is fundamental to theatre.

What draws me to theatre as both an artist and spectator? Above all, it is the possibility that I will be touched. It might be a particularly well-crafted line or a perfectly timed light cue that grips me. It might be the box-office assistant brushing my fingers when she hands me my ticket or a fellow spectator stepping on my feet as he makes his way to the seat next to mine. To be sure, it is theatre that makes me most acutely aware of the indispensability of touch. While scenes fade, touches remain. But what of those who do not have the same relationship to theatre? Have they lost all touch with the sense of touch?

I am mulling these questions when a notification from my iPhone alerts me that someone has “liked” a picture I posted on social media. I pick up the device to investigate. Swiping across its glossy screen, I am touched. I wonder: Am I out of touch? Too in touch?

<sup>11</sup> Richard Kearney, “Losing Our Touch,” *New York Times*, August 30, 2014, available at [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/losing-our-touch/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/losing-our-touch/?_r=0).

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Franzen, “Liking Is for Cowards, Go for What Hurts,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29franzen.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Mark Shiffman (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing / R. Pullins, 2011).

*Universal Theatre Machine (for Leibniz, Turing, Brecht, and Boal)*  
**Annie Dorsen**

This performance will end war, religious conflict, economic injustice, and metaphysical confusion.

Making literal the notion of *theatre* as a space for rehearsing the world, the Universal Theatre Machine is a universal problem-solver. It is a performance for 7 billion (and counting). It actualizes Gottfried Leibniz's imagined *calculus ratiocinator* (rational calculus), a machine for settling disputes of all kinds: philosophical, ethical, geopolitical, social. In Leibniz's words:

If we had it, we should be able to reason in metaphysics and morals in much the same way as in geometry and analysis [G.VII.21]. If controversies were to arise, there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants. For it would suffice to take their pencils in their hands, to sit down to their slates, and to say to each other (with a friend as witness, if they liked): Let us calculate [G.VII.200].<sup>14</sup>

The machine is both mechanism and means. It uses as data the whole history of the world—all human knowledge and experience—and converts it into manipulable symbols, available for calculation.

Each performance of the piece ends when, inevitably, it all goes horribly wrong. When the irrationality that hides in the center of the rational reasserts itself, when the machine fails to find a solution for fear.

This performance is offered every day.

<sup>14</sup> Bertrand Russell, ed. and trans., *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937), 169–70.

### Gloss by Christopher Grobe

Back in 1991, Brenda Laurel published a book called *Computers as Theatre* in which she applied theatre theory (especially Aristotle's *Poetics*) to the art of interface design. No one has yet written its counterpart, *The Theatre as Computer*, but this playlet might serve as the lead epigraph for such a book. The theatre, after all, is a place of simulation, so what's stopping us from using it to run simulations—say, a million or two per second? Well, obvious answers aside . . .

And Dorsen doesn't settle for obvious answers. She doesn't protest that the theatre is only concerned with the singular—present bodies, palpable sensations, instant emotions. She doesn't dwell on the small bounds of theatre, nor does she gape at the scope of the dataset. Instead, she thinks to herself: *A stage is quite big enough, thank you very much, for Big Data*. In fact, porous to the world, already obsessed with "manipulable symbols," and compelled always to repetition and permutation, the theatre is practically the perfect place for a calculation: "great reckonings in little rooms" indeed!<sup>15</sup>

What Dorsen objects to is only the mood we insist on attaching to our candidates for Universal Machine. The cheerful actuarial science of Leibniz, the gee-whiz promises of the TED Talk, the endless sunshine of Silicon Valley—none of these makes room for pain, doubt, and fear. So what in the world do they have to do with the theatre? (And what in the world do they have to do with the world?)

The *Tractatus Coislinianus*, thought to summarize a lost sequel to Aristotle's *Poetics*, would, I think, please Dorsen very much. It gives fear pride of place: "Tragedy . . . wishes to have a due proportion of terror. It has pain as its mother."<sup>16</sup> Dorsen offers us precisely this: no, not just terror and pain, but due proportion. For once, a tragic computer.

<sup>15</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, with the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, *Reconstruction of Poetics II*, and the Fragments of the *On Poets*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 43.

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