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Editorial

The editorial board of *Platform* was particularly curious as to the sort of submissions that this issue of the journal would receive. The last two issues have been themed ("Theatres of Resistance" and "Receiving Reception"), and we were interested to see whether an open issue would hold the same appeal to contributors. We're happy to say that the result is an exciting cross-section of new scholarship. The contributors to this issue come from various disciplinary backgrounds, make use of different critical perspectives, and deal with a diverse range of subjects. What they have in common, however, is a genuinely original take on their various topics. In each case, the authors approach familiar areas of inquiry in ways that shed light on old issues and raise new and intriguing questions.

In Theron Schmidt's article "Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre," the author takes a close look at the "emotionally detached" acting style that characterises Maxwell's productions. Through a highly articulate, thoughtful, and above all penetrating analysis of the plays themselves and of Maxwell's own commentary on the productions, Schmidt argues that rather than acting as commentary on fiction and reality, the New York City Player's performance style instead serves as a living metaphor for the act of acting itself.

Neema Parvini, on the other hand, takes a much more literary approach to the reception of N.F. Simpson's productions. Through a close reading of Simpson's works and a comparative analysis of Simpson and his contemporaries, Parvini argues that Simpson's writings have been given short critical shrift by scholars and reviewers who insist on categorizing his work as either "Absurdist" or belonging to the "Comedy of Menace." For Parvini, the question of the plays' genre is far less relevant than the social commentary that he sees as central to Simpson's work.

Mary Daily and Dani Abulhawa each take very different approaches to the concept of performance. Daily's article on mascot performance both considers the origins of familiar sports icons such as Baldwin, the Boston College Eagle, and deconstructs their contemporary performance from a materialist perspective. Drawing heavily on Marx, Daily illustrates the fetishized nature of the modern mascot, and points out the commodification of the performers who enact the mascot role. Abulhawa's article, by contrast, examines the performative nature of skateboarding through a feminist lens. Conceptualising the marginal position of female skateboarders as an "edgeland" that is neither mainstream nor fully integrated into the skateboarding subculture, she uses Judith Butler's theories of gender construction as a way of beginning to approach and understand the "performance" of the female boarder.

Natalia Theodoridou's article moves us into the theatre of Classical Greece. Combining modern queer theories with traditional approaches to the study of Classical literature, Theodoridou offers a new take on cross-dressing in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Using an approach that is similar, in many ways, to those of the other contributors, Theodoridou argues for a reading of the *Bacchae* as a play which acts as a critique of the society and institution that produced it.

Finally, Stephe Harrop's article on her practice-based research into Ezra Pound's version of the *Trachiniae* challenges dominant notions of both the translator and the text, suggesting a much more dynamic relationship between the actor and her script. Through a combination of approaches that include an analysis of the translation itself and a

thorough examination of Pound's writings on the topic of translation, Harrop argues for a performance practice that makes use of both the words and the layout of the translation to motivate the choreography of a performance.

All the articles engage with, and challenge, existing scholarship while also offering new approaches to the topic they undertake. Each piece is a passionate and enthusiastic effort to reexamine not only the specific subject, but also the critical perspectives that have hitherto been used in such examinations. Cumulatively, these papers represent the perspectives of a new generation of scholars determined to both learn from and to question the work that has been done in the past.

As ever, the editors would like to thank the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, the University of Plymouth Press, Routledge, Intellect Books, and all of the peer and academic reviewers who have helped to bring this issue together.

Rachel Clements and Jim Ellison
(Issue Editors)

Notes on Contributors

Dani Abulhawa, an early-fourth wave amateur skateboarder, is currently in the process of producing a Practice-as-Research PhD within the Performance Studies department of the University of Northampton. Focusing on the gendered nature of skateboarding and public space, her performance practice explores the role of costuming in performing and disrupting gender and the social productions of space.

Mary C. Daily holds a BA in English and Comparative Literature and an MA in Psychology in Education, both from Columbia University. She is currently a graduate student and Teaching Fellow in the Department of English at Boston College. Mary's research involves the intersection between cultural performance discourse and literary theory with current inquiries including the performance of Boston Brahmin courtship rituals in the nineteenth century and Post-WWII homosexual anxieties as mediated by the American musical.

Jane George was Director of Coral Arts, a company specialising in site specific performance from 1992 – 2004. She was then awarded a studentship at University of Winchester to study for her PhD, entitled "Performance of Place as En/countering Narrative to Globalisation," which is now near completion. She has been a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Performance at University of Worcester since 2007. Her research interests are contemporary performance practices, site specific work and devising.

Stephe Harrop is a theatre practitioner and academic. She originally trained as a dancer, before studying at the University of York, and Royal Holloway (University of London). Her practice-based research explores the ways in which text, particularly poetic text, can provoke, define, and shape physical performances. Her doctoral thesis examined this question in relation to modern poetic versions of Greek tragedy, and her most recent research is concerned with highlighting the links between feminist and choreographic readings of verse. She is currently a Teaching Fellow at Royal Holloway, where she lectures in theatre history, the reception of ancient tragedy, actor training and performance practice.

Kene Igweonu completed his PhD in contemporary African theatre and performance at the University of London in 2007. He is currently a lecturer in the Centre for Performance and Literature (incorporating Film Studies) at Swansea Metropolitan University, where he teaches Physical Theatre, Acting and Research Skills. He was a founding member and the inaugural Issue Editor of *Platform,* and has presented papers at various national and international conferences in England, Finland, South Africa, USA and Ghana. He is a member of the African Theatre Association and co-convened its 2007 international conference at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is also a member of the International Federation for Theatre Research and convenes its African Theatre and Performance Working Group.

Megan Macdonald holds a BA in Drama and German from Mount Allison University, Canada, and an MA in Performance from Queen Mary, University of London, where she

is in her final year of doctoral work. She is interested above all in what people believe and how they perform that belief, whether through rituals, in performance art or in everyday life. Her thesis examines the performance of belief in the west and seeks to look past representational meaning in order to analyse spiritual performance in light of the performative qualities inherent in practices that both instantiate and produce belief.

Eirini Nedelkopoulou is a third year PhD student and part-time seminar tutor in the Department of Film, Theatre and Television at the University of Reading. Her doctoral research is on Multimedia Practices in Contemporary Greek Performance, with particular focus on the reconfiguration of both body and space through technology. She received her MA in theatre directing from Royal Holloway and her BA in Theatre Studies from the University of Patra in Greece.

Neema Parvini is reading for his PhD at Royal Holloway, where he won the Edme Manning Award, a McDonalds scholarship and several other prizes for his 2004 undergraduate degree. He gained his Masters degree from Oriel College, Oxford with distinction in 2005. His PhD thesis, "Shakespeare's History Plays: Re-thinking Historicism," evaluates new historicism and cultural materialism by looking at their theoretical assumptions and critical practices, particularly, the enduring, anti-humanist, influences of Althusser and Foucault. Re-reading Shakespeare's history plays in the contexts of Elizabethan historiography and early modern Italian humanism, it posits an alternative way of reading Shakespeare historically, while also re-asserting the claim that Shakespeare was a dynamic political thinker.

Theron Schmidt is a writer and performer based in London. He is currently pursuing AHRC-supported doctoral research into relational aesthetics and theatricality at Queen Mary, University of London. He was also a critical writer with Writing from Live Art, a Live Art UK initiative, and his reviews have been published in <u>AN Magazine</u> and <u>RealTime</u> (Australia). As a performer, he has presented solo work at Camden People's Theatre and Chisenhale Dance Space, and has collaborated with Apocryphal Theatre, Barbara Campbell, Chris Goode, Punchdrunk, Rotozaza, Rajni Shah, and Unlimited Theatre.

Natalia Theodoridou studied theatre at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Her research interests include the relationship between religion and art (film, theatre, literature), with a special affection for ancient Greek tragedy and its sacrificial violence. Currently, she is exploring the theme of violence in Asian ritual theatre and dance as part of her MRes programme at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Abstracts

Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre
Theron Schmidt (Queen Mary, University of London)

Both academic and popular critics identify something paradoxical in the work of Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players, in which there is a disparity between the emotional content of Maxwell's plays and the company's distinctively "flattened" mode of acting. This paradox is often expressed in terms of an opposition between reality and artifice, and attempts to resolve it suggest that Maxwell is aiming at a higher form of the "real" through his artificial style. In this paper, I use selections from various interviews with Maxwell to argue that his interest lies not in attaining on-stage "reality" through the transcendence of artificiality, but in maintaining a mode which is simultaneously real and artificial. Markus Wessendorf has likened Maxwell's work to Hans-Thies Lehmann's description of "postdramatic theatre," but I suggest that the paradoxical experience which Maxwell evokes might go much further back, to Diderot's 1773 *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*.

N.F. Simpson and the "Theatre of the Absurd"
Neema Parvini (Royal Holloway, University of London)

In the wake of a recent West End revival, this paper explores the work of N.F. Simpson. Once heralded as Britain's most promising playwright, Simpson has not enjoyed the same reputation as his one-time collaborator, Harold Pinter. Simpson's plays are now seldom talked about or performed; they are often dismissed as being enjoyable yet shallow stylistic exercises or elaborate games of logic. The paper has two principle aims. Firstly, to establish the extent to which Simpson can be considered a writer of the "Theatre of the Absurd" by reading his work in relation to Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter. It also attempts to provide political and philosophical contexts for the post-war absurdist movement in drama. Secondly, the essay seeks to challenge the long-established notion that Simpson's plays, whilst undoubtedly funny, essentially say nothing. By drawing out the latent social satire in Simpson's seemingly *non-sequitur* plays, this essay argues that they remain relevant for both performance and criticism today.

Mascots: Performance and Fetishism in Sport Culture
Mary C. Daily (Boston College)

Mascots exist in sports ranging from high school track to professional football, and their role has never been academically questioned. From a cultural standpoint, mascots serve as entertaining aspects of sport culture; however, upon deeper examination, one can conceptualise mascot performance as representing fetishization. Mascots correspond to single facets of sport society and this paper brings their fetishistic status to the forefront in order to initiate an academic discussion as to why and how these performances perpetuate themselves in modern culture. The discussion includes theorists ranging from

Joseph Roach and his work on effigies to Karl Marx and commodity fetishism. Through working to elucidate relationships between mascots and other fetishized objects, readers are encouraged to see mascot performance through an innovative lens.

Female Skateboarding: Re-writing Gender
Dani Abulhawa (University of Northampton)

Focused on the male-dominated and socially/spatially provocative skateboarding subculture, the article presents the argument that skateboarders locate themselves at the "edgelands" of mainstream culture, which is also the position occupied by female subjectivity within skateboarding. Considering female involvement as a performance intervention, the article explores representations of women in skateboarding from an industry perspective, followed by an analysis of several progressive female skateboarders as exemplary of a performance of gender that problematises the dominant "alternative" masculinity displayed by heterosexual male participants.

A Queer Reading of Euripides' *Bacchae*
Natalia Theodoridou (Royal Holloway, University of London)

This paper investigates the various ways in which queer theory can be applied to Euripides' *Bacchae* and focuses particularly on three points: the cross-dressing of the ancient Greek actors who played female roles and its effect on the creation and reception of tragedies, Dionysos' effeminacy, and Pentheus' famous cross-dressing scene. The subject is examined through the lens of both ancient Greek tragedy's socio-cultural context and contemporary queer culture.

Ancient Greek theatre is often characterised as "transvestite theatre" because of the all-male cast and it is customary for feminist critics to attack the ancient female impersonation as biased and oppressive. However, this paper explores the possibility that this may be a case of internal critique of the representation of women, a challenge to the binary opposition between male and female, facilitated precisely by the Dionysiac context in which the performances were taking place. The *Bacchae*, as a play in which the representation of women by men is taken to an undisputable extreme, could be seen as either appropriative or subversive of gender roles, deepening the divide between male and female or effectively deconstructing both.

Ezra Pound's *Women of Trachis*: Modernist Translation as Performance Text
Stephe Harrop (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Women of Trachis, Ezra Pound's version of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, stands as testament to the poet's commitment to the demolition of previously existing rules of translation. The play also provides a blueprint for some of the ways in which a genuinely modernist relationship might be achieved, not only between the dramatic literatures of the past and the present, but also between the organization of words upon the printed page, and the

kinaesthetically expressive body of the performer. *Women of Trachis* is a complex, little known and seldom performed version of Sophocles' play, but within its idiosyncratic text are to be found intriguing clues about the ways in which its author envisaged the relationship between poetic text and the motion of the theatrical body in performance. This article explores some of the distinctive ways in which Pound attempted to re-make ancient Greek tragedy as a credibly modernist performance event, drawing upon my own experiences as a physical theatre practitioner in rehearsing and performing Pound's Greek choruses.

Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre

Theron Schmidt (Queen Mary, University of London)

The seemingly simple aesthetic form of performances by Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players, in which actors speak and move with minimal emotional affectation and in which the scripts are constructed largely out of apparently insignificant elements of everyday speech, seems to baffle academic and popular critics alike. We read into these choices a set of apparent contradictions and paradoxical strategies which seem to challenge our conception of how theatre works. So Philippa Wehle in *Theatre Forum* and Robin Pogrebin in the *New York Times* both grapple with the curious way in which they come to have emotional investment in the characters in Maxwell's plays, with Wehle asking "what is the appeal of these curious stock figures who barely move and who deliver their mundane monologues in a flat monotone […]?" (75) and Pogrebin puzzling that "[s]omehow the less demonstrative their behavior, the deeper they seem" (1). In the *Guardian*, Lyn Gardner similarly describes the effect as "*weirdly* compelling" and "*curiously* moving" (my emphasis), and Sarah Hemming writes in the *Financial Times*, "paradoxically, [the characters] and their troubles seemed unusually vivid and moving."

There is clearly something enigmatic about Maxwell's work, and as an audience member at 2006's *The End of Reality* at the Barbican, London, I left not quite sure of what I had seen. Despite the presence of all the traditional elements of a play – including a fixed playscript (which is available for purchase from the company), costumed actors portraying characters, an identified author and director of the work, and a single storyline presented in sequence (albeit with unsignalled

discontinuities in time) – I found it difficult to accept that I had seen a play.[1] This discomfort with identifying the work as a play, its writer as a playwright, and its performers as actors, is perhaps allied with the impulses of some critics to want to see the work as *more* than a play, as something which is built out of the elements of a play but is somehow other than a play, somehow new. And yet, ultimately, I suggest that what is revealed in Maxwell's work is not something *beyond* theatre but is, simply, theatre itself, in an unresolved paradox of pretending to pretend.

Wehle's piece reveals something of the desire for this work to be more than it is. Her descriptions of Maxwell's work give it a sense of exceptionality, somehow different from other theatre – and ultimately, in her argument, as enabling an access to reality which is impossible for other theatre. Writing about the staging of *House* (1998), she says, "There is no place for illusion here; what we see is what we're going to get" (74). Referring to Maxwell's description of *House* as a "modern Greek tragedy," Wehle comments, "[w]hereas it is true that *House* is about revenge, murder, and fate and the play has the stark simplicity and concentrated plot of Greek drama, it is hardly the House of Atreus or Thebes" (75). These comments are no doubt intended to illustrate the aesthetic feel of Maxwell's work rather than articulate an analysis of the formal processes at work. Nevertheless, I question to what extent illusion plays more or less of a role in Maxwell's work than it does in any other theatre, even in the most conventional of plays. If there is no place for illusion, then why have characters at all, let alone a stage-set which, though stark, is not the starkness of an empty stage

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[1] This difficulty with recognising Maxwell's work as a "play" is also a consequence of the way his work is programmed in the UK, as part of the Barbican's BITE seasons of "fresh new work that hovers on the very edges of classification" (as the Barbican describes it). The run of *The End of Reality* included a post-show discussion led by Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment and a parallel panel discussion at the Riverside Studios with Maxwell, Etchells, Phelim McDermott of Improbable Theatre, and Adrian Heathfield. Situating Maxwell's work alongside Etchells' explicitly anti-theatrical project, for example, certainly changes the way in which UK audiences react to Maxwell's work and supports the notion that these works are somehow challenges to the idea of a play rather than extensions of them.

but rather the meticulously reconstructed stage-set of the empty rehearsal studio?[2] Similarly, the Houses of Atreus or Thebes – as represented in Greek tragic drama – are hardly the *actual* Houses of Atreus or Thebes either. That is to say, the House of Atreus we know is a house made of scripted words, actors, masks, and representations of violence – ontologically indistinguishable from Maxwell's *House*. What is at stake in marking out this *House* as a different kind of house?

Wehle describes Maxwell's work as transcending its theatricality through "a process which allows each actor to drop the mask and be real" such that "each person comes through in a pure form" (78). This language suggests a belief in some ultimate reality which comes through in New York City Players performances, and which is uniquely accessible because of their performance style – a suggestion which is reinforced by some of Maxwell's own comments on the matter. After interviewing Maxwell for the *Financial Times*, Hemming hypothesises, "[p]erhaps his shows move us because he gets a little closer to what he calls our 'core being': what is true about a person when he or she drops the social masks." Similarly, Sarah Gorman concludes that "Maxwell appears to remain haunted by the possibility of realizing the 'authentic' and the 'real' in performance, and also appears to hold that there might be moments or instances of authenticity which are fleeting and irreproducible" ("Dead-Panned" 14).

Yet what is troubling about this conclusion is that it tends toward a kind of teleological reading of Maxwell's shows, in which the intricate theatrical construct which his company crafts exists *in order to* enable access to a "fleeting" reality, to the "core being" of an actor independent of the process of acting. This reading is one way in which to resolve the feeling of paradox which Maxwell's shows produce: in the concomitant presentation of artifice and authenticity, valuing the "reality" of what

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[2] Sarah Gorman notes that the rehearsal room was so meticulously recreated, it even included 'the take-away menus jammed behind the phone on the wall' ("New Theatre Making" 287).

emerges makes irrelevant the artifice of how it emerges. If the performance artifice exists in order to deliver to its audience small moments of reality, then we need not trouble ourselves that such an artificial mechanism is used to transport them.

If this is Maxwell's intention, Gorman argues, it is continuous with an American Method approach, in which the aim of theatre is the pursuit of authenticity; Maxwell's own comments on the subject certainly support the importance of authenticity to him. But I would emphasise the way in which the category of authenticity is restricted to what is possible within the context of doing a "play," not seeking through the play to get to a reality beyond it. He says, "The reality of it is we are acknowledging the artificiality, and that's what makes it real. The highest reality is that there is a play happening" (Marranca). In none of his recorded conversations does he reveal any anxiety about achieving any resonance with reality which transcends the activity of playing. In another typical statement, he says, "I never ask the actors to pretend that what people are seeing is real. The reality is that we're doing a play" (Hemming).

What's more, it is important to Maxwell that the artificial framework of playmaking remains constantly in place, that it not become invisible. In a 2006 conversation at the Riverside Studios, Maxwell described how he had been educated with the idea that "good acting is invisible" and that the intention of theatre should be that "the acting disappears." However, for him and other audiences, this style of "invisible acting" through psychological realism is now immediately visible, and incapable of becoming invisible (Etchells et al.). For Maxwell, the more actors pretend not to be acting, the more false they seem – or, inverting Pogrebin's observation in the *New York Times* cited above, the more demonstratively actors behave, the shallower they seem.

In Gorman's analysis, Maxwell might be seen to be working at the problematic borders of method-influenced realism. She refers to David Graver's description of the ways in which the actor is conventionally only visible "by mistake," embarrassing and disrupting the world of the drama (Gorman, "Dead-Panned" 12). Maxwell, Gorman argues, deliberately creates and expands this theatrical territory: these embarrassing examples of "bad acting" or "failed acting." It's easy to see how this might be read as being an artificial framework set up in order to allow something "real" to slip through, as if by accident, as I've suggested might be implied by Wehle's anti-illusionist comments. But Maxwell never allows the framework to fall away by privileging either the authentic or the artificial over each other. Hence Maxwell uses both trained and untrained actors, not just untrained ones; staging and choreography is prescribed precisely; and the performance texts, while fragmentary in their content, are treated as integral and fixed entities in their usage. In her 2005 survey of several of Maxwell's shows, Gorman writes, "On repeated viewing, it becomes obvious that these 'bad' performances have been rehearsed and 'honed' to perfection [and] that the clumsy dialogue is precisely written" ("New Theatre Making" 287). Daniel Mufson makes a similar observation, writing that "Maxwell has his actors recite their lines *under the pretense* of removing any type of attitude whatsoever towards what is being said" ("The Burden of Irony" 269; my emphasis). Mufson's qualification "under the pretense" is important for my argument, because it illustrates that the absence of a certain kind of artificiality does not make the performance "real."

Speaking about the performance result to which he aspires, Maxwell describes a kind of highly charged state of indeterminacy between reality and artifice. He says, "[t]he comments which gratify me are things like, 'I felt like while I was watching I

couldn't tell whether what I was seeing was real or fake.' Like a switch was being flicked on and off, like a constant toggling between 'This is reality' and 'This is artificiality'" (Moore). This paradoxical position is not the means to achieve something else (such as the end of illusion) but is itself the goal. Gorman writes, "The dual potential of the style of acting to register as both sincere and flawed means that the work is able to provoke a genuine sense of uncertainty" ("New Theatre Making" 288).

Markus Wessendorf suggests the framework of "postdramatic theatre," as developed by Hans-Thies Lehmann, as one way to locate Maxwell's theatrical project. This description is useful because it theorises the kind of indeterminacy which Maxwell creates by not allowing the artificial framework to become obscured. Writing about *Drummer Wanted*, Wessendorf characterises it as having a "hypernaturalistic effect of derealisation" achieved by setting "traditional naturalism as a reproduction of real-life situations and speech" against "the 'extreme naturalism' of the signifying body." The actor's signifying body "refuses to recede into the dramatic fiction that it is supposed to embody by pointing instead to its own material presence onstage." For Wessendorf, postdramatic theatre as a concept is dependent upon Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, in which reality is "second-order," "a universe of signs that only point to each other, cut off from any external referents."

This framework of signs pointing to each other, and images of desire without referents, describes the world of Maxwell's plays. Wessendorf's description of the sustained co-presence of mutually exclusive forms of naturalism is one such example; others include characters breaking into song (in *House*, *Drummer Wanted*, and *Ode to the Man Who Kneels*, for example) and the signification of violence in *The End of Reality*. Song is traditionally a signifier of emotional interiority, but in Maxwell's

plays (which he has often referred to as "musicals") it is at odds with its performance framework. *The End of Reality* features carefully choreographed stage combat, which Maxwell (typically) has described as being presented without any attempt to convince people that there is *actual* fighting taking place on stage. "When have you ever seen actual fighting on stage?" he asks, rhetorically (Etchells et al.). Instead we get *actual* stage-fighting, *actual* stage-blood, and actors pretending to fight involving tremendous amounts of a*ctual* skill.[3]

The conceptual framework of "postdramatic theatre" is appealing because the absence of "real" referents keeps different orders of artifice at equal value to each other. It describes a sustained co-existence between paradoxical elements, continually deferring any resolution in significance beyond what is present, which is consistent with the kind of indeterminacy between truth and falsehood to which Maxwell aspires and which audiences seem to experience. There's a homeostasis, a tonal constancy, which one experiences while watching one of Maxwell's plays, which this description can accommodate without necessitating fleeting moments of "reality" to justify the artificial. There may be moments which seem to convey "real" significance, but it is the quality of their fleeting in and out of awareness, rather than any individual moment of revelation, which characterises Maxwell's plays. The egalitarian way in which significance is distributed is also consistent with the intense level of scrutiny which every act of signification is attended – such as the idiosyncratic pauses, catchphrases, meaningless utterances, and false-starts of Maxwell's texts.

However, there's something which strikes me as excessive in using the language of postmodernist thinking to describe Maxwell's work. I think Maxwell makes not "post-plays," but "plays"; and I think the paradoxical experience of

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[3] On my way out of *The End of the Reality*, I overheard Donald Hutera, dance critic for the *Times* (UK), comment that the fight sequences were "the best dance choreography [he'd] seen all year."

watching his work is not a result of a challenge to theatricality, but instead a reduction of theatre to its core proposition – which is, however, a paradoxical one. Wessendorf's reading, in which Maxwell's major theme is his "character's inevitable failure to ever match up, or to get on the level with, the hyperreal," is convincing, but it seems to me that the fundamental failure which Maxwell presents is less a postdramatic technique than a simple but elusive paradox of theatre.

In Joseph Roach's account, Diderot's *The Paradox of Acting* (*Le paradoxe sur le comédien*, 1773) marks a paradigm shift in the history of thinking about theatre in that it clearly prescribes a break between reality and illusion as the necessary condition of theatre. In Roach's description, prior theories of acting were contradictory and incomplete, for the most part striving toward a theory in which "real" passion flows spiritually, mechanically, or magically through the actor into the mind and body of the audience. In the problem of "spontaneity and sincerity" as opposed to "calculation and artifice," Diderot comes down firmly on the side of artifice (Roach 114). As Roach puts it, "[p]assions are embodied, not inspired" (120) and "true art does not really create an imitation of reality at all, but rather an illusion of reality" (125). Diderot asks:

> Reflect a little as to what, in the language of the theatre, is *being true*. Is it showing things as they are in nature? Certainly not. Were it so the true would be the commonplace. What, then, is truth for stage purpose? It is the conforming of action, diction, face, voice, movement, and gesture, to an ideal type invented by the poet, and frequently enhanced by the player. (Diderot 22)

Rather than being confounded by the idea that there is a stage-truth that is artificial and that is completely at odds with any *actual* truth, Diderot embraces it. Introducing the idea of a "double personality" in which the actor is knowingly separate from his or her story (11), Diderot relishes the thought of answering an actor's scripted call of "Where am I?" by addressing the actor rather than the character: "Where are you?

You know well enough. You are on the boards […]" (48). This playful example acknowledges that the audience also is capable of a double personality, aware that it is watching a fiction. Though Diderot's project is very much about becoming a "great copyist of Nature" (13), something with which Maxwell would not identify, there's a strong similarity with Diderot's embrace of artifice in Maxwell's statements: "we don't really put much effort into convincing people that what they're seeing is really happening. It's very clear […] that what they're watching is a play" (Moore).

To illustrate the wholly different nature of on-stage truth, Diderot asks his interlocutor to imagine taking a highly charged emotional scene out of one's private life and reproduce it exactly on stage. The result, he predicts, would be farcical: "You may cry to your heart's content, and the audience will only laugh" (Diderot 18-19). In an interview with Mufson, Maxwell describes the effect of including an autobiographical scene in *Showy Lady Slipper*: one of the characters learns via a phone call that another has been killed in a car crash, which is closely based on the death of Maxwell's brother-in-law (Mufson, "Hydras of Style"). In the performance, Mufson remarks, the event "provokes laughter because of the accelerated and deceptively blasé presentation of events" and the "unconvincing" final song which follows it; and yet, paradoxically, it lingers in Mufson's mind, haunting and hollow ("Burden of Irony" 270-72). This seems to exemplify the paradoxical logic of theatre, for, as Diderot puts it: "he [the actor] has had exertion without feeling, you [the audience] feeling without exertion" (17). If "exertion without feeling" describes Diderot's ideal acting, then Maxwell's "flattened" performances take this to its logical extension.

In effect, one track of acting theory continues down the line of reproducing realism on stage (though I question whether, at any point, this has been as firmly

entrenched as anti-realists claim), while another embraces the artificial. The idea of feeling-less performers is taken to an extreme in Heinrich von Kleist's proposal for a marionette theatre (1810), in which marionettes would achieve a degree of "grace" unavailable to human performers, who must always be "guilty of affectation" (Kleist 5). Edward Gordon Craig extends this argument, writing in 1908 that a marionette achieves "natural" performance because "[a]ll its movements speak with the perfect voice of its nature. If a machine should try to move in imitation of human beings, that would be unnatural" (26). To extend this to the context of Maxwell, I would argue that an actor pretending not to be pretending is "unnatural," in the pejorative sense in which Craig uses it. Maxwell's productions give us not just the actor pretending, which is inevitable, or the actor pretending not to be pretending, but the actor showing us *via acting* that he or she is pretending. That is, the actor knowingly takes on the pretence of pretending – and this, "naturally" (in Craig's sense), is what actors should do.[4]

But Maxwell's actors, like Craig's marionettes, have not transcended their theatricality; it's only the world of the play, the paradoxical framework of theatre, which supports this pretence. Maxwell's productions are still plays, with characters and stories, but we are discouraged from conflating the character with the actor. Instead, character is something which is systemically produced, a result of overlapping referents (as described by Wessendorf). Craig, according to William Gruber, envisions a similarly systemic notion of character:

> The acts and words that are an individual character's most "characteristic," it turns out, are less like idiosyncrasies than symptoms – that is, not something they are entirely responsible for or able to control, and often something they seem unconsciously to "catch" or pick up from others around them. (Gruber 15)

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[4] This contrasts with Forced Entertainment, for example, who replace *the actor pretending to be a real character* with *the actor pretending to be a real actor (but disenchanted with pretending)*.

Maxwell's actors – standing in their poses, suddenly shifting into action or song, and speaking in sentence fragments as if only catching part of a conversation happening elsewhere – are like these puppets, and, paradoxically, the room can be rich with character and story, as even dissatisfied reviewers acknowledge. In the case of *Joe*, the central character is literally passed on from performer to performer, as each takes his turn delivering the title character's life story, the last being a crudely conveyed automaton. The multiracial casting of *The End of Reality* lends an additional charge to the decentred text, as having a white actor call another white actor a "trick nigga" or argue over whether or not "we all come from Africa" (Maxwell 19, 43) – all the while speaking in calm, flattened tones – takes on an uncomfortable dimension, as some aspects of character might be symptoms we do not want to catch.

Giving life to the characters and their drama necessitates the active involvement of the audience. Maxwell says, "As a director I'm trying to get out of the way and let that [story] speak for itself in the most open way possible, and I think that involves allowing the audience to interpret this place indicated in the script in as many ways as possible" (Marranca). Yet this active engagement is not unique to Maxwell's plays; as Diderot argued, it is how all theatre works. Reality doesn't transmit itself through an artful illusion; instead, we lend illusion the strength of real feeling. The only difference in Maxwell's plays is that we are asked to watch ourselves doing it. "You have the character in the present moment with the audience all the time. They are discovering what they are saying at the same time as you are" (Ellis). I found it difficult to call Maxwell's works plays because they seemed to contradict their own existence. But, I have argued, there is an essential paradox at the essence of theatrical mimesis, and with Maxwell, it is that paradox itself which is staged. Maxwell's works are plays like any other plays – only more so.

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N.F. Simpson and "The Theatre of the Absurd"

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In 1958, in the *Observer,* Kenneth Tynan wrote of "a dazzling new playwright," with his inimitable enthusiasm he declared: "I am ready to burn my boats and promise [that] N.F. Simpson [is] the most gifted comic writer the English stage has discovered since the war" (Tynan 210). Now, in 2008, despite a recent West End revival,[1] few critics would cite Simpson at all and debates regarding the "most gifted comic writer" of the English stage would invariably be centred on Tom Stoppard, Joe Orton, Samuel Beckett or, for those with a more morose sense of humour, Harold Pinter. Part of the reason for Simpson's critical decline can be put down to protracted periods of silence; after his run of critically and commercially successful plays with The English Stage Company,[2] Simpson only produced two further full length plays: *The Cresta Run* (1965) and *Was He Anyone?* (1972). Of these, the former was poorly received and the latter only reached the fringe theatre.[3] As Stephen Pile recently put it, "in 1983, Simpson himself vanished" with no apparent fixed address. The other reason that may be cited is that, more than any other British writer of his time, Simpson was associated with "The Theatre of the Absurd." As the vogue for the style died out in London, Simpson's brand of Absurdism simply went out of fashion. John Russell Taylor offers perhaps the most scathing version of that argument: "whether one likes or dislikes N.F. Simpson's work, it seems to me, there is little to be said about it. It is uniquely all of a piece, all written in pretty well the same style, and all based on one principle, the *non-sequitur*" (Taylor 66). Whereas, for example, Harold Pinter developed and

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[1] For details of this revival see
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2007/07/25/btsimpson125.xml.
[2] Under William Gaskhill at the West End's Royal Court, these plays were: *A Resounding Tinkle* (1957), *The Hole* (1958), *One Way Pendulum* (1959) and *The Form* (1961).
[3] At The Theatre Upstairs, London, 7th July, 1972.

changed his style (and so went on to be considered in a class unto himself),[4] Simpson continued writing plays in the vein of his late 1950s successes.

These arguments against Simpson are not insurmountable: when his plays are considered alongside other plays of the time – for example, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) – they appear far less "dated" by particular social contexts. There is nothing in the suburban settings of *A Resounding Tinkle* or *One Way Pendulum* that binds them to the late 1950s and arguably both plays would work in contemporary suburbia. What is more, Simpson, like Pinter, might be said to belong to a class unto himself because his plays are without parallel on the English stage. Their legacy is seen on the small screen: in the sketches and cartoons of *Monty Python*, the logic-twisting tales of *Ripping Yarns* or the dislocated lunacy of Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer. Simpson's status as an exponent of "The Theatre of the Absurd" is not without its problems. There are very few immediate similarities with Samuel Beckett or Aruthur Adamov and the plays lack the socio-political concerns that underpin Eugène Ionesco's most famous work; Arthur P. Hinchcliffe has gone as far as to argue that "it is doubtful whether he ought to be considered as an Absurd dramatist at all" (Hinchcliffe 84).

This essay will seek to answer the question of whether it is still helpful to label Simpson an "Absurd dramatist" in the tradition of Ionesco or Beckett. In order to answer this question, I will consider Simpson's work in relation to its three most immediate contexts: first, the Theatre of the Absurd; second, English surrealism; and third, Pinter's "Comedy of Menace." I will then re-examine, through close reading, *One Way Pendulum*, which is generally considered Simpson's best work. In doing so,

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[4] Roughly speaking, Pinter started his career by writing terse "comedies of menace," such as *The Birthday Party* (1957) or *The Caretaker* (1959), then he wrote ambiguous, minimalist plays 'without plot', such as *Landscape* (1967) and *Silence* (1968), before writing the more overtly political plays of his late career, such as *One for the Road* (1984) and *Mountain Language* (1988).

I hope to clarify Simpson's position qua Absurdism whilst putting forward an argument for why his plays are still worth reading and performing today.

In his landmark study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin names five chief proponents of "French Absurd Drama": Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and Fernando Arrabal. What binds these writers is not a unified world vision, but rather that each playwright "seeks to express no more and no less than his own personal vision of the world" (7). For Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd is first and foremost a question of *style*. He states:

> These plays flout all the standards by which drama has been judged for many centuries; they must therefore appear as a provocation to people who have come into the theatre expecting to find what they would recognise as a well-made play… these plays often contain hardly any recognisable human beings and present completely unmotivated actions. (7)

However, it is clear that this would not serve as an accurate gauge for what constitutes the "Absurd." A play like Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* is guilty on all counts but, presumably, neither Shakespeare nor his play warrant the label "Absurd." Whilst dramaturgical experimentalism is undoubtedly a central tenet of Absurdism – all of these playwrights share a disregard for the traditional structures of drama – it cannot serve as its only criterion. Although Esslin insists upon the ultimate heterogeneity of The Theatre of the Absurd there *is* a broad philosophical and political underpinning that runs through all of the plays that he champions. As J.L. Styan argues:

> French Absurdism may in part be explained as a nihilistic reaction to the recent atrocities, the gas chambers and the nuclear bombs of war…Theatre of the Absurd revealed the negative side of Sartre's existentialism, and expressed the helplessness and futility of a world which seemed to have no purpose. (Styan 125)

Hence, The Theatre of the Absurd is specifically a post-World War Two phenomenon. All of the writers are, broadly speaking, anti-Fascist. For example, we

see overt opposition to Fascism in Pozzo's oppression of Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (e.g. "up pig!" [Beckett 24]) and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* in which, famously, everybody except its protagonist Berenger is transformed into an unthinking rhinoceros. *Rhinoceros* culminates with Berenger's remarkable speech for individual freedom: "people who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end! Oh well, too bad! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating" (Ionesco, *Rhinoceros* 124). Even if it stands for nothing else, Absurdism has at its core the principle of individual liberty.

Another key influence in the formation of Absurdism is the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Sartre's ideas are often given direct purchase in Absurdist plays. For example, in Beckett's *Act Without Words I*, a man finds himself on stage and continually attempts to escape it only to find himself "flung back" there (Becket 203). Here, the man is ostensibly trapped in existence: he does not have the freedom to leave the stage but he has agency to "act" (or refrain from acting) on and with the items upon it. In this reading, Beckett's *Act Without Words I* engages with Sartre's most famous argument that man is "condemned to be free" (Sartre, *Being* 553), and that there is no hiding from this freedom. Camus' bleaker vision of humanity also finds its reflection in Beckett. *Endgame*, for example, has Hamm declaring "you're on earth, there's no cure for that" and Clov telling himself "Clov, you must learn to suffer better" (Beckett 215, 132). Just as in Camus, the suffering of everyday existence is seen simply as a condition of being that is redeemed because of the "wholly human origins of all that is human" (Camus 315), which ultimately means, in Hamm's words, that "we are obliged to each other" (Beckett 132). To

summarise, the "Theatre of the Absurd" can be characterised as being broadly anti-Fascist in terms of its politics and Existentialist in terms of its philosophy.

When we turn to N.F. Simpson, it is more difficult to make statements about his political or philosophical affiliations. When Esslin considers Simpson in *The Theatre of the Absurd* he starts with a series of comparisons:

> [His plays] lack the dark obsessiveness of Adamov, the manic proliferation of things in Ionesco, or the anxiety and menace of Pinter… [they] lack the formal discipline of Beckett. (Esslin 304)

Interestingly, Esslin neglects to mention Fernando Arrabal whose logical twisting of morality surely shares an affinity with Simpson's similar games of logic. However, nowhere in Simpson is there the sort of narrative linearity or pseudo-realist emotion found in Arrabal's plays *The Automobile Graveyard* and *The Two Executioners*. Essentially, Esslin defines Simpson's theatre by what it lacks, a trend quite common among commentators of the time who almost always make the comparison with Ionesco. For Phillip Hope-Wallace, writing for the *Guardian*, "the humour is far less savage [than Ionesco's]". The *Times* claimed that "N.F. Simpson is interested only in the comic possibilities of a method that has been used to graver purpose, notably by M. Ionesco" ("Royal Court Theatre: *A Resounding Tinkle*"). Patrick Gibbs described *The Hole* as "being a parody in the Ionesco style of the conversation of married couples in suburbia" ("Play"). Finally, Martin Shulman, in the *Evening Post*, declared that it is Simpson's "ability to catch nuances of conversation and reduce them to hilarious *non-sequiturs* that makes Simpson the only valid Anglo-Saxon heir to the linguistic anarchy already spawned by Eugène Ionesco" ("Surely").

The most obvious Ionesco play to cite in relation to Simpson is *The Bald Primadonna*. Its suburban setting and focus on a middle-class couple – Mr. and Mrs. Smith – can almost be seen as a prototype for the home of Mr. and Mrs. Paradock in *A*

Resounding Tinkle. However, *The Bald Primadonna* is not indicative of Ionesco's dramatic style, as its manic degeneration into apparent lunacy is an anomaly in his oeuvre. When Simpson is read against something like *The Chairs* or *Amédée*, divergences in both style and subject matter become quickly apparent. Let us consider an exchange from *The Chairs*:

> OLD MAN: I'm so tired.
> OLD WOMAN: You were more cheerful when you were looking at the water… Just to cheer you up, let's pretend as we did the other night.
> OLD MAN: Pretend yourself, it's your turn.
> OLD WOMAN: It isn't, it's yours.
> OLD MAN: It isn't.
> OLD WOMAN: It is.
> OLD MAN: It isn't.
> OLD WOMAN: It is.
> OLD MAN: Semiramis, drink your tea. [*Naturally, there is no tea*]
> OLD WOMAN: Imitate February, then.
> OLD MAN: I don't like the months of the year.
> OLD WOMAN: There's no other kind at the moment. Go on, just to please me…
> OLD MAN: All right, then. This is February. [*He scratches his head like Stan Laurel*] (Ionesco, 2000 129)

This takes place before the invisible guests start arriving and, if one treats the invisible characters as real ones (as Ionesco and his characters do), it is one of the few instances of the *non-sequitur* in the play. The apparent arbitrariness of the old woman's requests is later explained as habit when the old man reveals, "every evening, every evening without exception, through seventy-five years of married life, you make me tell you the same story, imitate the same people, the same months … always the same" (130). Ionesco employs a series of recurring motifs in his characterisation of the two old people: the old woman constantly reiterates "I'm your wife, so now, I'm your mummy, too" (133) and the old man "might have become a President General, a General director, or even a General Physician, or a Post-master General", "a General Decorator, a General in the Navy, or a General Factotum … an Orator-General", "a General editor, a Director-General … or a Generalissimo" (129, 135, 167). We learn

that the old woman never had children and that the old man witnessed the traumatic death of his mother. The old man complains that he "has suffered greatly" and "suffered humiliation" (162, 166) and the old woman throws herself at the invisible photographer "like an old whore" suggesting something in her "character that normally remains hidden" (147). It is clear then that *The Chairs* is a dark and overtly psychological portrait of two rather desolate and unfilled people who can only look back on their own lives in terms of failure and who commit suicide on the false premise that the old man's "message is to be revealed to the world" (173) (the Orator they have entrusted to deliver this message to the world turns out to be deaf and dumb). The "absurdity" of hosting a party of invisible guests only serves to heighten the tragic reality of the couple's situation, just as the surreal growing corpse in *Amédée* metaphorically suggests something manifestly rotten (literally a skeleton in the closet) in the history of the couple in that play. Ionesco's drama hence functions as a sort of psychological realism – making manifest on the stage the hidden fears, the "dreams and nightmares" of his characters (Esslin, "Introduction" 10) – spliced with a brutal honesty that confronts head on Sartre's "totality of freedom."

Simpson's theatre can not be said to function in the same way. Let us examine a similar exchange between the couple from the truncated version of *A Resounding Tinkle*, Bro and Middie Paradock:

> *(Both relapse into silence.* BRO *reads his paper. After a few moments he looks up)*
> BRO: If we're going to change the name [of the elephant] at all, I can't see what you've got against "Hodge" for that matter.
> MIDDIE: "Hodge" is all right for a monkey.
> BRO: We'll go through some names and see what we can agree on. "Hodge".
> MIDDIE: "Hodge" for a monkey. "Gush" for an elephant.
> BRO: "Admiral Benbow".
> MIDDIE: "Hiram B. Larkspur".
> BRO: "Playboy".
> MIDDIE: "Killed-with-kindness Corcoran".
> BRO: "New-wine-into-old-bottles Backhouse".

> MIDDIE: "'Tis-pity-she's-a-whore Hignett".
> BRO: "Lucifer".
> MIDDIE: "Stonehenge".
> BRO: "Haunch".
> *(there is a pause)*
> BOTH: *(almost simultaneously)* "Splinter".
> BRO: Thank goodness we can agree on something. Now I can ring Eddie.
> (Simpson, *Tinkle* [short] 6)

This is a more obvious example of the *non-sequitur* than the passage of Ionesco's *The Chairs* quoted above. There is no explanation for why this couple have ordered an elephant, very little that associates one name that they suggest to the next, and no further elucidation as to why, for example, it is "'Hodge' for a monkey." Unlike the exchanges between the old man and old woman, there are no references to the past and no hints at an inner psyche that is "tired" or "suffering." The exchanges between the Paradocks are almost wholly discursive and concerned with fairly parochial, domestic matters or else external or abstract matters. There is no sense of ordering to events, they simply occur as random phenomena. It might be said that people turning into rhinoceroses, or corpses growing to fill a whole house, constitute "random phenomena," but these can always be reconciled by revealing something of the nature of society or of individual characters: it is possible to apply the associative logic of "dreams and nightmares" to Ionesco's poetic fantasies. In *A Resounding Tinkle*, on the other hand, nothing can prepare the audience for its random events:

> BRO: There was somebody at the door.
> MIDDIE: Who?
> BRO: I told him he better wait. *(he pauses)* He wants me to form a government. (Simpson, *Tinkle* [short] 17)

Much of the humour comes not only from the randomness of how events unfurl but from the fact that the Paradocks are unshakably calm no matter how strange these events might get. Perhaps the oddest of these unpredictable "events" is when their

Uncle Ted appears as "a young woman, elegantly dressed";[5] after momentary shock, Middie simply asks, "you look lovely – doesn't he Bro? But why ever didn't you let us know?" (Simpson, *Tinkle* [short] 17).

Simpson shares neither the dark psychological concerns of Ionesco's best work nor the sense of existential crisis found in Beckett's drama. Simpson's "Theatre of the Absurd," if it must be given that label, is plainly distinct from that of Ionesco or Beckett. Kenneth Tynan came closest to recognising this when he said, "the highest tribute I can pay N.F. Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* … is to say that it does not belong in the English theatrical tradition at all. It derives from the best Benchley lectures, the wildest Thurber cartoons, and the cream of the Goon shows" (198). Shulman too made a claim for Simpson's influences outside drama, "[Simpson] brings to the stage Lewis Carroll's logical lunacy, S.J. Perelman's hilarious ability to pulverise linguistic clichés and Beachamber's deadpan reporting of a mad world" ("Funny?"). Other critics also picked up on "a temperamental affinity with Lewis Carroll" (Taylor 207) or, as one critic put it, "the nearest likeness [to Simpson's plays] is to the higher flights of simple lunacy in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*" (Hope-Wallace). It cannot be denied that Simpson does take something from the twisted logic at play in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* novels. To take Alice's confrontation with the Red Queen as an example:

> "Where did you come from", said the Red Queen.
> "And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time."
> Alice attended to all these directions, and explained, as well she could, that she had lost her way.
> "I don't know what you mean by *your* way", said the Queen: "all ways about here belong to *me* – but why did you come out here at all?" she added in a kinder tone.
> "Curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time." (Carroll 148)

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[5] Note: in the first, longer, version of the play this character was called 'Don' and was the Paradocks' son.

This is exactly the sort of spurious logic at play in Simpson's work. Conversations and events develop unpredictably. The irrational reasoning of lines like "curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time," is echoed in Middie Paradock's reasoning. When she hears that the man at the door is wearing "an old rain coat," she says, "he was very likely trying it on for size," and when she argues, "if it's eighteen eighty-six it makes precious little difference whether you're Gladstone or not" (Simpson, *Tinkle* [short] 14, 17). However, we must not confuse Absurdism with Surrealism. Aside from the singing "Speak Your Weight" machines in *One Way Pendulum* there is very little in Simpson that can be said to be *impossible*. Simpson's plays are always, as Esslin notes, "firmly based in the English class system" (Esslin 302). Men ringing front door bells asking to form governments or the unexpected appearance of elephants in suburban gardens might sound absurd in the context of British social norms, but they are far more likely to occur in reality than, for example, the talking flowers or animated chess pieces found in *Through the Looking Glass*.

Thus, whilst the events in Simpson's plays are seemingly random, they always take place in the context of "real life," which is a statement that could also be applied to the early plays of Harold Pinter. When critics speak of *British* Absurdism, "often mentioned in the same sentence" are "Harold Pinter and N.F. Simpson" (Hinchcliffe 82) and, less frequently, David Campton (almost solely on the basis of 1957's *The Lunatic View)* and James Saunders. Simpson and Pinter both wrote their breakthrough plays in 1957, and of the two it was Simpson who garnered most of the early critical acclaim and commercial success whereas Pinter received mixed reviews. Controversy did not produce the *succès de scandale* for Pinter that it had for Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and *The Birthday Party*'s first run at the Lyric Opera House in 1958 was cut short. In 1959, both playwrights contributed sketches (along with John Mortimer) to

the successful West End revue *One to Another*, leading one newspaper reviewer to ask, "how … did Mr. Pinter, the little understood author of *The Birthday Party*, briefly seen and patchily received by puzzled critics last year, come to write successful revue material?" ("Mr. Harold Pinter"). As well as being associated with "The Theatre of the Absurd," Pinter was, and always has been since, closely associated with the term "Comedy of Menace" (taken from the subtitle of Campton's *The Lunatic View*), which led most theatre critics of the time to conflate the two labels. One article in the *Times* discusses Simpson as a writer of menace alongside Pinter and Campton, saying "menace is more implicit than revealed" in Simpson's plays and asserting that *A Resounding Tinkle* "exhibits characters in a state of mental attrition" ("Enter the Comedy of Menace"). It points to the Paradocks' nonchalant acceptance of random events as supporting evidence and goes on to claim that they "would have greeted … the declaration of an atomic war with similar unconcern." Thus, the "menace" lies in the passivity of the characters rather than in the fear of the unknown or the discursive games of power found in Pinter. Although it seems a stretch to label Simpson a writer of "Comedies of Menace," the comparison to Pinter is not totally unwarranted. Like Pinter's, Simpson's characters are total enigmas, we are told nothing of their background or why they happen to be in the places they are, and, of course, there is also the phenomena of random events. But Simpson's drama ultimately lacks Pinter's intense preoccupation with power relations whilst Pinter's drama lacks Simpson's disregard for the straightforward logic of cause and effect: they are ultimately different beasts.

Thus far, we have seen a series of things that Simpson is not: he is not an absurdist in the mould of Ionesco or Beckett; he is not surrealist in the tradition of English nonsense verse; and he is not a writer of the "comedies of menace." Perhaps it

is the right moment to turn to Simpson's most celebrated play, *One Way Pendulum*. At the time of its first production in 1959 it was hailed "as mad, marvellous, chaotic and irrelevant a play as London has seen for years" (Shulman, "Surely"). However, most critics were unanimous in claiming that it is largely a nonsense play about "nine characters who give insanity gentle rein" ("Sameness of Jokes Relieved by Resourceful Acting") but who are "utterly logical according to their idiosyncrasies" (Slater). One reviewer claimed that "*One Way Pendulum* is a superb collection of [gags] … But they do not really add up to a play" (Action-Bond). Only Martin Esslin picks up on the deeper point being made about what suburban life has become: "*One Way Pendulum* portrays a society that has become absurd because routine and tradition have turned human beings into Pavlovian automata" (Esslin 310). Each of the Groomkirbys are narrowly focused on a single obsession: Sylvia with the length of her arms; Mabel, as with Middie Paradock and Mrs. Brandywine before her, with house cleaning ("something else for me to dust, I expect, whatever it is," [Simpson, *Pendulum* 17]); Arthur with his dual obsession with the British legal system and with do-it-yourself carpentry; and, more disturbingly, Kirby, whose need to find a logical pretext to wear black has led him to killing people with an iron bar (after telling them a joke) so that he can wear it in mourning. Because of this single mindedness, the characters are totally dislocated from one another. Penelope Gilliat comments that, "the root of N.F. Simpson's comic style is the excessive difficulty any two people have in speaking to one another … Any duologue might equally well be a hand-shake or gibberish: the need for contact is what impels it, nothing more." There is then some form of human need to communicate, but this is made impossible or at least difficult because the characters lose themselves in their attempts to give purpose to their arbitrary existences. This is perhaps the wider social point at stake: the attempt to

impose an artificial order on what is essentially chaotic is not only absurd but it leads to profound emptiness and, in Kirby's case, to murder.

Kirby's current scheme is to train five hundred "Speak Your Weight" machines to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*, in order to use them as sirens on the North Pole, which will draw flocks of people to the area. Once the people are in place, Kirby plans to persuade them all to jump simultaneously; thus, ever so slightly, tilting the earth's axis and triggering a new Ice Age. This will provide a constant supply of dead people to mourn for, which *of course*, provides Kirby with a permanent pretext to wear black. This is Simpson at his logic-twisting funniest, but Kirby's plan takes on wider significance if one considers how governments have used similarly self-justifying logical pretexts as a means to go to war. Kirby's need to wear black is purely arbitrary but so too, one could argue, is a person's allegiance to a particular country, religion or cause. Esslin concludes that "Kirby's Pavlovian self-conditioning is a key image of the play; it stands for the automation induced by habit on which the suburban commuting world rests" (Esslin, *Theatre* 309) and might be extended to include all people who exist in self-justifying systems of thought, especially those who would inflict that self-justifying system onto others.[6]

The courtroom scene, heralded as "a wondrous satire of forensic logicalities" (Hope-Wallace) that displays "Mr. Simpson's comic observation at its keenest" (Gibbs, "Surrealism"), led one critic to remark that it "reminds one more of the real thing than fictional trial scenes usually do" ("Music Hall Style of Burlesque"). In the interrogation of Arthur Groomkirby, society is seen as exercising the same spurious and dangerous logic as the man it seeks to convict: Kirby. It makes a deeper

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[6] On this point, as well as the prayer from *A Resounding Tinkle* (discussed above), consider also the visionary in *The Hole* whose "ambition" it "was to have a queue stretching away from [him] in every possible direction known to the compass" so that the world could indulge in his "private vision" (Simpson, *The Hole* 2, 11).

existential point when Arthur refuses to swear on the Bible but instead insists on

Uncle Tom's Cabin:

> JUDGE: I thought the issue of slavery on the American plantations had been settled by Abraham Lincoln?
> …
> USHER: He said, "Not in my world it isn't". Those were his words m'lord.
> JUDGE: Which world is he referring to?
> CLERK: I understand he has one of his own, m'lord. (Simpson, 1960 59)

This is more than a mere linguistic trick, for the entirety of the play leading to this

moment, Arthur Groomkirby has been entirely self-obsessed; Simpson even describes

him as "an ineffectually self-important man" living literally in his "own world" (10,

17). Arthur constructs a court room in the middle of his home, which, as law-abiding

citizens of the state, we all metaphorically do. That this court room is exposed as the

construction of a man whose ultimate goal is the reconstruction of "Noah's Ark: The

Supreme Achievement in Wood" (17) surely indicates that the play makes a wider

point about the ultimate absurdity of human laws and other such attempts at objective

modes of being – all too often we forget about what is really important to us: each

other.

In conclusion, Simpson has proved a difficult playwright to categorise. His

dramaturgical methods diverge widely from those to whom he is considered closest,

Ionesco and Pinter; and if those two writers remain the benchmarks for the "Theatre

of the Absurd" and the "Comedy of Menace" respectively, then Simpson's plays

belong in neither sub-genre. Nonetheless, the scope of his vision is as powerful and

his social critiques are as valid as either Ionesco's or Pinter's. These are facets of

Simpson's work that were perhaps forgotten once he was safely pigeonholed under a

specific label. What better way to deal with a penetrating social critique than to label

it "absurd" – especially one that seeks to expose and undermine our core value-

systems? Simpson once stated that "like most Englishmen, of which I am proud to be

one, I have a love of order tempered by a deep and abiding respect for anarchy, and what I would like to bring about is [a] perfect balance between the two" (Simpson, "[A comment…]" 7). Simpson's plays demonstrate the absurdity of order as a "way of being," as a means to live one's life. His characters fail to connect with one another because of their subservience to ordered, inhuman modes of existence. If nothing else, the plays serve as a reminder that – even if there is no purpose to life, and although men and women are each free to make of themselves what they will – people all too easily get lost in their own machinations or those devised for them by society. It is worth remembering that humans still owe their survival and their emotional well-being – not to mention their sanity – to one another, and no logical system can explain that.

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Mascots: Performance and Fetishism in Sport Culture

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Sport culture is something of great interest to citizens ranging from sociology scholars[1] to sports fans. The performance rituals that accompany sport include victory dances, school songs, cheers, and mascots. As Rick Minter, a mascot historian writes, "We all care about the symbols, nicknames, and legends of our club – mascots make them real again. They are a bit of our club that we can reach out and touch" (7). If we accept Minter's conceptualization, what is the theoretical foundation that supports these representations? They make us laugh, we enjoy their athleticism, and kids love them; however, their lineage and purpose runs far deeper than their presence in the arena.

This paper argues that mascot performances represent fetishized aspects of sport culture, and specifically, that such rituals embody the ability to relate to and influence the providence of a chosen athletic team. Arguably, the success of college and professional sport teams rests on their ability to claim triumph, and mascot performances are an integral part of that process to those who believe in their power. While sports fans enjoy mascots for their physicality as furry caricatures that dance along the sidelines, their significance is founded on a supernatural power relationship. The performance of mascots perpetuates their fetishized status in sports ranging from high school soccer to professional football.

In the discussion of fetishization, one must be forgiving of possible oversimplifications present in the summarizing of various theorists, as the paper's

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[1] James Frey and Günter Lüschen outline both collegiate and professional athletics, exploring competition, reception, and cultural significance. See Frey's "Sport and Society" and Gunther's "Sociology of Sport: Development, Present State, and Prospects."

purpose is to connect mascots to several ideas and support those connections using theory rather than conducting a thorough theoretical analysis using a single set of ideas. Since not all mascots cultivate significance in the same way, a range of theorists is most useful in examining the substance of their performance.

The word "mascot" comes from the French "masco" or "mascotte," translated to mean "witch." According to historian Richard Traubner, the word came into being in 1880 when Edmond Audrain's operetta "La Mascotte" gained popularity (91). Audrain's opera was the story of a young woman who brought luck to those around her. The translated title of this operetta became *The Mascot* and the idea of a mascot as something that brings good fortune was thus established. Yale University adopted the first sport mascot in 1889 and they now perform at all levels of athletic competition.

Fetishism is a term that came into existence through the work of Charles de Brosses, and is the act of ascribing supernatural powers to material objects for the purpose of worship (Sofer 212). The word "fetishism" was first referred to in English around 1800, after popularization through French and German texts. In the mid-nineteenth century, Auguste Compte wrote a definitive history of fetishism that provided a source for both concurrence and discord, beginning the lively debates about the use of fetishism in academic discourse (Pietz 125). Karl Marx soon followed with his groundbreaking work on fetishism, commodities, and materialism.[2] While there are endless concepts and theories about the topic, this paper will focus on cultural fetishism by examining mascot performance through a fetishistic lens. As defined by Louise Kaplan in 2006:

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[2] On Marx's appreciation of materialism and the fetish, see Peitz, "Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, 133-43. See also Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat" in *Border Fetishism: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, 183-207.

> Fetishism is a mental strategy of defense that enables a human being to transform something or someone with its own enigmatic energy and immaterial essence into something or someone that is material and tangibly real, a form of being that makes something or someone controllable. (5)

Kaplan's description is especially useful as a modern definition of fetishism for an argument about sports mascots. The "something or someone" is the mascot performance and the "something or someone" that becomes controllable is luck and fortune. The driving belief behind mascots is that their performative existence brings providence to those whom they represent, be it fans or sports franchises, and that belief is at the center of this paper's argument.

One such providential performer is Baldwin, the mascot for the Boston College Eagles. This large, stuffed bird graces the sidelines of various Boston College events, even traveling with certain teams for games across the country. The mascot's name is an amalgamation of "bald," for Bald Eagle and "win" for the desire to win games. The Reverend Edward McLaughlin fashioned Baldwin in 1920, saying:

> It is important that we adopt a mascot to preside at our pow-wows and triumphant feats, and why not the Eagle, symbolic of majesty, power, and freedom? … Proud would the B.C. man feel to see the B.C. Eagle snatching the trophy of victory from old opponents, their tattered banner clutched in his talons as he flies aloft. ("'Eagle' Nickname & Mascot," par. 1)

Baldwin is a representation of nature believed to bring luck to those who worship his presence; thus, a totem owing to the mascot's endowed powers stemming from its association with a bird of prey. The most widely known presentation of totems is totem poles; however, the use of totems is also evident in such traditions as medieval heraldry, where images emblazoned on crests represented entire family clans. Baldwin is a bald eagle, the same symbol chosen by Thomas Jefferson to represent the strength and pride of an entire nation, which remains America's symbol even today (Kempthorne par. 7).

Fig. 1. Baldwin the Eagle. Photograph courtesy Media Relations Department, Athletic Association, Boston College.

On totem poles, the carvings (totems) include multiple representations of man, nature, and the spiritual world. Once theorized by Eurocentric perspectives, totem poles and their nature-based carvings gained a sense of mystique that is often associated with fetishized objects. Each carving is a relevant and meaningful totem, symbolizing something greater than the wood from which it is fashioned. The totems tell a story from which the owners draw strength and spiritual guidance.

Mascots perform as totems adopted for the purposes of good fortune. They stand in for culturally powerful or relevant representations in order to disseminate their fortuitous power. The idea behind Baldwin is that this large bald eagle will bring strength to the athletes at Boston College and they will find fortitude through the worship of the Baldwin totem. It just so happens that this particular totem is a six-foot-tall performing eagle costume inhabited by various human beings at multiple sporting events. Baldwin moves betwixt and between the rows of Boston College fans, shaking their hands, hugging children, and non-verbally mocking the opposing team, using these routines to win the affections of his audience. Through delighting in Baldwin's performance, fans of

Boston College athletics become active participants who worship their team's totemic identity. Although the actors who perform Baldwin often change, the eagle totem remains, highlighting the key difference between the essence of a totem pole and the essence of mascot as totem: totem poles have a life cycle and mascots do not. Totem poles are meant to return to the earth as their wood decomposes (Myers par. 7). Totemic mascots are imagined in such a way that their presence perpetuates without life cycles. When this interminable lifespan becomes linked to mascot representations, their performance becomes effigial.

Joseph Roach has done tremendous work on the role of effigy in performance, claiming that through performance, effigies "fill, by means of surrogation, a vacancy created by the absence of an original" (36). This is a relevant definition when considering that as one mascot performer passes, another assumes the role through surrogation, instilling the fetish object (mascot) with the "original motive powers" (124), deepening the object's value.

One particular mascot performance stands out with striking potency as an effigy. Roach describes effigies as "provid[ing] communities with a method of perpetuating themselves through specially nominated mediums or surrogates: among them… by virtue of an intense but unsurprising paradox, corpses" (36). One school uses an actual corpse as its source of mascot power in the belief that the corpse's presence endows supernatural luck to the other mascot representations, all of which are mere facsimiles of the original. This powerful effigy is Yale University's original Handsome Dan, a bulldog who died and was stuffed over one hundred years ago, currently residing in Yale's Payne-Whitney

Gymnasium.[3] Since Handsome Dan's death, there have been fifteen other live bulldogs performing the role, but there is no attempt to pass these dogs as the original. There are various performance rituals surrounding Handsome Dan, especially when Yale plays their interscholastic rival, Harvard University, in their yearly football match.[4] According to Yale University's Athletic Department, any Handsome Dan's favorite trick is to "speak to Harvard," whereby the dog "bark[s] ferociously and work[s] himself into physical contortions of rage never before dreamed of by a dog."[5]

Fig. 2. The taxidermied Handsome Dan, photo courtesy of James McGirk.

Handsome Dan's role as an effigy connects closely to Roach's description of mummification as "the sacred purification of a secular relic, a venerated effigy fit for a king" (92). Handsome Dan is fetishized in death because of the belief that he, as Yale's original mascot, brought fortune to their sports teams. For believers in the power of Handsome Dan, the death of the original marked the passing of a great symbol of providence, and thus the flesh of the animal became an effigy, immortalizing the power of this homely canine mascot. Moreover, the tradition must be performed through a live

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[3] The entire history of Handsome Dan, as published by the Yale University Athletic Department, can be found at http://yalebulldogs.cstv.com/trads/mascot.html.

[4] In addition to Harvard/Yale, many other schools perform mascot rivalries. See George Washington University's *Hatchet,* Oct.5, Oct. 19 1948 and *Cherry Tree,* 1949 for description of 1949 kidnapping of and subsequent ransom demands for the University of Maryland's mascot.

[5] See Yale University Athletic Department

bulldog in order for modern believers to connect with their mascot and continue their tradition of competitive athletic success.

Although Handsome Dan is an effigy made of flesh, the mere fact that all mascots are ageless and everlasting representations of primary ideas makes them effigies. The original is absent but the facsimiles remain in order to keep the spirit within our cultural consciousness.

While some mascots are easily identifiable, not all mascots are caricatures or interpretations of imagined beings. A fine way of categorizing the performance of non-human/animal/monster mascots in our academic discourse and cultural collective is to connect them with props. According to Andrew Sofer, "A fetishized prop is one endowed by the actor, character, or playwright with a special power and/or significance that thereafter seems to emanate from the object itself… [that] then serves the same function for the audience" (27). In the case of mascots, the players and fans endow the power upon the mascot in return for luck gained through superstitious belief rituals. Sofer goes on to describe the projected anxiety associated with the fetishized prop, illustrated beautifully by a recent debate surrounding the mascot for the Atlanta Braves.

Chief Noc-A-Homa[6] (to be understood as knock-a-homer, as in hitting a home run) and his trusty tomahawk presided over the Braves organization for many years (Wallace pars. 4-6). When the Braves phased out Chief Noc-A-Homa in favor of Homer, a figure with a baseball head, and Rally, a large, red character of no discernable origin, the fans were enraged. To make matters worse, the team went on a losing streak shortly after the Chief's teepee was dismantled in order to make room for additional stadium

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[6] For additional discussion about the fetishisation of Native American signs and symbols, see Jason Edward Black's "The 'Mascotting' of Native America: Construction, Commodity, and Assimilation" and King and Springwood's *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascot Controversy*.

seating. Fans demanded the reinstatement of the man with a teepee who resided in left field. They missed his victory dance, his battle cry, and his convincing performance as the powerful leader of their tribe. More than that, they missed winning. Bob Watson, a former player and now Major League Baseball's Vice President of On-Field Operations explains:

> The Braves lost all those games when they took the teepee down in left field, and [people] attributed that losing streak to the teepee having been taken down to put in [extra] seats. When we put the teepee back up, we ended up winning the last five out of seven games and ended up winning the National League West. (Cooper par. 6)

Fig. 3. Chief Noc-a-Homa performing the ritual victory dance at his teepee in the left field of Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium, courtesy of The Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Georgia University).

The politically correct compromise was the restoration of the teepee and tomahawk without the Chief. The Atlanta Braves tomahawk and teepee remain the ultimate props for Major League Baseball as they represent an entire franchise. The fans today perform a ritual chopping movement (the "Tomahawk Chop") with their arms to simulate the tomahawk's slicing motion whenever they are praying for luck during the game, furthering the fetishized performance of their mascot. Without their tomahawk, Braves fans become anxious about their ability to control the game's outcome.

Fig. 4. The Atlanta Braves logo, illustrating the tomahawk prop, courtesy of Major League Baseball.

The tomahawk is particularly relevant as a prop because, as Sofer states, props "bring dead images back to life again – but with a twist" (3). Tomahawks are antiquated implements of battle that we no longer see in use. They are "haunted mediums… possessed by the voices of the past" (27). The tomahawk, unlike a gun or cannon, is a weapon that relies upon the force of the user in order to be effective, reminiscent of the great warriors who employed these weapons. The Braves' tomahawk is a supernatural representation of Native American power, a fetishized prop that symbolizes the ability of the Atlanta Braves to kill their competition with great force and violence. Another prop that serves as a mascot and calls to mind brawny men of battle is the recent adoption of the skull and baseball bat/crossbones used for the Pittsburgh Pirates (reminiscent of the Jolly Roger). These props perform as magical possessions for those who believe in their power, connecting them to fetishized and supernaturally evocative props that are traditionally associated with stage performance.

Props usually remain on stage, effigies exude power from their respective alters, and totems began as immovable carvings; however, the sports mascot's power is believed to pour forth into commercial reproductions created in representational likeness, thus inserting mascot performance into capitalist discourse.

Karl Marx used the term "fetishism" to characterize the whole of the capitalist social process. According to William Pietz, "Marx appealed to the language of magic and theology in general, and fetishism in particular, as a way of evoking the materialist imaginary proper to… a mode of apprehending capitalist reality" (130). Marx focused his work on materialism and social theory, producing philosophies of modern capitalist society. In particular, his work on commodities is of noteworthy relevance to the

conceptualization of mascots as fetishized; however, in order to understand mascots as commodities, we must first examine the social entities at work in his theory and then relate them to the discussion of mascots and their performance in sport culture.

Marx, in his magnum opus, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, stated that "All our inventions and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life and stultifying human life with a material force" (qtd. in Fernbach 300), and thus the concept of "commodity fetishism" was born.[7] The social relations between the actor as mascot and the audience commoditize the performance and reception of these symbols. William Pietz conceptualizes fetishized commodities as "universals that incorporate (i.e., that become the practical substance – the unity – of) the particular social processes that produce them and which they thereby alter" (147). Fans gather in support of their chosen sports franchise, thereby creating the social processes that produce mascots and their subsequent worship. The perceived alteration is the luck that the followers believe comes from the existence of their mascots as part of their sport ritual. The commoditization in this relationship happens on two different levels: that of the human being that performs the role and then the mascot itself.

According to Marx, the key to this idea is the surplus that exists between the worker (proletariat) and the capitalist (bourgeoisie), which is something that applies to today's mascots. The actors hired to perform as mascots are athletic and entertaining; however, it is impossible to reveal their personal identities since they vow secrecy so as

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[7] Marx repeated this idea verbatim in a speech that he gave at the anniversary of *The People's Paper* in London on 14 April 1856. See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1856/04/14.htm for additional background information and complete text.

not to spoil the "magic."[8] The actors are dispensable and interchangeable, turning them into faceless commodities. For professional sports mascots, salaries start around £12,500 per year (Sahadi 4) and include health benefits, which is of critical importance. Dr. Edward J. McFarland of Johns Hopkins University surveyed mascots of professional American sports teams and learned that "40 percent of the respondents had suffered from heat exhaustion, brought on by costumes that averaged 21 pounds in heat averaging 85 degrees inside the uniform" (Vecsey pars. 12-13). These actors are commodities to the sports organizations that they represent because they provide both a use value and a sign-exchange value. Their presence is the use value and the status of the sports organization recognized by the symbolic mascot is the sign-exchange value. If the actors cannot perform their roles (which often happens due to injury), they are quickly replaced so that the benefits of the mascot remain. In addition to use and sign-exchange, a pure Marxist exchange value is also relevant to the discussion. The actors perform the mascot ritual but are compensated mere fractions of what the capitalist franchises gain.

The visual representations of mascots serve as revenue generators, allowing fans to bring supernatural mascot powers into their own homes. The people performing the roles are not the beneficiaries of these monetary gains, often (especially for college mascots) compensated just in the joy and honor that acting such a role bestows. Boston College's bookstore and online merchandising site offers countless products adorned by Baldwin the Eagle, ranging from sweatshirts and hats to golf tees and the "Eagle Express" train set for the holidays. The list is inexhaustible and illustrates the exchange

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[8] In December 2007, the author spoke with various actors who play mascots in the Boston, MA area including Baldwin the BC Eagle, Wally the Green Monster of the Boston Red Sox, and Paws the Northeastern University Husky. All asked to remain anonymous and cited that revealing their identity compromised the "mascot magic."

value of mascot representations.[9] The Marxist connection lies between not only the actual retail products but also the commodification of human beings associated with the performance of mascots.

The question remains: what broader lessons about sport culture can be learned through mascots? These fetishized characters signify a link between the various sports teams and the communities that they represent. The mascots stand for luck and good fortune, which gives the fans and athletes a belief that they can influence a game's outcome by worshipping the mascots. By trusting in the power of mascots, the believer receives agency in an otherwise uncontrollable situation. As sports fans worship the performances of mascots, they situate themselves as participants in creating luck for their chosen sport team, which signifies the action that they cannot take on the field. Whether revealed as fetishized totem, effigy, prop or commodity, the power is of equal importance in relieving the anxiety associated with sporting competitions. As long as players and fans believe that they can somehow manipulate a game's outcome through veneration of a symbolic entity, such entities will remain. By understanding mascots as fetishized performances of sport culture, we can better comprehend their perpetual existence.

Although this paper discussed the power of mascots, uncultivated knowledge remains. What about scopic fixations in relation to mascot performance? Gazes, whether conceptualized by Foucault, Lacan, or Mulvey must certainly play a role in the fetishized status of mascots since our very act of looking is what signifies our awareness of their presence. There would be no mascots if spectators were not fixated on their physical being, an awareness that requires optical confirmation and energy. By delving into gaze

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[9] For additional discussion of possessions as related to beliefs, see Russell W. Belks "Possessions and the Extended Self".

theory, one could better understand the tri-directional power structure that exists between fans, athletes, and mascots. Moreover, since mascots cannot speak, their directional gaze is the only way that they can communicate their intentions and presence. Therefore, multidirectional scopophilia is a strong (and likely lengthy) source of additional research on this topic.

In addition, one could look at mascots that are outside of sport culture in order to further this discussion. The Walt Disney Company's foundation rests on mascot performance and could be explored using a close reading of Marxist theory. Symbolic representations and corporate mascots such as the McDonald's "M" or the Microsoft Window, as well as the icons of Mr. Clean and the Energizer Bunny are equally endowed with magical performative powers. Some of these (such as the "golden arches") are linguistic representations, engaging the role of semantics in the representation of mascots. Semiotician Charles Sanders Pierce's founding work, Umberto Eco's research on iconism, and Baudrillard's discussion of simulacra could help advance mascot discourse by approaching the relevance of these cultural performances from new academic dimensions.

Mascots are an integral part of our collective conscience and I would argue that they are influential in ways that we have yet to discover. This paper serves as an invitation to further explore the fetishized status of mascots so that we can ultimately unpack the complexity of the imagistic world in which we live.

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Female Skateboarding: Re-writing Gender

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In the opening paragraph of the article "Space, Place and Gender," Doreen Massey remembers, as a nine or ten year old living on the outskirts of Manchester, her experience of "going into town" with her family. She remembers witnessing, every Saturday, the vast grassy land between home and Manchester city centre, passed by on the bus journey, having been divided up into hundreds of football and rugby pitches, and being entirely occupied by boys. She says:

> I remember… it striking me very clearly – even then as a puzzled, slightly thoughtful little girl – that all this huge stretch of the Mersey flood plain had been entirely given over to boys… I did not go to those playing fields – they seemed barred, another world. (Massey 185)

The other world Massey identifies represents those spaces or places of human environments inaccessible to certain social and cultural groups. More specifically, it represents the difficulty which women face when participating in male gendered activities; for Massey it is not only the playing fields that seem barred but also the activity being undertaken.

Aside from their gendered nature – or perhaps because of this – traditional, competitive sports (such as football and rugby) are deemed to be of the greatest cultural importance, commanding consistent attention in the media. Therefore, such activities dominate in more ways than purely spatially or geographically. Traditional sports are often associated with hegemonic masculine attitudes, exemplified in the "Jock" stereotype and the Jock's relationship to subordinated masculinities (such as the "Geek" – intelligent, non-aggressive and physically weak). Some non-traditional sports and

activities attempt to move away from this hierarchy, developing what Becky Beal describes as an "alternative masculinity" (204-220). In her research, which is focused on skateboarding, she states:

> [t]he subculture of Skateboarders I investigated chose not to live completely by the traditional and hegemonic forms of masculinity. In doing so, they created an alternative masculinity, one which explicitly critiqued the more traditional form. For example, the skateboarders emphasized participant control, self expression, and open participation which differ greatly from the hegemonic values of adult authority, conformity, and elite competition. (204)

Here, Beal articulates participant control, self expression and open participation as features of an anti-hegemonic social organisation, which would seem to suggest that skateboarding is a progressive and positive activity. However, as is highlighted by Beal in her article, skateboarding's liberalism and permissiveness is paradoxically compromised by an inherent sexism and heteromasculine focus within the subculture.

The focus of this paper is on the male dominated lifestyle/activity/sport/ subculture of skateboarding.[1] The central argument is concerned with the notion of female skateboarders occupying an "edgeland" position within the subculture and how, from these edgelands, female participants might re-write their involvement through the performance of gender.

"Edgeland" is understood by Marion Shoard's coining of the term to describe:

> [t]he apparently unplanned, certainly uncelebrated and largely incomprehensible territory where town and country meet… as we flash past its seemingly meaningless contours in train, car or bus we somehow fail to register it on our retinas. When we deliberately visit it, this is often for mundane activities like taking the car to be serviced or household waste to the disposal plant, which we choose to discount as part of our lives. (118)

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[1] The contestation of what skateboarding *is* relates to the different modes in which skateboarding is perceived. Some skateboarders would not regard their practice as a sport; on the other hand, there has recently been a push to include skateboarding in the Olympic Games. The term "activity" seems to suggest light involvement rather than saturation within something, whilst the term "subculture" is rooted within cultural theory and may not necessarily be commonly understood or used by participants. In many cases it may be viewed as a lifestyle, influencing participant's choices of clothing, music, art and also attitude.

Shoard is specific in her term, with edgelands referring to sites between town and country. But the term could also describe areas at the edges of the city or town, between city and suburb, such as the vast grey flatlands underneath ring-road carriageways or the dilapidated landscape of bygone industrial warehouses and service roads. The term could also refer to a cultural edgelands. Shoard states that, "[t]he edgelands are raw and rough and rather than seeming people-friendly are often sombre and menacing, flaunting their participation in activities we do not wholly understand" (121). Applying this quotation to the skateboarding subculture in general is straightforward, since attitudes towards skateboarders are often negative.

Skateboarding-related internet forums are rife with stories from skateboarders who report having been verbally and physically attacked whilst attempting to skateboard in public and private sites, whilst skateboard filmmakers regularly include documentation of confrontations between skateboarders and local authorities, business owners, or the public, in skate videos. Most examples present skateboarders as responsible and reasonable in these situations, such as in professional skateboarder, Anthony Pappalardo's, section from the Transworld Skateboarding video *IE* (2001). In this video, Pappalardo, appealing to a police officer who has reprimanded him, says, "I'm giving you respect, I'm not talking back… now I just feel like I'm not getting respect back." The police officer responds, "How do you figure that? I'm talking to you," to which Pappalardo replies "You're talking to me like an animal, not like a human being." This dialogue posits skateboarders as victims of overzealous authorities, rather than as aggressive occupiers of sites; as James Davis points out, in his aptly titled book *Skateboarding is Not a Crime*,

> [s]kateboarders have long been thought of as rebels, for various reasons… skaters… use the urban environment in a way which is not designed, and this often provokes a negative response from members of the public. It's a natural response – what they don't understand must inherently be bad. (82)

Davis's quotation suggests that confrontations are essentially an individual's articulation of their knowledge of the habitus of a specific site as a place that is not designed for skateboarding. Public opinion towards skateboarders, then, is strikingly similar to that of the public opinion towards Shoard's edgelands. Furthermore, from a socio-cultural perspective, a female skateboarder's participation in the activity is deemed unusual, due to the perception of skateboarding as being male-dominated, potentially injurious, and physically aggressive. Therefore, female skateboarders necessarily occupy a subcultural edgeland position, though, as is discussed later in this paper, some female skateboarders are finding methods of transgression.

Street skateboarding, or the application of tricks on objects not designed for skateboarding, demonstrates a physical and creative re-writing of the urban environment and the creation of an emotive performance text. The documentation of this exists in the marks caused by the interaction between the physical material of the skateboard and of the object used. This performance text, created predominantly by male skateboarders, is therefore interrupted by the mere participation of female skateboarders, who write themselves into this text, becoming performance interventions.

Representations of women in the skateboarding subculture

Often women are only marginally involved in skateboarding when fulfilling supporting roles to a son, male friend or boyfriend - providing transport to locations around the country and support, attending skateboarding sessions and competitions, and so on. For

males, at the heart of being a skateboarder is an emphasis on displaying a heteromasculinity, something exemplified by the inclusion of a female pole-dancing contest as the climactic evening's entertainment during the annual, Vans Skateboard Company, Summer Sessions event, held in Newquay, Cornwall, UK. Female skateboarders problematise this structure by occupying the realm of the male skateboarder and inevitably find themselves within social contexts that explicitly objectify women. This objectification is not limited to social events and everyday banter: graphics printed on to skateboard decks and images featured in advertising campaigns at times resemble soft-core pornography. A prime example of this can be seen in the marketing tactics of the Hubba Company. A typical example of one of their ads features an underwear-clad glamour model appearing to be sitting with a gigantic Hubba skateboarding wheel between her legs. In their most recent campaign, Hubba have produced two versions of an advertisement and are inviting the public to vote on which should appear in the next issue of the US skateboarding magazine, *Thrasher*. The two versions, which both feature the same, topless, glamour model, differ in the way the model is posed. In one, she is crouched next to the product with her legs extended across the image, in the other she is on all fours; with her back arched and her legs extending in front of the product. At the extreme of this, some companies have chosen to depict violence towards women in their graphics, as Borden states, "skateboard companies and magazines have increasingly used misogynist treatment of women as a way of selling skateboards" (147).

The representation of women as sex objects or in situations where they are ill-treated, "sells well" as an attitude because it reaffirms the heterosexuality of the

participant, in what is a heavily male – and ostensibly heterosexual – dominated performance arena. In America, the skateboarding publication *Big Brother* is "sold in plastic wrapping due to its 'adult' content" (Beal and Wilson 34) and interestingly, the title of the magazine seems to enforce hegemonic masculinity, with its readers projected into the role of the younger brother, rookie skater. "Harmless" sexist commentary which features so prolifically within skateboarding print makes it clear to female and homosexual participants that they do not meet the heteromasculine standards that define skater subculture, and females are sexually objectified by the heterosexual male skateboarder's gaze.

Even in the arena of fashion, the female skateboarder is marginalised, with very few skateboarding companies catering to the female body shape in clothing design. This has implications for the female skateboarder, trying to fit into skateboard clothing, and a subculture, designed for men. The shoe company Gallaz, part of the Globe company, have produced skate shoes designed for "girls," along with other well established skate companies, such as DC, Vans and Etnies. However, through selling these products to large mainstream chains, in which the non-skateboarding public may purchase a pair purely for fashionable purposes, female-orientated brands cannot carry the same sub-cultural currency as brands that are only available at specialist skate-shops. The skatewear company Fallen, for example, state in their advertising, "Fallen footwear is designed purely for skateboarding." This, along with an emphasis on supporting local, independent skater owned shops (SOS), results in skateboard clothing designed specifically for women becoming devalued by its mainstream availability. By not being exclusive to the hallowed local skate-shop, it is not fully saturated in the subculture; in

just the same way that female participation is all too often regarded as frivolous and uncommitted.

One of the best ways of examining the skateboard industry's representations of women is to consider the contrasting ways in which female and male professional skateboarders are represented and marketed. Out of 77 skateboarding companies researched between December 2007 and April 2008, on the World Wide Web, 14 companies sponsored a total of 38 women.[2] These companies were selected because they all deal, specifically, in equipment and clothing designed for skateboarding, such as grip-tape, trucks, wheels, bearings, decks, and skateboarding shoes. They also all currently sponsor a professional and/or amateur company team, or provide their product to skateboarders as endorsement. It is important to note that the number of sponsorships does not reflect the number of individuals sponsored, since professional skateboarders often receive support from several companies. However, of those researched, 48 company sponsorships went to women, compared with 1173 sponsorships going to men. Interestingly, the (British) Rogue Skateboards and (North American) Villa Villa Cola skateboarding companies, which are the only specifically female brands included in this research, were both difficult to find information for. Rogue Skateboards' main point of information is their Myspace layout. Similarly, the only web information available for Villa Villa Cola was a link to a trailer for their skate video, featuring 12 female skaters

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[2] These companies were: Alien Workshop, Adio, Adidas Skateboarding, Almost, Arise, Avera, Bacon, Baker, Billabong, Blacklabel, Blind, Blueprint, 5 Boro, Bones Bearings, Circa, Chocolate, Darkstar, DC (USA), Death, Dekline, Destructo, Duffs UK, DVS, Element, Elwood, Emerica, Enjoi, Enuff, Es, Etnies, Fallen, FDK Bearings, Flip , Foundation, Fourstar, Gallaz, Girl, Globe, Grindking, Habitat, Hawk Shoes, Heroin, Hijinx, Hubba, Hurley, Independent, Krooked, Lakai, Lib Tech, MADA, Matix, Mob Grip, Mystery, Nike Skateboarding (SB), Osiris, Pig Wheels, Plan B, Powell, Premium, Quicksilver, Real, Ricta, Rogue, Royal Trucks, Santa Cruz, Silver Truck Company, Slave, Supra, Third Choice, Thunder Trucks, Toy Machine, Vans (USA, UK, Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland), Villa Villa Cola, Volcom, Vox, Zero and Zoo York.

from around the world. This strongly suggests that these companies also occupy an edgeland position, this time within the skateboarding industry.

Most of the companies researched supported their female skateboarders on a separate, linked website under a "Girls" section. The contrast in the profile pictures and biographic information for female and male skateboarders is particularly notable, with many of the companies opting for posed "fashion" shots of the females, compared with pictures of male skateboarders that, generally, present them in the act of skateboarding. In some cases, no images at all were supplied of the "girls" actually skateboarding. Some companies, however, choose not to separate female and male skateboarders in this way. Vans USA sponsor Cara-Beth Burnside, Vans Austria sponsor Sabrina Goeggal, Vans France sponsor Lisa Jacob, and Element sponsor Vanessa Torres, Lacey Baker and Evelien Bouillart, all alongside their male skaters. Zero included the world-renowned skater, Elissa Steamer as one of the main team, not differentiating her as sponsored woman.

However, Steamer is a particularly interesting case. On the Etnies website, she features in both the male and female teams, with her profile information displaying the following statement of her achievements and her previous role as a team rider for the Toy Machine Company:

> [s]he regularly makes the cut skating with the boys, and is virtually unrivalled among her female peers… From the get-go, Toy Machine treated Elissa as just another rider, rather than as the head of a girl's division or as a side project. However, it was not until her 1996 appearance in Toy Machine's *Welcome to Hell* video that many in skateboarding consider one of the most influential of all times that Elissa truly made an impact. Her exposure in the video single-handedly redefined the role of women in skateboarding and ushered in a new era of talented female skaters… Elissa continues to dominate nearly every all-female event she enters…The fact of the matter, however, is that Elissa is simply a great skater not just a great female skater. ("Elissa Steamer")

Here, Etnies sum up the industry perspective on female skateboarding by acknowledging that females and males are treated differently; that females are not required to be up to the same standard as males. The quotation also suggests that Steamer broke the mould of previous female skaters by having proved her ability to skate "like a guy." Steamer is also included in the Etnies "Girls" pages, as the girl who managed to transcend the female-only section. On the same website, and again while referring to Elissa Steamer, professional skateboarder and founder of the Toy Machine company, Ed Templeton, states:

> Obviously, she's the best girl skater, and the thing is that she doesn't skate 'like a girl.' It's in quotes because, for some reason, everyone knows what you mean when you say that, even though it sounds like a lame thing to say. She has a good style, stands up straight and skates like a guy. ("Elissa Steamer")

Templeton reveals an inherent sexism within the subculture by admitting his concern over using the term "like a girl," but sanctioning his use of it by recognising it as commonly used and understood. In the above context, skating "like a girl" implies skating "to a lesser extent," and this is a view enforced in the way skateboarding companies construct teams. In comparison to Steamer, then, "girl skater" becomes a category that actually refers to a lower standard of skateboarding rather than a biological difference between female and male skateboarders. In relation to Shoard's edgelands, the male-centric skateboarding industry appears to have co-opted a female gendered edgelands through heterosexually orientated entertainment, the notion of skateboarding "like a girl," and through the constructed supporting-role of women as spectator in the performance of skateboarding.

Marisa Dal Santo

In November 2007, a video clip was posted onto the *Sidewalk* Magazine online skateboarding forum with a caption below it reading, "Just in case you don't know, Marisa is female." The inclusion of this comment alongside the posting of the video suggested there might be some confusion. On viewing the footage, three things are apparent - first, the standard of skateboarding exceeds that of most female skateboarders, by the range of tricks demonstrated. Second, Marisa's physical appearance is noticeably "masculine," to the extent that she would be easily mistaken for a young male; her androgynous natural features and hairstyle are rendered more "masculine" by her choice of physical clothing, which is reminiscent of all-male 70s/80s rock band, The Ramones. Third, her skateboarding style is more aggressive than is generally demonstrated by female skateboarders, in terms of the speed and force with which she performs tricks. In her consistency and success in competitions against both female and male contestants, Dal Santo has become one of the latest up-and-coming skateboarding talents. Talking about her experiences of attending female competitions, she says:

> The guys' contests go on for 3 days while the girls' contests go on for 20 minutes. There's usually 10 people at the most in the crowd… [a]t most of them, we all get paid something so it's win/win even if you get last. For those same reasons they're also kind of lame and embarrassing, cause it shows how low girls are viewed in skateboarding. I'm still backing them though. (Dal Santo)

Dal Santo expresses an interesting tension between getting paid to do something you enjoy and concern over female involvement being regarded as inadequate. Her final sentence and use of the word "them" suggests that she feels distanced from the "skater girl" category, whilst at the same time expressing a desire to be supportive towards female skateboarders.

Having started skateboarding at the age of 10, Dal Santo's practice has always been as the only female within a small group of males; she states that she has "never skated with girls outside of contests" (Dal Santo). When asked whether she would feel comfortable being on an all-female skate team, she remarked, "No, I've always skated with guys and I feel as if it helped me in the long run. I try to stay closer to their level of skating." (Dal Santo.) Many skateboarders believe, as Dal Santo's statement suggests, that a person's ability to skateboard is affected by the general level of the group of which that person is part. Dal Santo makes a conscious effort to transcend the arbitrary lower standard that has come to be expected of female skateboarders. Her presence within the subculture, alongside skaters with a similar approach (such as Steamer), is important in the way that they explode this mythology.

Dal Santo's performance has allowed her to become well respected in the skateboarding subculture. When asked if she had ever experienced any negative attitudes towards her by male skateboarders, she replied: "No not really. The only people that have vibed me for skating were the girls in my class in like 6th grade. They'd say 'girls don't do that' and all that jazz. But I'd like to see what they're up to these days" (Dal Santo). Dal Santo's young peers' responses to her extra-curricular activities suggest that as performance, she may be having as much of an effect on mainstream culture as skateboarding culture.

Similarly, another American female skateboarder, Alexis Sablone, in a 2002 interview with *Thrasher*, states: "I think girls should just skate in regular contests. I don't think girls should have to have their own category – they should just be in a skateboard contest. Girls just skate with guys, it's all the same" (Dyer and Burnett). Sablone's

statement resonates with the more recent concerns of Dal Santo, whilst the article's authors, Erin Dyer and Michael Burnett, draw a clear comparison between Sablone and Steamer – and particularly to their physically aggressive approach to skating – as they state, "[o]ne similarity I've noticed between you and Elissa is that you can both take a beating. How hurt do you have to be to quit?" (Dyer and Burnett). Sablone replies, "[j]ust never; never quit. You can't stop 'til you land a trick, then after you land it is when you really feel it." (Dyer and Burnett)

This attitude is also reflected in Sablone's section from the Coliseum video *P.J. Ladd's Wonderful Horrible Life* (2002) in which Sablone is seen to "slam"[3] down a set of nine steps, three times. On the third time, she momentarily writhes in agony on the ground before getting up. The person filming her asks if she is ok, to which she determinedly says "yeah" before hastily grabbing her board and running back up the steps for another attempt, in an explicit demonstration of her physical endurance. What is most pertinent about Sablone, Dal Santo, and Steamer, is the way in which their approaches to skateboarding are marked by an adoption of the masculine, as a tactic for being successful. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* states that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is formatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler 34). Importantly, Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer's expressions of masculinity do not suggest a desire to be male; they are not exemplary of any inherent "male-ness." Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer's success within skateboarding is necessarily achieved through a performance, which is reliant upon the utilisation of costuming and expressive attitude.

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[3] A commonly used term to describe when a skateboarder falls whilst attempting a trick

In relation to this performance, similar behaviour can be seen outside the skateboarding subculture; in a recent article published in the *Guardian*, titled "Why Does Hilary Clinton Wear Such Bad Clothes?" writer Hadley Freeman states,

> It is obvious to the point of cliché that Clinton is in a trickier position in many ways than Obama: when he is emotional, he is persuasive; when she is emotional, she is betraying her feminist roots. So just as Obama can cut a dash in his slimline, clearly style-conscious suits, Clinton has to hide herself in garishly coloured squares going under the name of "jackets", or else risk being dismissed as so vain that she would be too busy putting on her lipstick to respond to an international terror threat…last year, when there was a bit of a hoo-ha in the US press about Clinton showing some cleavage, instead of dismissing it as the load of misogynistic nonsense it was, she seems to have taken this to heart and buried herself ever since in shapeless, defeminised, frequently yellow (yellow!) suits.

Freeman sees Clinton's expressions as an attempt to "defeminise" herself – to hide or detract from physical features that explicitly reference her female-ness or femininity. She expresses a tension in the way emotion and a care over personal appearance is perceived when it is expressed by a woman and by a man who are both attempting to prove their ability to be president. There are, of course, major differences between the practices of Sablone, Dal Santo, Steamer and Hilary Clinton. Nevertheless, their (perceived) negation of the "feminine" as a viable choice of presentation of the self seems to be intrinsically central to their position in their chosen professional arenas.

Conclusion

The skateboarding subculture and the heteromasculine standards that define it are produced and upheld by the objectification of women in advertising campaigns, comments within skateboarding publications and in the graphic designs of skateboard decks. Skateboarding, as an activity, functions as a subversive performance text of the city, written physically by skaters – a majority of whom are male – into spaces. The

involvement of women within the subculture, as skateboarders themselves, problematises this structure and positions female skateboarders, by their very presence, as performance interventions in what is a predominantly male performance text. Gender stratification has come to be accepted within the subculture with female only skate teams and competitions ensuring this separation and that the category of "female skating" occupies an edgeland position within the subculture.

Within male-orientated skateboarding circles, notions of skating "like a girl" demonstrate the construction of an arbitrary lower-echelon applied to females that skaters like Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo disprove through their achievements and their refusal to be restricted. Importantly, Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo's styles of skateboarding and styles of dress and behaviour explicitly reference masculinity, which has the effect of their incorporation into the "centre" of the subculture, marked by their inclusion on team videos and their featuring in the popular skateboarding press. Therefore, their intervention is problematic in that whilst it helps to redefine notions of "girl skateboarder" as well as highlight the performed nature of gender, it also perpetuates masculinity as the centred normative. Their presentation of masculinity and the success this achieves, relates to Luce Irigaray's claim, as it is defined by Butler, that "[t]here is only one sex, the masculine, that elaborates itself in and through the production of the 'other'" (Butler 25). This production of the "other," or of a subcultural edgeland, ensures that the heteromasculine aspects of the subculture remain intact, suggesting that within skateboarding, it is presentations of femininity and possibly, homosexuality, that are "othered."

The "defeminised" performances of Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo therefore represent an intervention – albeit one which raised questions of inclusion, conformity, and the possibility of a "feminine" intervention – from the "edgelands" into this hetoromasculine subculture.

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A Queer Reading of Euripides' *Bacchae*

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Applying a modern critical theory to an ancient text is, by default, a problematic feat; especially when the chosen tool is queer theory, with its close affinities with gay and lesbian studies and the constant reminder that homosexuality is a recent category no more than one hundred years old.[1] In such cases, the marrying of theory and artwork can result, in fact, in some very queer readings. Bearing this in mind, however, a researcher concerned with the value and vigorousness of plays on a contemporary stage, rather than the accurate reconstruction of their original production, can use the analysis of the past in order to illuminate and inform the present. Although the interest here is theatrical rather than historical, it is nevertheless important to remember that ancient Greek tragedies *are* the products of a specific culture and may be better understood if seen in the light of their own time.

This paper investigates the various ways in which queer theory can be applied to Euripides' *Bacchae*, focusing particularly on three points: the cross-dressing of the ancient Greek actors who played female roles and its effect on the creation and reception of tragedies, Dionysos' effeminacy, and Pentheus' famous cross-dressing scene. But before proceeding to the text, it would be useful to look at certain notions and concepts of queer theory that will accompany us throughout our reading.

The term "queer" is sometimes used to describe "culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" (Jagose). Queer theory is mostly associated with gay and lesbian studies, but it also explores topics such as cross-dressing, gender ambiguity, the

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[1] The idea that the category "homosexual" is a social construct was introduced by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*. This concept has been received as a liberation from contemporary values in the study of ancient Greece—this is clearly reflected in works such as John J. Winkler's *The Constraints of Desire* and David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. Also of particular interest is the volume *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, co-edited by Froma Zeitlin, John Winkler, and David Halperin.

medical construction of gender, and broadly anything that displays a gap or incoherence between sex, gender and desire. This display often assumes a very theatrical or dramatic character: performance becomes a means of exposing but also of magnifying the gap. Therefore, gender-b(l)ending also blends reality and performance, effectively deconstructing both.

Despite the different ways in which they engage in the discussion about gender difference, feminist theorists since Simone de Beauvoir have consistently argued against the pre-existence of gender as a biological feature and rejected its essentiality to an individual's identity (Abrams 88-100). This line of reasoning produced a rupture in the image of the self and contributed to the deconstruction of the idea of the essential selfhood. Therefore, according to feminist thought, femininity is not an innate characteristic of female beings, and masculinity is not a natural attribute of male beings. What queer theory added to that was the idea—first formulated by Judith Butler—that gender is not only a socially constructed artifice, but a show, a masquerade, a costume that can be worn, adapted, or even torn to pieces through potentially subversive acts, such as "drag" or cross-dressing.[2] According to Butler, "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" ("Performative Acts" 521). Hence, what is of interest here is the construction and deconstruction of gender through dressing and cross-dressing, as well as the theatricality of cross-dressing and cross-dressing as a theatrical performance.

It has been argued that the notion of *cross*-dressing in the sense of "dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex" suggests that there is an original which is parodied (Raymond 218). On the contrary, Butler suggests that "[i]n imitating gender, drag

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[2] The idea is termed "gender performativity," coined by Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*.

implicitly reveals the imitative nature of gender itself" (*Gender Trouble* 187), and argues that this "elusive" original identity is "an imitation without an origin" (*Gender Trouble* 188). In this sense the cross-dresser who successfully attempts to "pass," to go unnoticed as a member of another sex, incorporates the socially constructed gender, exposing what culture has made invisible: gender is taught, learnt and can be accomplished (Solomon 5). Thus, the presence of the transvestite interrupts and reconfigures the established definition of and relationship between genders, which were hitherto conceived as unchangeable and fully explored.

Marjorie Garber includes ancient Greek theatre, along with Shakespearean theatre, in the category of "transvestite theatre" (39-40), because it was solely men who played the female parts of the plays. Although it would be easy to criticise this practice from a feminist perspective—attacking the female impersonation as false, biased and alien to the experience of "real" women—it is interesting to investigate the possibility that "transvestite theatre" may be an "internal critique of the forces that govern the representation of women both on stage and off" (Solomon 9), a challenge to the binary opposition between male and female, facilitated precisely by the Dionysiac context in which the performances were taking place.

Dionysos, as we will see in greater detail below, was a god associated with transvestism, theatre, and the collapse or inversion of polarities such as god/beast, man/woman. Hence, it is only natural that the festival organised by the city-state in his honour was, also, a festival of inversion. Queer culture is said to consist of two more or less distinct worlds: the "flamboyant," which includes the showy and "Almodovarian"[3] world of transvestite clubs, shows, and drag queens, and the "closet," which is secretive, withdrawn and self-contained. Maybe ancient Athenian

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[3] Spanish film director Pedro Almodovar is highly eloquent in conveying the essence of the "flamboyant," especially in such films as *High Heels* (1991), *All About My Mother* (1999), and *Bad Education* (2004).

theatre can be seen as a mixture of these now separate "cultures": a sort of drag show fully accepted by, and embedded in, the community. The flamboyant and the closet become one and are inseparable: at the heart of a respected institution of the city are men dressed as women, problematising and reflecting on some of the most pressing political, ideological and philosophical issues; possibly the ones also discussed at Symposia.[4]

Judith Butler's view of gender as a performance is very interesting when applied to actual, literal performances in which gender becomes a theatrical act: on the stage of the theatre of Dionysos, in a highly political theatre viewed mainly by men and played exclusively by male citizens, drag became not only legitimised, but part of the dominant ideology. The maleness of the actors could be seen as an instance of gender-bending, a subversive questioning of the fixity of gender (Rabinowitz). In the context of inversion that the Dionysiac cult offered, though, cross-dressing was a *contained* form of deviance, simultaneously challenging and supporting the perpetuation of the "normal" and the "normative." Thus, it is rational to say that "the theatre was also a state function" (Barlow 2), in the sense that it helped purge the city of any tendencies that would be considered marginal, out of the ordinary, and, indeed, queer.

What happens in Euripides' *Bacchae*, however, is an inversion of this inversion: what is presented on stage is the resistance to the introduction of the cult of Dionysus to the city of Thebes and its final, violent establishment through the same forces that were unleashed during the Dionysiac festivals; the "normal," useful queerness of the festivals is (mis)placed outside the Athenian ritual context and becomes the very mechanism which brings about the tragic fall. Euripides, here, calls

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[4] For more information about Symposia in Ancient Greece see Fisher.

attention to the function of theatre within the Dionysiac cult and exposes the ambiguity of its practices. Therefore, the play is abundant in cases of gender-b(l)ending: it features Dionysos, the prominent spectator of the tragedies acting in his own theatre, for himself and for the whole city to see, with special importance given to his effeminate appearance; Teiresias, who bridged (or jumped) the gap between male and female twice in his life; and a king, Pentheus, who cross-dresses under the influence of this strange god and is led to his demise as a transvestite. Apart from these "feminised males" there is also a "masculinised female" (Zeitlin 344), Agaue, played, of course, by a cross-dressed male actor. But let us begin with the case of Dionysos.

Dionysos was a god inextricably linked with theatre and, therefore, with false realities, deceptive images and the representation or exaggeration of reality. He was also a god known to have an identity oscillating between extremes: he was both Theban and Asian, both Greek and barbarian, raised as a girl, dismembered by the Titans, and transformed into a bull. He also delighted in imitating newborn children, small girls and women, in appearance, dress and comportment (Bremmer 187-88).

When Dionysos first appears in the *Bacchae*'s prologue, he announces that he is a god in disguise, a supernatural being wearing the costume of a man (*Bacchae* lines 4-5), and he is later straightforwardly described by Pentheus as womanish (453-59). Then again, ancient spectators would also know that, in reality, Dionysos was an actor dressed up as a god who, in turn, was dressed up as an effeminate man, maybe retaining some elements of the potential cross-dressing of the actor as a woman. From the very beginning, Dionysos' body is deceitful, an act, a performance within a performance within a performance. And, like some contemporary transgenderists, he goes beyond the one-sided femininity of a male-to-female cross-dresser (Raymond

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218): he blends characteristics of both genders, creating a queer, new mixture, which matches perfectly the image of the most ambiguous of gods.

Dionysos' strange body, neither male nor female, rendered almost immaterial by his perpetual imitations and transformations, cannot be bound by any prison (*Bacchae* 616-17). He is the physical embodiment of the deconstruction of a singular identity. Jay Michaelson suggests that "[i]n contemporary queer theory, binaries are the enemy. They […] invariably administer power to the powerful, subjecting the weak to the rule of the strong" (56); Dionysos, however, appears as a true knight of queer: he negates the normal order of things and renders the weak tragically strong. He appears to be soft but uses the typically "weak" womanliness to destroy the authoritative, masculine king and he transforms the women of Thebes into wild huntresses—and "hunting was a typically male activity" (Bremmer 193).

When Dionysos enters the city, "the ground flows with milk" (*Bacchae* 142) as if the (mother)land were impregnated. He is surrounded by a chorus of bacchants (again, a chorus of male, cross-dressed actors), pregnant with divine madness,[5] following a deviant god, a queer religion, copulating with him in the wild. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "queer" has a primary meaning of "odd," "strange," something which is "out of the ordinary," and this is precisely what the cult of Dionysos is when it is introduced to Thebes: something queer, dangerous, which provokes forceful political action from the ones struggling to preserve the status quo and the established power relations in the city.

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[5] A very interesting example of the Bacchants being literally represented as pregnant women can be found in Luca Ronconi's *Bacchae*, presented in Epidaurus in 2004. The divine madness transcended the metaphorical level and assumed an embodied, physical presence. Moreover, the theatre was filled with a feeling of imminence: the pregnant Bacchants could start giving birth at any time, filling the orchestra with blood, placentas, and shrieking babies. Besides, "giving birth—the production of human offspring the way beasts produce their own—displays to Greek eyes, with its screams, its agony, and its delirium, the wild and animal side of femaleness" (Vernant 202).

Charles Segal argues that "Dionysus operates as the principle that destroys differences" (234); so, the difference between himself and Pentheus is going to be gradually destroyed. Himself feminine, Dionysos is going to persuade Pentheus to dress in female attire and indirectly become one of his followers, as transvestism was inherent in Dionysiac mystic initiation (Segal 33). Dionysos, as we have seen, appears, in the beginning of the play, as a kind of god-to-human cross-dresser. Pentheus later will not only become a male-to-female transvestite but also a human-to-god cross-dresser as he will be partly identified with Dionysos.

Several modern critics have proposed the idea that Pentheus' cross-dressing is consistent with his desire for Dionysos and previously suppressed homosexual tendencies (Ormand 10-13). Eric Robertson Dodds has also argued that Pentheus' negative reaction against the Dionysiac cult was a result of the fact that it blurred the differences of gender and class (xxvii-xxviii) and this could be approached as an instance of "homophobic panic." However interesting these psychological interpretations may be, though, it is also useful to see how the moment when the cross-dressing begins produces a break in Pentheus' identity and poses some significant questions regarding the representation of gender on stage.

Prior to his "feminisation," Pentheus is the "ideal" picture of masculinity: a strong king, a man in power. When he cross-dresses, however, he shows signs of what might be considered typical of "female nature," that is, of the socially constructed image of the female gender; he is overtly concerned with his appearance, a true coquette (*Bacchae* 932-44), and he is willing to deploy tricks like disguising, hiding and spying – all suitable only for women and adolescents, beings partly belonging to wilderness – thus renouncing his hoplite military code which demands direct, masculine confrontation (Ormand 13).

The second alteration of Pentheus' identity is associated with his increasing likeness to Dionysos, and the similarity between the two heroes is doubled: there is similarity in appearance, and similarity in death. When Pentheus emerges from the palace dressed as a woman, he sees double for the first time: "two suns, and a double Thebes" (*Bacchae* 918-19). Seeing double is a "symptom of madness […], but madness is the emblem of the feminine," also associated with the "double consciousness that a man acquired by dressing like a woman and entering into the theatrical illusion" (Zeitlin 363). Once he is dressed as a woman, Pentheus adjusts his costume like an actor preparing for a performance (Foley 225). He embodies the double reality of a cross-dressed actor, but does so *within* the tragedy, thus both exposing the mechanism of female representation on-stage and drawing attention to the very origins of performative transvestism, associating it with the cross-dressing often practiced in Dionysiac cult.

But the audience, in this scene, also sees double: there are two effeminate figures on stage, "carrying the same Dionysiac paraphernalia" (Foley 250). And since Pentheus is an imitation or parody of Dionysos' appearance and mixed gender, he will also share his death, or a parody thereof: "[i]t is one of the peculiarities of Greek myths that a hero(ine) is sometimes killed by a god, while at the same time being closely identified with that particular god" (Bremmer 194). This is also true for Pentheus: Dionysos' body was torn apart by the Titans and then reconstructed by a kind deity. Pentheus is going to be dismembered by his god-maddened mother, but he is not going to be as lucky: his torn apart body is going to be "searched […] out with difficulty" (*Bacchae* 1299) by his grandfather and brought back on stage in pieces. Quite ironically, Pentheus wanted to decapitate Dionysos (*Bacchae* 241), but he was actually talking about his own fate.

So, the power-relations between Pentheus and Dionysos have been inverted: the weak has become the strong, while both are now effeminate. Previously, the masculine king was unquestionably in power, while the effeminate stranger was the object of mockery; the ambiguous identity of the latter positioned him in the powerless end of the power continuum. Now, the transvestite, the one who was earlier fully masculine, is less powerful than the androgynous god; assuming a pseudo-identity, wearing femininity as if it were a costume, Pentheus is a powerless no-one while Dionysos' power derives from the very fact that he bridges the gap between genders within his own identity.

One of the themes explored here is the idea of womanliness as a masquerade. "Female characters were not only identified by their clothing, the clothes literally *stood* for the woman" (Ferris 166). In his cross-dressing, Pentheus actually *wears* a woman. In doing so, the king exposes his divided self (Foley 227), a fact which is very soon going to assume a tragically literal sense. The "queerness" of Dionysos' cult has infected Pentheus, the normal-man-in-power, and turned him into a transvestite, a queer subject whose body is going to be dismembered/deconstructed in the hands of his deviant mother (another transvestite, a respectable Athenian male actor dressed as/embodying a blood-thirsty woman). Gender-bending here assumes such an extreme form that the opposite extremes reach each other and come to merge.

Butler suggests that "as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" ("Performative Acts" 522), which means that failure to perform one's gender correctly results in punishment. In this instance, however, Pentheus is punished for his stubbornness in trying to *preserve* his ideal image of manhood and his hubris against the ambiguity which Dionysos personifies, and he is

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punished precisely through the deconstruction and disruption of the apparent coherence of his masculine self.

Contemporary critics such as Butler would argue that this deconstruction is possible precisely because the gendered self is not an innate or biological characteristic but a socially constructed and instructed performance. Pentheus the King is therefore merely the representation of the powerful Man, a symbolic locus of power. This representation succumbs to the irresistible force of inversion, the dismantling force of the gender-bending god, necessary for the survival and preservation of the "normal" order.[6]

This confirmation of "normality" through the temporary assumption of an alien identity is particularly evident in many rites of passage of classical antiquity. Especially in ancient Greek puberty rituals, young boys would often dress in women's clothes, imitating the "radical other" (Zeitlin 346) in order to secure the characteristics of the masculine adult and reject the inappropriate feminine ones by the symbolic act of dropping the female outfit. Rites of passage could be broken down into three distinct stages: community, liminality, and reintegration (Turner 94). "The second phase, 'liminality,' is characterized by disorientation and a breakdown of normal concepts of identity and behavioural norms" (Csapo 253). The transvestism of Pentheus can be seen as an unsuccessful or inverted rite of passage: instead of passing from the status of a boy to adulthood (to become a king, no less), he escapes his masculinity and kinghood to become a powerless boy, torn to pieces by his own mother, returning to the immaterial state of death, incorporated again by his mother, through the *sparagmos*, the raw-eating of his flesh (*Bacchae* 139); but her body is

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[6] The idea that a contained form of deviance (such as an institutionalised festival of inversion) has the power to establish the norm even more firmly has its roots in Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept that ancient Greek thought was structured in polarities which had to interpenetrate at specific occasions and in carefully controlled ways so as to be kept separate for the rest of the time. See Lévi-Strauss, Vernant, Vidal-Naquet.

now a burial place instead of a cradle of life, her womb now a tomb. Pentheus is separated from the community, reaches a liminal condition when dressed as a woman but he is not re-incorporated in the end—or he is, in a very perverted and grotesque way.

The cross-dressing of Pentheus can be seen as the first stage of his *sparagmos*, as it seems to loosen its structures so that it will easily become "unbound," undone and fragmented (Zeitlin 352). The cross-dressing seems to have corroded the concreteness of the male body and has lent to the masculine compactness something of the alleged fluidity and permeability that made female bodies so dangerous, so "other." Thus, "Greek tragedy […] could […] be called the 'misadventure of the human body'" (Zeitlin 349-50). In Euripides' *Bacchae* one can witness this "misadventure" in all its magnitude: the male actors' bodies assume the appearance of masculinised women; Dionysos, a god, is bound in human form; Pentheus' body loses its undivided identity and becomes a transvestite or, as some would have it, something in-between, a "third gender" (Rabinowitz), and is finally dismembered.

What is more, this misadventure of the body is entangled in the fine nets of theatre: it becomes a spectacle. Nancy Rabinowitz talks about the cross-dressed actor as a new species, a third gender, but Pentheus becomes this third gender *inside* the performance, thus unconcealed by the theatrical illusion. In addition, Pentheus goes to the meeting-place of the maenads with the intention of becoming a hidden spectator, a voyeur of their mystic rites; instead, Dionysos makes a spectacle of the king in front of both the Theban and the Athenian citizens (*Bacchae* 854-56). "It is with theatrical weapons […] that Dionysus destroys Pentheus" (Foley 223). In this context, not only womanliness, but any gender, is exposed as a masquerade, a garb. Thus in the closing scene of Klaus-Michael Grüber's famous production of *Bacchae*, Pentheus'

dismembered body is nothing more than pieces of clothing torn apart, the remains of a *costume* that may be sewn back together, but will never form an un-fragmented whole.

In this context of spectacle and spectatorship, gender relations can be explored and may be subverted through a whole range of queer encounters between them. The volatile nature of human identity in theatrical contexts "is precisely what makes theatre the queerest art" (Solomon 2). Pentheus is the one who considers a cult of transvestism and theatre dangerous and is finally destroyed by these very mechanisms; the fate of Thebes, though, the imagined alter-ego of Athens, remains unknown. For Athens, on the other hand, the gap between gender and its performance migrates from the individual to the collective through the theatrical experience. What happens next, however, is an unanswered question: Athens has either incorporated the ambiguity of gender through the centralisation of theatre and its androgynous god or neatly tucked it in the place where it can cause the least harm. Thus, Euripides' *Bacchae* can be seen as either subversive or appropriative of gender roles; and both choices would be equally legitimate.

When the cross-dressed Pentheus encountered the cross-dressed actor who played Agaue, or, even more interestingly, when, in accordance with the ancient Greek theatrical rule that limited the number of actors to three, the actor who previously played the cross-dressed Pentheus appeared dressed as his mother (Damen 320), what happened, more than anything else, was that the problem of representation was put under the microscope and became a point of reflection for all the male citizens. One could say that, through its dangerous and disastrous inversion, the category of "man" was reconfigured and stabilised; someone else could say that the transvestite theatre of ancient Athens destabilised and challenged the supposed

fixedness of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxv). Besides, "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and […] drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidialization of […] gender norms" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 125). Which of the two sides one focuses on is a matter of choice, or even, of agenda.

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Ezra Pound's *Women of Trachis*: Modernist Translation as Performance Text

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Ezra Pound was the primary force behind a radical shift in values which characterized the modernist contribution to the field of poetic translation. According to George Steiner, Pound's translations "altered the definition and ideals of verse translation in the twentieth-century," revolutionizing "the idiom of translation, the notion of what a translation is and how it relates to the original" (Steiner 32-33). The innovations of the modernist movement provided both the creative impetus and the intellectual foundation for "a modern renaissance in English translation" (Apter 1). Its members, exasperated by what they perceived to be the over-ornamented and reductively literal pieties of Victorian classicists, preferred to view translation as an essentially creative act of transformative identification with the intuited aims of the original poet. Pound's many translations from a wide variety of geographically, temporally and culturally distant sources are predicated upon "the impulse" to "make it new" (Wilson 215) – to offer the reader, listener, or audience-member an immediate and complex intellectual and sensory experience which would represent, whilst not necessarily resembling, the culturally distant words, images and effects of an original poetic composition.

In my research, I have been using historical and literary analysis, in combination with physical theatre practice, to examine some of the distinctive ways in which Pound attempted to re-make ancient Greek tragedy and, more particularly, ancient choral dance, as a credibly modernist performance event. The dances which result are not presented as being either definitive or prescriptive. They are *my* physical responses to a set of poetic suggestions, and to the intellectual speculations and

intuitions arising from my related textual research. I do not present my performance experiments as *a* (let alone *the*) correct response to the poetic text under discussion. Instead, I aim to highlight some of the ways in which the provocations and parameters of Pound's distinctively modernist dramatic diction might be capable of impacting upon and directing the performing body. For, with characteristic imperiousness, Pound's iconoclastic translations from the Greek require that physical performance, as well as the words of ancient tragedy, be made new.

Women of Trachis was first published in 1954, but the challenge of translating a Greek tragedy had fascinated Pound for many years. Both Pound and T. S. Eliot had previously attempted to produce a modernist translation of the *Agamemnon*, in answer to the prevailing orthodoxy of lingering Victorian reverence for the literal word of ancient texts. Neither poet managed to produce anything which satisfied their own demands. In later years, Pound would ruefully describe the way he had "twisted, turned, tried every ellipsis and elimination," before finally condemning his own best efforts as "unreadable" (Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* 92-93). "A search for Aeschylus in English is deadly, accursed, mind-rending" the frustrated poet commented grimly (Pound, *Make It New* 146). The mature Pound's engagement with the plays of Sophocles was more fruitful. *Women of Trachis*, Pound's version of Spohocles' *Trachiniae*, stands as testament to the poet's commitment to the demolition of the old rules of literary translation, in the dramatic text as well as the purely poetic. The play also provides a blueprint for some of the ways in which a genuinely modernist relationship might be achieved, not only between the dramatic literatures of the past and the present, but also between the organization of words upon the printed page, and the kinaesthetically expressive body of the performer.

Pound conceived this play in performance as a ritualistic dance-drama, in a style derived from the Japanese Noh. Pound had been intrigued by the Noh for decades. It was he who had introduced W.B. Yeats to the distinctive form, and he had also played an instrumental role in the development of Yeats' Noh-inspired *Plays for Dancers* (1916-21). The published text of *Women of Trachis* explicitly recalls this fascination, containing a dedication to Japanese poet Kitasono Katue, in which Pound expresses his hope that "he will use it on my dear old friend Miscio Ito, or take it to the Minoru if they can be persuaded to add it to their repertoire" (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 3). Ito was the Japanese dancer who had first performed the role of the Hawk in Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well* (1916). Umewake Minoru was a celebrated performer in the Noh theatre, and the teacher of Ernest Fenollosa, Pound's own mentor in the classical Japanese tradition. It is clear, even from this brief note, that Pound intended his play to be performed as a ritualised, symbolic drama, probably including a significant element of dance. He considered the *Trachiniae* to be the Greek tragedy "nearest the original form of the God-Dance" (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 3), and was evidently concerned to find some existing theatrical form which might be able to encompass the physical, as well as the verbal, ritual of ancient tragedy. Both Greek tragedy and the Japanese Noh, Pound wrote, developed out of "a sacred dance," and in both "action was a modification of the dance" (Pound and Fenollosa, *Classic Noh* 59-60). The suggestion that the play was imagined by the translator with an eye towards the possibility of it receiving production as a ritualistic dance-drama in the manner of the Japanese Noh offers tantalising clues as to the ways in which the latent physicality of the text might be explored and experienced in performance.

For the physical practitioner seeking to engage bodily with Pound's text, it is particularly exciting to read his comments on the relationship between text and

movement within the Noh tradition. In his introduction to *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan* (1916), Pound wrote approvingly of a theatre in which "the poet may even be silent while the gestures consecrated by four centuries of usage show meaning" (Pound and Fenollosa, *Classic Noh* 4). That Pound was acutely aware of the actor's body as a crucial absence from any written theatre text is evident from some of his earliest writings. In his 1910 chapter on "The Quality of Lope de Vega" he is emphatically of the view that:

> The art of literature and the art of the theatre are neither identical nor concentric. A part of the art of poetry is included in the complete art of drama. Words are the means of the art of poetry; men and women moving and speaking are the means of drama. (Pound, *Spirit of Romance* 179)

In his writings about theatre, the poet often seems to be describing a relationship between page and stage within which the performer embodying the text is counted as a creative collaborator in the construction of meaning, rather than the passive mouthpiece of a self-sufficient linguistic dramatic narrative. Pound reiterated this understanding of the role of language within theatrical performance in his *ABC of Reading* (1934): "It is unfair to a dramatist to consider his WORDS, or even his words and versification, as if that were the plenum of his performance" (Pound, *ABC* 31). Meaning, in Pound's re-imagined Greek theatre, is to be formed through the juxtaposition of bodies and words, poetic sound patterns and moving visual images.

So how are we to imagine the tragic choral dance of the Greeks refracted through Pound's chosen prism of the Japanese Noh? A great deal of what Pound and Yeats believed they knew about the nature of dance within the Noh when they were preparing *At the Hawk's Well* for performance had come from a young Japanese dancer named Mischio Ito. Both of the poets "erroneously assumed" that Ito was thoroughly versed in Noh traditions. However, in reality, the dancer "had not seen a

Noh production since the age of seven," and had only begun to study dance seriously after being inspired by the performances in Paris of the aesthetically radical Ballets Russes, and the virtuoso star dancer Nijinsky in particular (Longenbach 198). Despite actually knowing very little about the classical drama of Japan, Ito proved more than willing to "read up on the subject in libraries" and eke out his limited knowledge with intuition and imagination (Carpenter 224). The resulting performances seem to have been examples not of "the living tradition of Noh dancing" (as onlookers might fondly have imagined), but rather a seductive conflation of a few ancient principles with a generally modern, sophisticated, western aesthetic (Longenbach 198). It is probable that Ito was able to demonstrate to the poets some of the basics of the Noh, to suggest "some idea of the posture, gliding movement and dance steps of the principal actor" (Yeats 313). However it is unlikely that he could have demonstrated a great deal more in terms of the concrete details of the Noh tradition.

Despite the limitations of their knowledge, both Pound and Yeats seem to have intuited or absorbed at least some of the central physical features of the sacred theatre dance of Japan, which Yeats described in his introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*:

> A swift or a slow movement and a long or a short stillness, and then another movement … their ideal of beauty … makes them pause at moments of muscular tension. The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to which it moves … there are few swaying movements of arms or body such as make the beauty of our dancing. They move from the hip, keeping constantly the upper part of the body still, and seem to associate with every gesture or pose some definite thought. They cross the stage with a gliding movement, and one gets the impression not of undulation but of continuous straight lines. (Pound and Fenollosa, *Certain Noble Plays* xii-xiii)

The appreciation of this "distinctive straight-line" aesthetic might suggest one of the ways in which Noh forms appealed to Pound's aggressively modernist sensibilities (Kunio 240). The concept of a physical art composed of powerful straight lines might

have been calculated to appeal to the poet who preached fiercely of the need for a "hardness" of artistic image (Bradbury 238), and for a poetry "austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (Pound, *Literary Essays* 12). The aesthetic of the hard straight line, then, a physicality which privileges muscular tension, and a rhythmic succession of static poses, is one which might stand as at least partially representative of the Noh form as conceptualised by Pound in *Women of Trachis*. In making dances from the verse of Pound's Greek choruses, I attempted to respond to this distinctively modernist reading of a classical Japanese aesthetic by constructing step sequences featuring a series of static body postures, linked by gliding steps, based around hard, straight lines and muscular tensions.

Another extremely characteristic feature of Pound's text, which recalls his ideal of a creative and mutually-allusive relationship between sound and image, is the poet's extensive use of melopoeia. This linguistic technique has important consequences for the practitioner engaged in the business of translating the text of *Women of Trachis* into embodied performance. Pound's concept of melopoeia encompassed the "melodic and rhythmic aspects of poetic structure" (Wilson 58). It was based upon the

idea that words might be treated as musically suggestive, rather than as distinct and transparent segments of semantic meaning. Throughout the choruses of *Women of Trachis*, the reader or listener is invited to interpret potential meanings suggested through the sounds of transliterated Greek words, both singly and in sequence, rather than focussing upon an actual lexical content which is deliberately left obscure for the Greekless modern. For example, in one section of the text, the overall sense of a celebratory choral verse is carried through combinations of syllables which are largely meaningless in the English language, beginning:

> APOLLO
>   and Artemis, analolu
>   Artemis,
> Analolu,
> Sun-bright Apollo, Saviour Apollo,
>   analolu,
> Artemis,
> Sylvan Artemis,
> Swift-arrowed Artemis, analolu
> By the hearth-stone
>   brides to be
> Shout in male company:
>   APOLLO EUPHARETRON. (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 12)

Within this chorus, lexical sense is strictly limited. Rather than down-playing the untranslatable ululation "analolu," Pound seems positively to delight in the evocative possibilities of the strange syllables, actively choosing (without Sophoclean precedent) to reiterate that and other transliterated Greek phrases at regular intervals throughout the verse, rather than employing more conventionally explicit descriptive language. This patterned juxtaposition of suggestive sounds is the medium through which meaning is accumulated and suggested. And this idiosyncratic response to the challenge of translation is deliberate.

"Mere words" were not, in Pound's view, the primary concern of the translator of poetic texts. He viewed individual words, and their culturally-accepted semantic

meanings, as the constituent fragments of a larger poetic phrase, or image or sensory effect. It was this total effect or "sense" which he sought to recreate in his translations. As he explained: "I don't see that one *translates* by leaving in unnecessary words; that is, words not necessary to the meaning of the *whole* passage" (Pound, *Letters* 358).

Throughout his career, Pound emphatically refused to sacrifice the potential artistry and poetic suggestiveness of the transformative translation to what he considered to be the hampering claims of verbal literalism. "Don't bother about the WORDS, translate the MEANING," he instructed the prospective translator of *Women of Trachis* into Japanese. Similarly, he ordered his German translator, "Don't translate what I wrote, translate what I MEANT to write" (Kenner 150). He was adamant that a "poem is not its language" (Kenner 358), that the effect of a poem upon its reader, or of a play upon its audience, could not be reduced to the definitions of the collection of words contained within it. Always, with Pound, the poetic sense of the phrase of cluster of sounds or images was paramount. Individual words were simply the building blocks of a wider, more elusive, poetic suggestivity.

This way of considering the function of words within the dramatic text offers a fascinating challenge to the physical practitioner. The words of the translated text do not, in themselves, constitute any sort of total narrative. Rather, they function as a partial schema of a performance event, which will, in its fullest form, combine aural and visual suggestiveness in order to present the observer with a meaningful complex of individually-elusive fragments. Consequently, in making dances based upon Pound's choral verse, I tried to adopt and utilise hard modernist lines of corporeal force which might function as bodily hieroglyphs for some of the word-images contained within Pound's sometimes cryptic poetic text, as the abstracted corporeal symbolisms of the Noh theatre illuminate the highly formalised diction of classical

Japanese mytholgy. So, for example, an arm drawn backward in a strong horizontal line across my chest to a point of concentrated tension behind my shoulder was designed to correspond physically to the textual description of "swift-arrowed Artemis" (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 12). The movement incorporates an abstracted image of the aspect of the goddess upon which Pound lays most emphasis, representing the drawing back of a symbolic bowstring.

Likewise, the crossing of tensed, spread fingers and the backward inclination of head and neck which accompanies the line evoking the death of "the great stag" (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 12) was intended to function as another embodied hieroglyph, re-iterating and visualising in concrete terms the image of the antlered deer.
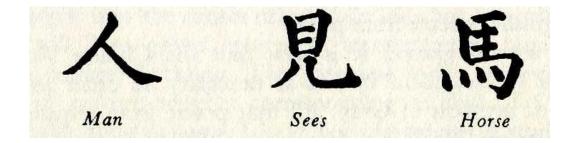
In developing these semi-abstracted physical responses to Pound's poetic images, I was intrigued by the possibility that they might function as symbolically suggestive visual complement to the deliberate linguistic elusiveness of the translated verse.

It is also possible that Pound, drawing upon his enduring fascination with the simultaneously aural and visual communicative qualities of Chinese written poetry, began to envisage and encode an "ideogrammatic" technique of dramatic suggestion in his translations from the ancient Greek. The poet's theory of the Chinese ideogram, derived from the writings of Oriental scholar Ernest Fenollosa, was based around the idea that in pictorial languages, a sign would not merely indicate, but could actually visually resemble the thing it denoted. Describing the alien allure of such a system, the obsessively polyglot Pound emphasised the strangeness and the power of ideogrammatic language:

> The Egyptians finally used abbreviated pictures to stand for sounds, but the Chinese still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things. It *means* the thing or the action or situation, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures. (Pound, *ABC* 5)

To demonstrate this theory, Fenollosa referred to the simple Chinese sentence "Man Sees Horse."

人　　　見　　　馬
Man　　　Sees　　　Horse

He described the operation of the sentence like this:

> First stands the man on his two legs. Second his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of running legs but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on his four legs. (Pound and Fenollosa, *Chinese Written Character* 8-9)

To Pound's fascinated eye, this group of symbols "holds something of the quality of a continuous moving picture." This theory, much scorned by Sinologists, nevertheless offers some fascinating possibilities for the theatre practitioner. It is extremely tempting to consider whether the evocative way in which Pound's verses move across the page might have some relevance to the potential physicality with which the poet invested his theatre translations. The visual form of the verse recalls the poetic tradition of "emblematic, or figured, verse," a type of poetic expressivity dating back, in its earliest forms, to ancient Greece, consisting of "poems printed in such a way that they resemble something related to the subject matter" (Carroll 50). It is intriguing to speculate that some of Pound's choral verses offer a visual counterpart to the dance depicted and evoked through their verbal signs. The backward and forward motion of certain lines upon the page alludes powerfully to the physical nature of the dance they were designed to covey:

> Dancing maid and man,
> Lady or Bacchanal
>   dancing toe to toe
> By night,
> By light shall show
>   analolu
>   Paian. (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 12)

It may well be, that in choral passages of daring virtuosity, Pound is actually attempting to make printed text embody the motion which its sounds represent.

My own practical work in making and performing dance sequences from the choral verses of *Women of Trachis* draws upon these speculations, and explores some distinctly modernist, ideogrammatic, methods of developing potential physical

performances from translated text. Proceeding from Pound's fascination with Chinese ideograms, and his conviction that the figures underlying modern Chinese letters could be read as abstracted figures representing frozen moments of action, I began experimenting with basing the floor-patterns of my choreography of Pound's Greek choruses upon the patterns made by the verse upon the printed page. Pound habitually exploited a wide variety of spatial relationships between different words and phrases in his poems, and it rapidly became evident to me that there are any number of fruitful ways in which the practitioner might respond to the visual appearance of text as a stimulus for choreographed movement in stage-space. Individual words or phrases might be interpreted as representing the relative positions of choral bodies in the performance space, or the moving steps of an individual dancing figure, or they might represent a floor-pattern which could be traced out by multiple performers following behind one another in single file.

One approach which I found particularly productive was based around the concept of constructing a sequence of dance steps and postures which would broadly (or where possible, more specifically) reflect the backwards and forwards motion of the text across the page. So, for example, in constructing a step sequence to be performed during the opening lines of the verses quoted above, I aimed to create a piece of choreography in which the progression of my body across stage space would mirror the way in which Pound sequences and spaces the words of his poetic text:

> APOLLO
>   And Artemis, analolu
>   Artemis,
> Analolu,
> Sun-bright Apollo, Saviour Apollo
>   Analolu. (Pound, *Women of Trachis* 12)

The first three lines were all performed travelling in the same direction (and at a diagonal angle to the audience), with the "Analolu" marking a change of direction.

The phrase "sun-bright Apollo" began my second sequence of diagonal steps, this time travelling in the opposite direction to the first set. This is not an exact replication of Pound's word patterning, which (when read ideogramatically as a provocation for a dance) seems to imply two sets of movements travelling in the same direction, beginning from different starting points (a choreographic option available to a group of dancers, but not to a soloist). However, in my own choreography, I tried to respond to the sense of two strongly diagonal movements, as well as to the sense that the exclamation "analolu" often seems to occur at points within the text patterning at which changes of direction occur. The recurrent positioning of "analolu" at the extreme edges of lines or phrases of verse suggested to me the possibility of using the word as a signal for a pivoting or turning step, which would be followed by the movement of the dance changing direction. In my choreography, I allocated the word its own distinctive elevated pose, which I used to pivot my body into new directions at these moments.

This repeated, whole-body pivot allowed me to develop my dance in ways which reflected the distinctive winding pattern of Pound's verse upon the page, whilst simultaneously exploring the ways in which bodily motion might be used to colour

the aural characteristics of transliterated Greek. Adopting an elevated body line, and raising my arms above my head, I attempted to loan the semantically-meaningless expression "analolu" a sense of ritual formality, or even religious celebration, the raised arms gesturing to some unreachable sphere of existence, knowledge, or power, recognised and celebrated in the choral dance.

What I've been hoping to suggest in this article are some of the ways in which Pound's idiosyncratic and ground-breaking modernist style of dramatic translation might influence the process of translating *Women of Trachis* from the page to the stage. When developing physical performance sequences, Pound's self-consciously incomplete approach to the suggestion of meaning through the melopoeiac and visual qualities of the dramatic text offers the practitioner an unusually large degree of freedom and responsibility in the establishment of performative effect. A movement, action, or gesture can often be crucial in deciding the specific sense which an audience might derive from deliberately ambiguous verbal phrases. Pound's modernist principles, and his fascination with abstracted symbols and ideograms, seem to call for a physical performance within which word and gesture are mysterious in isolation, but capable of great suggestivity and eloquence in sequence and in relation to one another. Throughout my work with Pound's texts, I have been concerned to explore the possibilities of a theatrical dance which might combine a modernist abstraction and clarity of line with appropriate symbolic suggestiveness, and which might respond to the complex texture of the poet's translated texts on a suitably polyglot variety of symbolic levels. Classical Japanese drama, as well as theories of the Chinese ideogram, and the aesthetic principles of modernist composition, all contribute significantly to the complex of influences informing the relationship between Pound's Greek tragedies and their potential physical

performance. For the practitioner, this complex of influences offers a variety of routes towards the composition of physical performances, each responding differently, and with a different range of potential outcomes, to the multiple aspects of Pound's transformative poetic translation.

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Trial: A Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' "Schrödinger's Box" by Andrew Brown, Mole Wetherell and Reckless Sleepers

Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press, 2007, 84 pp. (paperback)

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Over the last few years, I have been following the work of Reckless Sleepers. They are not, perhaps, as widely known as some of their contemporaries (Station House Opera, Forced Entertainment), but they deserve much greater critical attention both within and without the academic world than they have so far received. *Trial*, the book written by Andrew Brown, Mole Wetherell and Reckless Sleepers, which creatively documents some of their existing work and processes, is therefore a very welcome development.

Whilst reading the book, I thought about a particular personal experience of working with Reckless Sleepers (as an observer/ researcher) on a *Quiet Time* project in Oxford. The project was over. It was late at night and I walked back through the square in which we had performed earlier that evening. The trails of sugar we had left on the empty paving stones of the square during the performance (as personal mappings of the city), glittered in the light of the street lamps, like hieroglyphics writ large across the space. I'd been there; I'd help to create them, but as traces of something passed, they seemed to have taken on a different, mysterious meaning. What can you make of such traces? What can you re-construct or imagine of what took place, from the leftovers of performance? *Trial* is about just such a re-construction: not just a documentation of a project that is past, but a re-animation of a performance based on traces of the past.

In an exploration of the connections between theatre and archaeology, Pearson and Shanks suggest that:

> The past is not somehow "discovered" in its remains, for what would it
> be? … What archaeologists do is work with material traces, with evidence,
> in order to create something – a meaning, a narrative, an image – which
> stands for the past in the present. (Pearson and Shanks 11)

Trial is both a construction and a re-construction. It is also a set of traces or evidence for further imaginings by the reader. *Trial* focuses (although not exclusively) on one of Reckless Sleepers' projects, *Schrödinger's Box*. The company decided to re-visit the project (which it had first presented in 1998), not just to reproduce it as it was then, but to re-animate it in the present, using the same pool of material – the constructed metal box which was the "set," the ideas and the notes, diagrams and videos, and memories of the 1998 *Schrödinger's Box* - as evidence for re-interpretation. To help with this re-interpretation, new performers were introduced to the process.

> In the re-devising of Schrödinger's Box, the artists … asked questions of
> the original work, and generated new ideas. The involvement of new
> people is necessary because new ideas are necessary. (Brown, Wetherell
> and Reckless Sleepers 13)

The approach of drawing from previous ideas or performances is one that features in the work of many contemporary companies; old projects sow the seeds of new ones or cross-fertilize with other ideas in development. However, Reckless Sleepers' re-visiting and re-devising of a previous project, and the documenting of this process in *Trial,* seems to me to be a valuable challenge to a funding culture which prioritizes "the new."

Trial, as a documentation and re/construction of this process, also presents a possible way forward in the tricky question of the "legacy" of devised performance. At a recent symposium on *Devising In Process* (2008), a discussion took place about what the possible legacy of devised work could be, and what any such legacy might bring to the field of performance. A playwright leaves behind a script for interpretation and re-

interpretation, so the work can continue to be explored by other people in other contexts. Devised work, on the other hand, is often seen as being closely linked to its originating company or performer, so not appropriate for others to perform. A script, or other form of notation, also carries very little of what gives life and meaning to a devised performance, particularly when the work relies on physicality, visuality, liveness or engagement with the audience. Video documentation raises problems of its own, as it cannot capture the full phenomenological experience of a performance, particularly with a company such as Reckless Sleepers who often use sensual elements (such as touch, smell, performers' proximity, audience perspective) in their work. Finding alternative ways, then, of increasing the exposure to and legacy of devised work, seems to me to an important issue.

The book, *Trial*, especially if viewed alongside the video of *Schrödinger's Box*, offers a new kind of legacy: a complex, multi-voiced re/collection of ideas, images and processes from both the original development of *Schrödinger's Box* (and other works), and the re-visiting of it in 2006. As well as being a documentation of the project, the book seems to invite new explorations by the reader of the "evidence" – both in re-constructing it in their mind as they read, and in presenting possibilities to create new work from the same pool of material and processes, as the company themselves have done.

As *Trial* informs us, Reckless Sleepers are often inspired by Surrealist ideas and imagery; their name comes from Magritte's painting, "The Reckless Sleeper." *Trial* also draws on the surrealist processes of collage and juxtaposition to create and shape the text, structure and layout of the book. The text comprises four different voices: Andrew Brown (researcher/writer), Mole Wetherell (Director of Reckless Sleepers), various company members through their records and notes on projects and processes, and a written

notation of the 1998 performance of *Schrödinger's Box*. These voices are presented side by side on the page; sometimes the texts directly relate to the same idea, and sometimes they take the reader in different directions. The various voices allow different ways into understanding the work, as well as opening up space for the reader to find their own connections between the disparate ideas and experiences presented.

The book focuses on the 2006 re-animation of *Schrödinger's Box*, but rather than follow a linear path through this process, it draws in ideas and understandings from previous company projects (through the various voices and collaged texts) and diverts out to explore processes and theories that underpin the company's work in general. Detailed descriptions are given of the "box" that forms the stage set of *Schrödinger's Box*, and is described as a "performance machine" for "generating ideas and behaviours" (15). The performance of *Schrödinger's Box* evolved from a physical and *thought-full* exploration of this box construction: "The box is an experimental chamber, a cloud chamber, a crucible, an alchemical experiment, a television, a radio, a tuning device; it is so blank it calls other rooms into being" (9). Explanations are also given of the relationship between the performance piece and Schrödinger's original thought-experiment (from the field of quantum physics) from which it derives its name. But Reckless Sleepers are inspired by a diverse range of ideas and knowledges, and so the book, too, represents this eclectic approach, with chapters on such diverse subjects as physics, mathematics, Magritte, alcohol, letters, maps and journeys, alongside descriptions of the company's devising processes and descriptions of exploratory, practical exercises.

The structure and collaged approach of *Trial* makes it a book that is sometimes challenging to read, necessitating the reader to pause for thought or to digest or connect

ideas. It is ideal for dipping into for inspiration, or for referring to when lecturing on postmodernist theatre, or for gleaning practical exercises for devising work. For lecturers, students, practitioners or readers engaged with contemporary performance, *Trial* offers a useful and fascinating insight into the workings of this important company.

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Multi-media: Video-Installation-Performance, by Nick Kaye
Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 249 pp. (paperback)

Eirini Nedelkopoulou (University of Reading)

Multi-media: Video-Installation-Performance is a result of the interdisciplinary project, *Performing Presence: from the Live to the Simulated*, an AHRC funded project managed by Nick Kaye (University of Exeter), Gabriella Giannachi (University of Exeter), Mel Slater (University College London) and Michael Shanks (Stanford USA). The emphasis of the project is on the performance of presence in live, mediated and simulated environments. The book explores the concept of presence by presenting a series of discussions with leading international artists including, Vito Acconci, The Builders Association, John Jesurun, Pipilotti Rist, Fiona Templeton and Studio Azzurro.

Multi-media develops a stimulating discourse between theoretical analysis and documented art practice. Kaye covers a considerable amount of ground, examining a wide range of video, installation and performance, providing an extensive, creative

investigation of current multi-media practice, and addressing the complicated concept of presence, an ongoing issue in the field of intermedia art. This interdisciplinary study moves between different practices and consistently interrogates some of the main themes and concerns in current multi-media practice, including notions of space, time, liveness, presence and media while exploring the performance of subjectivity. Kaye elaborates on some recurring issues across video art, installation and multimedia theatre, including the intertwinement of, and collision between, the live and mediated; the media's dispersal and multiplication of the performing subjects; the re-configuration of the notion of "presentness" in relation to different operations of the multiple times and spaces of the performances.

The book is organized into an introduction on "Live Video" followed by three major sections: "Video Time/Performance Time," "Video Space/Performance Space," and "Multiplying Media." Between these sections, there are illustrated documented artworks and essays as well as new articles. Kaye's selection of the artists' pages is one of the strongest attributes of the book as it provides an invigorating dialogue, with a sophisticated theoretical analysis, on live and mediated performance. The author situates the chapters through a carefully laid out introduction, discussing different experimental practices in relation to the notions of place, presence and media mainly through the theoretical lens of Samuel Weber and Jacques Derrida.

In "Video Time/Performance Time," Kaye examines the complexities of "time-structures" in video, video installation and performance in the works of several artists: Nam June Paik in response to John Cage's use of "chance method and indeterminacy," as well as Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham and Joan Jonas, who were influenced by Paik's

ideas about the "the performance of a plurality of musical and visual times" (26). Focusing on the ideas of liveness and ephemerality in various multimedia practices, Kaye goes on to discuss the interplay between the "real" and "virtual" performance moments that are "subject to variability, difference and multiplication" (37).

The second chapter, "Video Space/Performance Space," explores the "presentness" of "real" and "virtual" spatial experiences and subjectivity. To exemplify his discussion on the "performance and mediation of the body and its sites" (211), Kaye looks to the work of Vito Acconci, Studio Azzuro, Pippilotti Rist and Gary Hill. In this chapter, Kaye elaborates the problematic and also challenging concepts of presence and absence in the screened body in relation to aura and distance of art work in spaces where the boundaries between the "real" and the "virtual" are blurred and disjunctive. To discuss these concepts, Kaye foregrounds and challenges Pontbraid's, Benjamin's, Weber's and Derrida's accompanying theories on the subjects.

The book's final chapter, "Multiplying Media" focuses on the multimedia theatre practices of The Wooster Group, the writer and director John Jesurum and the New York based theatre company The Builders Association. Here, Kaye concentrates on "place, narrative and identity" (210) in relation to media's operation in the different modes of production. Through discussion of multiplication and convergence in multimedia theatre, issues re-emerge that have been analysed earlier in the book: "the division between video time and performance time; between video space and performance and the multiplication of media in the theatrical re-framing and performance of mediation" (26).

Overall, *Multi-media: Video-installation-Performance* offers an insightful account of multimedia practices in terms of space, time and subjectivity. Kaye opens a dynamic

dialogue between times, spaces and media with various multimedia practices so as to emphasize "the instability or 'undecidability' characterizing the transmitted image and the performance of mediation" (212). Although the study successfully counterbalances theory and practice, at times the writing style is somewhat dense and compacted in its engagement with the issue of the reconfiguration of bodies, spaces and times in multi-media practices. The additional illustrated material between the chapters functions as a fascinating oasis that illuminates and facilitates Kaye's discussion. Undoubtedly, *Multi-media* is a well-researched and highly informative book, which is a valuable resource in the growing body of work on multimedia performance.

African Theatres and Performances by Osita Okagbue
Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007, 200 pp. (hardback)

Kene Igweonu (Swansea Metropolitan University)

Osita Okagbue's *African Theatres and Performances* sets out to examine and, in the process, to challenge some of the (mis)conceptions about what constitutes theatre or performance in an African context. In this book, Okagbue confronts a key question that has, in the past, threatened to undermine African theatre pedagogy. The publication of *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a Critical Source Book*[1] in 1981 brought the issue of contemporaneity of African performance forms to the fore and exposed the dangers of analysing African performances from a Western perspective. *African Theatres and Performances* builds on this argument surrounding the contemporaneity of African

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[1] Yemi Ogunbiyi, ed. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a Critical Source Book.* Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981.

forms by highlighting the ill-defined tendency to distinguish between Africa's indigenous and literary theatre traditions as traditional and modern respectively.

Okagbue argues that appropriating the term traditional to describe indigenous performances implies that they are "fossilized" whereas, the term modern would signify forms that are "fashionable" (Okagbue 9). The arbitrary use of such *loaded* terms as traditional and modern in relation to African theatre forms continues to inspire debates as to whether indigenous festivals, masquerade performances, rituals, and other such events constitute theatre in their own rights and the appropriateness of validating them based on Western theatre hypotheses. Meanwhile, Okagbue is resolute in affirming his belief that indigenous performances are as contemporaneous as the literary ones due to their "ability to dialectically interact and negotiate with history…constantly reviewing and revising themselves in response to their ever-changing historical and cultural contexts" (10).

African Theatres and Performances offers a comprehensive insight into indigenous African performance forms by examining individual performances' contexts and performance aesthetics. The book examines the systems of management and organisation of each of the four performances, their training and rehearsal methods, staging techniques, design concepts, performer-spectator relationship, and functional and social relevance. The book is suitably divided into six chapters, four of which are devoted to the analysis of individual performance forms, with a very poignant compelling introduction and conclusion. It contains almost thirty photographs and diagrams that thoughtfully illustrate the performances being discussed.

The introductory chapter examines what I discussed earlier as (mis)conceived notions about theatre and performance in Africa. In Chapter 2, Okagbue focuses on his embodied and researched knowledge of the Igbo masquerade theatre of south-eastern Nigeria to underscore the requisite correlation between an understanding of the Igbo worldview and *Mmonwu* performances. For his analysis of *Mmonwu* performances, Okagbue examines the *Enemma* festival performance found in Nkpor community in Anambra State of Nigeria. Okagbue justifies his choice of *Enemma* on the fact that it provides "a spatial envelope in which independent and unrelated masquerades or other performance activities can take place simultaneously or separately" (21). The nature of *Enemma* festival is such that it can be described as a carnival which provides the opportunity for a variety of masquerades to parade through designated spaces. However, Okagbue's preference exploits his entrenched knowledge of *Enemma* being that it is a performance event from his own indigenous background.

Chapter 3 discusses the *Bori* ritual theatre of the Hausa people of northern Nigeria. This chapter considers the relationship between ritual, theatre, therapy and the society by examining influences such as Hausa patriarchy, world-view, and Islamic religion. Here, Okagbue argues that *Bori* ritual performances function both as ritual – "an emotional and therapeutic outlet for the politically, socially and sexually repressed groups in Hausa society" (98), and as theatre – a form of entertainment. The fourth chapter introduces *Jaliya* of the Mandinka as a performance form that is reliant on words unlike most other performance arts of Africa. However, Okagbue is quick to point out that this reliance on words is not "dialogic" (101), but free-flowing, in one direction – from performer to audience. The *Jaliya* performance that Okagbue

investigates in this chapter is known as *Jaliya Balundo* and was performed in Dakar, Senegal.

Okagbue then shifts his attention to Mali in Chapter 5 where he looks at the *Koteba* satirical comedy of the Bamana, describing the performance in detail. The particular performance he describes in this chapter was performed at his request after he arrived too late for *Sogo Bo*, a form of *Koteba* that is performed using masquerades and puppets. Okagbue illustrates how the "situational comedies" (166) of the *Koteba* are used to explore a range of social issues by relying on stereotypes in a manner that is reminiscent of pantomimes. In the concluding chapter, Okagbue assesses the future of indigenous African performance forms, affirming his confidence that "indigenous performances continue robustly alongside the European influenced literary theatre, strongly challenging African theatre scholarship that oftentimes differentiates between these two forms, by using the terms 'traditional' and 'modern' respectively" (175).

African Theatres and Performances is a practical and theoretical guide into the making and appreciation of indigenous African performance forms. It is particularly useful as a pedagogic tool for introducing indigenous African performances in Higher Education and a must-read for anyone interested in African performance arts. The book does not pretend or attempt to discuss *all* forms of indigenous theatres and performances in Africa – a virtually impossible task for any one author to accomplish due to the vast but often overlooked diversity of culture that exists on the continent. What the book does is to focus its analyses on the production processes and reception of indigenous oral performances in four West African performance traditions: the Igbo *Mmonwu,* Hausa *Bori,* Mandinka *Jaliya,* and *Koteba* of the Bamana people.

The fact that the title of the book alludes to theatre(s) and performance(s) clearly points to what I noted earlier as vast diversity of forms that exist among the peoples of the colonial construct known as Africa. Acknowledging this diversity does not suppose that most African cultures do not have certain characteristics in common. For instance, the performance traditions discussed in the book are commonplace in Africa and their practices are comparable across cultures, particularly West African cultures. In essence, the analysis of the Igbo masquerade performance would normally provide useful insights into the practice of this form elsewhere in the region and Africa as a whole.

African Theatres and Performances is perhaps the first book by an African scholar to assert its prerogative to apply the term African to a specific tribal or regional performance tradition without feeling the need to fulfil the post-imperial requirement of felicitating with regional traditions elsewhere on the continent. The book is a bold and brilliant intervention in cultural and performance studies on Africa, and I hope that it will help to refocus African theatre pedagogy and inspire other focused reading of Africa's vast performance forms and traditions.

Sacred Theatre. **Ed Ralph Yarrow**
Bristol: Intellect, 2007, 224 pp. (paperback)

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Attempts to discuss the ineffable in theatrical experiences often result in clichéd assertions that there are no words to describe the event. *Sacred Theatre*, devised and edited by Ralph Yarrow, takes a collaborative approach to the examination of theatre,

allowing multiple perspectives to inform each other while resisting the temptation to rigidly define what is or is not sacred.

Sacredness or the sacred of theatre is not treated in a conventional or culturally specific way, as Yarrow explains, "[w]e have…emphasized in this book that we are not necessarily accepting such definitions, not least because they may be freighted with all kinds of inculturation and its political and social baggage" (156). With the word sacred un-tethered from its moorings, "what is crucial is whether or not the kinds of experience and process which may occur serve to open out or close off the scope of being, and whether they offer the possibility for the kinds of transition we have identified" (156). The book begins with definitions of sacred theatre drawn from the six contributors: Ralph Yarrow, Franc Chamberlain, William S. Haney II, Carl Lavery, Peter Malekin, and John Fox. These are diverse and highlight the difficulty of accepting any one concept: empty fullness, full emptiness, presence of emptiness, sense of doubleness, of flowing, a gasp or gape, liminality, becoming another, voiding of thought, shift of consciousness, blurring of boundaries (16). Throughout the book the discussion returns to the idea of cognition, a shift, change or transition of consciousness in the actor, spectator or participant. Thus, the sacred of theatre is most clearly aligned with how consciousness can be affected by theatre: "The sacred of theatre may be its capacity to activate a particular quotient of energy, a form of active and holistic knowing, qualitatively different from 'normal' discrete subject/object cognition" (16-7).

The book's nine chapters each contain many short sections and the writers take turns with subject matter, switching between voices, tone and formality. Split into nine sections, "Terminologies and Categorizations of the Sacred" focuses almost exclusively

on theory and philosophy through short subject specific examinations, e.g. Ritual, Space, Time, Aesthetics and The Absurd. In the first of these, Modern Views of the Sacred, various philosophical positions ranging from Emile Durkheim to Sigmund Freud, Mircea Eliade to Georges Bataille are used to effectively negate any investigation of western concepts of the sacred because a "logocentric understanding of the sacred negates the defining feature of sacred experience: cosmos and continuity" (36). The main comparisons, then, throughout the book in relation to ritual and spiritual practices come from India (the Natyasastra, the Advaita Vedanta, Samkiya-Yoga, the Vedic), Japan (Noh drama and Buddhism), Bali and others. The application of Eastern and South Asian philosophies to western playtexts certainly provides an interesting and productive analysis. However, this might have been complemented by a more open position towards western practices which engage ritual, religion and drama.

Five of the chapters address theatrical texts in a critical context, and it is here that the strength of the book lies. The readings of Stoppard, Churchill, Ionesco, Pinter, Genet and David Henry Hwang combine theories and close textual analysis in provocative and diverse ways. Each playwright and playtext is treated to multiple layers of analysis which build successively on what the sacred of theatre could mean. In all cases the analyses return to the kinds of spaces opened up by the texts for transformation to occur. The question is always whether the "mode of experience" created by the theatrical event can productively be called a sacred experience. Sacredness is re-thought and re-positioned in each section, so that, in relation to Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and the theme of gender games, the sacredness is posited as "the experience of 'during' as a space of inter-being that compels us to break out of a doubled reality mediated by representation – even

while using representation as a means" (92). In relation to Genet's *The Screens*, sacredness is linked to an otherness that passes through emptiness requiring the "abandonment of the known or normal self which owns or has a place; or a location of the contours of the material in the not quite manifest realm of the imaginary" (144). Any attempt to define the sacred is difficult and the strength of the book is its insistence that the sacred be conceptulised in relation to how it works and what it produces (30).

The last chapter addresses questions of sacredness in a non-academic register by relating experiences from workshops, performances, actor training techniques and many years of applied theatrical work. Perhaps because of the multi-vocal approach to this collaborative book (the various authors reference each other, highlighting the inter-relatedness of the texts), the writers point out topics they have overlooked or which might be taken up by someone else. The discussion ranges freely and incorporates individual questions and comments which are not necessarily answered.

Anyone interested in the playwrights mentioned or political readings of texts will find *Sacred Theatre* a good starting point. The use of the word sacred in the title is perhaps misleading, but Yarrow does admit that performance resists solid frameworks when discussed in such broad strokes. Recent publications such as *After the Death of God* by John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo show that the concerns raised here are in step with the contemporary return to religion across discplines. There is much more to be explored in this area of research and this book is a welcome starting point.