

PECULIAR WAYS, HOLLOWS, AND VOIDS:  
EXPLORING THE HETEROTOPIAN PERFORMATIVE

By

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(Under the Direction of John Patrick Bray)

ABSTRACT

Inspired by Jill Dolan's conceptualization of the utopian performative, this study uses scholarship in landscape-informed dramaturgy and spatial theory to investigate performances in which *heterotopia is done*. To this end, I develop a critical framework for analyzing these authored and sustained other Other spaces in performance. My framework is based on a reading of a small, uncanny passage by Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges, within his 1942 essay, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language." I am led here by Michel Foucault, who identifies Borges' out-of-place passage as a heterotopia in his preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. In his preface, Foucault describes in detail a heterotopia's disturbing effects on the site of the surrounding text's discourse. He does not, however, codify what a heterotopia is and how it may be applied. In this study, I ask: If Foucault has established that a seemingly small, easily overlooked passage in an essay has the power to do away with the site of its surrounding discourse, desiccating and dissolving the *a priori* assumptions of the order in which it lies, what happens when we approach the heterotopia as not a phenomenon that may be found or a trick only available to Borges, but as a meta-literary device that may be authored? Further, how might we locate and examine this special device as one already being applied at the intersections of embodied performance, place, and time? Using Foucault's first published writing on heterotopias

and my reading of Borges' passage returned to its original essay, this study recovers the authorship as well as heterotopia's presence, agency, and monstrosity, and makes an inquiry into performances through their radical acts of *lingering*, and the resulting acts of both place-making and place *taking* they engender. Mapping onto Dolan's framework, I propose that heterotopian performatives describe small but powerful moments in which an interloper calls participants into a labor of lingering within a site both within and separate from their socio-cultural place and time, in the process hollowing the *a priori* assumptions that underpin patterns of thought, and sustaining participants together within a disruptive unmeasured caesura of rest, with-ness, and care. These strategies, I suggest, manifest and sustain authored heterotopias in society for the duration of the performance, sites that I term *peculiar*s, as they are outside the jurisdiction of the socio-cultural site in which they are sustained. This study brings together an eclectic gathering of difficult-to-categorize works, including performance scores, embodied installations, scripted drama, and sensory theatre. Through my analysis of these works as heterotopias, I develop a framework for reading their strategies for surreptitiously entering sites, their modes of lingering, their implications, and the posthumanist phenomena encountered in the unmeasured rest(s) they sustain.

INDEX WORDS: Theatre, Performance, Playwriting, Performance studies, Heterotopia, Place-making, Landscape Theatre, Spatial Theory, Sensory Theatre, Theatre for the Very Young, Posthumanism, Foucault, 600 Highwaymen, Benjamin Patterson, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Alison Knowles, Ann Hamilton, Caryl Churchill, Adrienne Kennedy, Replay Theatre, Oily Cart

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DEDICATION:

I dedicate this with love to my husband, Ben Compton, and to our silly geese, Jonah and Rory.

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## INTRODUCTION

### RE-THINKING FOUCAULT'S FIRST HETEROTOPIA

#### Foucault's Hollow Laughter

In the opening lines of his untitled preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault makes a bold and personal declaration as to the origins of his project:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—*our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation first arose out of reading the above opening passage, from the eerie sound I heard and could not shake, of the laughter arising out of Michel Foucault.

What did this laughter sound like? I imagine it was not how he usually laughed, among friends. I imagined him reading Borges alone in a quiet room; the sound I heard in my mind was a singular *bark*, a sharp, biting *HA!* When Foucault laughed, part of me jumped. The laughter was also, at the same time, without sound, a silent force that shook Foucault's whole body. For the smallest moment, Foucault was in the room with me; I could see him out of the corner of my

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, xvi.

eye, seizing. It was as though the text itself laughed. This laugh seems to have its own presence, its own agency. While it was entirely possible that there was no laugh at all, when I jumped, I sensed that part of Foucault jumped too.

It was strange, even disturbing. I had not considered that Foucault had a corporeal body, at least not one capable of producing involuntary sounds. I had seen pictures of Foucault, but he and so many other theorists and philosophers to me have never seemed to have bodies, but rather exist strictly within the realm of ideas, unbothered by things like decay and death. Certainly, Foucault could frame bodies, historicize bodies. But the notion of a laugh erupting from his mouth without his command was unsettling. It is the sound of Foucault's laugh that shattered "the familiar landmarks"<sup>2</sup> of *my* thought. This laughter was as out of place in Foucault's body as the passage was out of place "in Borges."<sup>3</sup> If Foucault could laugh like this—no, if this laugh could *happen to/through* Foucault, then perhaps there is a space beyond, behind, or under this text, beyond a cluster of words in books, ideas scattered across time. In a worrying reverse of the experience of reading weird fiction, I wondered: If Foucault were real, what might that make me?

In that same quoted passage, Foucault uses "planes and surfaces"<sup>4</sup> to describe historically specific ways of knowing, "apparatuses" with which to distinguish what ordering of thought counts as valid from what counts as invalid in a certain field at a particular point in time. These, he writes, are *epistemes*. Later in the preface, Foucault further spatializes epistemes by deploying the image of a medical table as a tabula, the surface on which we lay ourselves, others, and every object, thought, and sense. We cannot order our thinking, let alone *know* anything without such a

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

surface. He also conjures an image of a navigable space when he refers to this surface as “the mute ground” along with the site of “in Borges,” like the Argentinian author is a landmass unto himself.

The passage in question (the one that set off the laughter that shattered) is contained within a paragraph within a nonfiction essay by Borges, which is titled “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language.” Foucault identified this passage as a *heterotopia*, drawing from a clinical term referring to tissue that is found “out of place” in the body,<sup>5</sup> implying that the meaning of “the mute ground”<sup>6</sup> includes place, body, and constructs. The image of “surface” implies something unseen on the other side. I draw attention at the start of this introduction to this strange experience of encountering Foucault as a human being to highlight the entanglement of place (“a passage in Borges”), apparatus (human-made structure of discourse like a medical table), and body in connection to the phenomenon of a *heterotopia*.

J.L. Austin does not include laughter in his taxonomy of ordinary speech in his famous lecture series, *How to Do Things with Words*. A laugh is something understood as being generated. Laughter affirms that another speech act, a joke, is a joke. Laughter arises. However, in Foucault’s preface, the laugh does something more than affirm Borges’ passage as a joke. This laugh *shatters* something that holds together Foucault as Foucault. It has agency and a presence of its own. The uninvited laughter that shatters meets the historical moment (my act of reading).

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<sup>5</sup> Taber’s Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary defines heterotopia as “The appearance of a cluster of normal cells in an abnormal location, as of a cluster of cells from the adrenal glands found in a tissue specimen taken from the ovaries” and “The displacement of an organ or body part from its normal location.” Donald Venes, editor, “Heterotopia,” *Taber’s Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, 24th ed. (F.A. Davis Company, 2021), [https://www.tabers.com/tabersonline/view/Tabers-Dictionary/770564/all/heterotopia\\_\\_heterotopy](https://www.tabers.com/tabersonline/view/Tabers-Dictionary/770564/all/heterotopia__heterotopy).

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii.

While reading has been established as a solitary act, within this moment there was something like unity in the unease.

At its heart, the present study is an attempt to understand certain uncanny acts of authorship as “out of place” passage-making, authorship which ruptures the author function itself.<sup>7</sup> That is, this is an attempt to reckon with moments when heterotopia is *done*,<sup>8</sup> when discourse is done away with by small acts of strategic passage-making, and what phenomena are encountered in the site of absence that remains. In the hollowed-out absence of a “common ground,”<sup>9</sup> a new landscape is found, and unknown knowledge is encountered. To hold linguistic space for this ephemeral site, I will develop the term *peculiar* to describe these sites, drawing on the ecclesiastical definition. A peculiar is the term for a site that is both within the church and also outside of or exempt from the scheme of jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that a peculiar is not a place, nor a building, but a jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> The performances I examine in this study successfully hold this jurisdiction, peculiar unto themselves.<sup>11</sup> This project illuminates performance works that respond to the problem of representation and mimesis through participants, players, audience becoming a part of the heterotopia itself as a body, a site in a landscape, and as an action. As such, landscape theory serves as my primary critical lens, anchored by scholarship in the spatial turn.

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<sup>7</sup> I use Foucault’s definition of the author function, which I discuss later in this introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Jill Dolan describes utopian performatives as “moments of performance in which utopia is ‘done.’” Jill Dolan, “Utopia in Performance,” *Theatre Research International* 31, no. 2 (2006): 163.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Barber, “What is a Peculiar?” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 3, no. 16 (1995): 299–312.

<sup>11</sup> I am playfully drawing on J.L. Austin’s exclusionary passage in *How to Do Things with Words*, where certain “parasitic” speech acts are deemed “in a peculiar way, hollow and void.” I discuss Austin’s passage in greater detail in Chapter Two. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 21-22.

Foucault's table/tabula image used to describe epistemes provides a straightforward spatial framework: Knowledge requires a surface on which to be organized, and that base is neither neutral nor natural, but built and sustained.<sup>12</sup> The heterotopia not only "does away" with the site—it dissolves, sterilizes, desiccates, disturbs, and threatens.<sup>13</sup> The discourse is made visible as not only a constructed table, but also a living body, and a place. Heterotopian performatives suggest that these three selves of the episteme, the discourse of an age, are all bound by their power relation to time, dissolution, ruin, and decay. Heterotopian performatives make, sustain, and *are* passageways into the "emptiness at the heart of matter,"<sup>14</sup> through the points where objects, bodies, and place meet time and decay.

The heterotopia itself, when read as this passage within and separate from its proper text, appears to have an agential force; it is capable of not only doing away with the site, but, in the case of Foucault, making a passageway of the very body of the author. Somehow, it seemed, Borges' passage bored a hole through this table/tabula of Foucault the Discourse, desiccated it as a body, and in the process made another kind of passage, a traversable one, through which this strange hollow laughter made its way to me, the reader. In place of where the table had been, there was an absence, an abyss, upon which to organize infinity. In the opening moments of his preface, I suggest that Foucault opens a way into approaching heterotopia through embodied performance but situating its two key components: a presence and a passage, both out of place.

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<sup>12</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi. Foucault uses tabula in two "superimposed senses," of a physical surgical table upon which "the umbrella encounters the sewing machine" and also of a tabula that "enables thought to operate upon the entities of the world" for the purpose of making order. This is where, Foucault writes, "since the beginning of time, language has intersected space."

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

<sup>14</sup> Elinor Fuchs writes that, "The sense of emptiness at the heart of matter can be traced in much of the new theater." Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre After Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4.

## Defining Heterotopia: Reading Borges' Interloper

Foucault dedicates significant space to unpacking his uneasy response to reading Borges' passage. Perhaps, he wonders, heterotopias are disturbing because they "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences."<sup>15</sup> But what *are they*? And *how* do they do this? Let us consider, simply, our singular example Foucault cites to establish a working definition of what a heterotopia *is* and *does* as a literary device, such that we might then apply it to readings of embodied performance. Foucault extracts this passage, which is in itself a fictional extraction from a fictional work, titled, "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge." This fictional passage of the fictional taxonomy reads,

animals are divided into (a) those belonging to the Emperor, (b) those that are embalmed, (c) those that are tame, (d) pigs, (e) sirens, (f) imaginary animals, (g) wild dogs, (h) those included in this classification, (i) those that are crazy-acting (j), those that are uncountable (k) those painted with the finest brush made of camel hair, (l) miscellaneous, (m) those which have just broken a vase, and (n) those which, from a distance, look like flies.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that in this preface, Foucault confines his analysis to the brief passage itself, limiting how deeply he might be able to examine it. Foucault twice describes the passage's location only as "in Borges,"<sup>17</sup> aligning Borges as a human body, a corpus of written works, and as a navigable site one might physically traverse or map. The passage, however, occupies space

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xix.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, quoting Borges, in *The Order of Things*, xv.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.

within a text, beginning about halfway through the fifth paragraph of a short, eight-paragraph essay, first published in Spanish in the conservative newspaper *La Nacion* on February 8, 1942.<sup>18</sup>

In this essay, which Foucault never cites, Borges critiques the English philosopher Wilkins' proposal for a universal language, one in which each word would serve as its own "secret encyclopedia,"<sup>19</sup> containing its past, its present, and its fate. Borges' essay examines the limited capacity of utopian "human schemes"<sup>20</sup> at creating systems of ordering the universe through language. The passage Foucault draws is only one of two examples of eccentric order-making in Borges' text.<sup>21</sup> What sets the Celestial encyclopedia apart is that it is hinted at as being a *fiction* by Borges, describing its author as the "unknown (or apocryphal) Chinese encyclopedist."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, *all* of the attempts described by Borges are fiction, as ordering transforms raw material into something not neutral.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to return the extracted passage to Borges' essay, as Foucault describes a heterotopia as understood by what it *does* to its surrounding text. A heterotopia is not an

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<sup>18</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," *La Nación*, February 8, 1942.

<sup>19</sup> Borges, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language" trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (Viking, 1999), 230. The essay title is translated in other collections as "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins."

<sup>20</sup> Borges, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," 231.

<sup>21</sup> In the same paragraph, Borges also cites The Bibliographical Institute of Brussels as an example of attempting to make order to an extreme in this essay. This attempt, he writes, "also exercises chaos." "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," 231. Borges' original phrasing in Spanish is "también ejerce el caos." Instead of "exercises chaos," others variously translate this to, "exerts chaos," "resorts to chaos," or "practices chaos."

<sup>22</sup> Borges, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," 231.

<sup>23</sup> See Umberto Eco's illustrated book, *The Infinity of Lists*, which distinguishes between the infinity of aesthetics and a response to infinity. The infinity of aesthetics is "the subjective feeling of something greater than us," that a poet or artist crafts, and which in a sense is complete. Infinity, on the other hand, is "made up of objects that can perhaps be numbered but that we cannot number—and we fear that their numeration (and enumeration) may never stop." Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, translated by Alastair McEwen (London: MacLehose Press, 2009), 13.

aesthetic object, but rather it is entangled in action. It sustains a disruption in the narrative long enough to become a caesura. In an essay whose narrative is composed of taxonomies, this passage breaks the flow with its fictionhood, and then sustains this break by way of a brazen insistence on being present in the discourse. The intrusion of the heterotopia, thus, not only pauses the flow, but makes it impossible for the rhythm and reception of what comes next to be the same.<sup>24</sup>

Lists, of course, have their own poetics. They at once “exist just beyond the boundary of narrative proper,”<sup>25</sup> and, through intrusion, are “embedded in the story.” Stephen A. Barney affirms lists’ action and agency when he likens them to “intruders” that “break the narrative.”<sup>26</sup> Brian Richardson adds that the act itself of listing has a temporal element of disruption. “Narrative is suspended,” Richardson writes, during the period of time in which “lists are unfolded.”<sup>27</sup> Arthur Krystal, in an ode to lists, notes their function as “a ceremonial flourish against amnesia and chaos.”<sup>28</sup> Borges, Krystal notes, is “the great contemporary list maker.”<sup>29</sup>

The excerpt of the fictional passage in “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language” is a partial taxonomy, a fictional fragment of an attempt at establishing order and meaning, and, like all

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<sup>24</sup> This disruption sustained by a heterotopia and its effect on the established rhythm of the prior narrative resonates with Friedrich Hölderlin’s concept of a tragic caesura. Hölderlin’s finds the tragic caesura manifested in Sophocles’ *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, sustained by the extended speech act of Tiresias. I discuss Hölderlin’s concept in the methodology section of this introduction.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Richardson, “Modern Fiction, the Poetics of Lists, and the Boundaries of Narrative,” *Style* 50, no. 3 (2016): 328.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen A. Barney, “Chaucer’s Lists,” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzell (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan UP, 1982), 190.

<sup>27</sup> Richardson, “Modern Fiction, the Poetics of Lists,” 328.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur Krystal, “The Joy of Lists,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> See Borges’ short story “The Aleph,” about a strange object that makes it possible to see (and thus compile a list of) everything that exists in the moment of looking.

other attempts to do so, Borges writes, invariably “resorts to chaos.”<sup>30</sup> While Foucault puts his attention on the impossible gathering of elements in the list, what is key for our purposes in returning the passage to the essay itself is not necessarily how strange the ordering is within the passage, but that the list is both fictional and yet just as legitimate and real as any of the other taxonomies referenced in the essay. The taxonomy mirrors the other examples Borges provides within the paragraph; it is indistinguishable from “fact” until informed otherwise. The passage is an interloper, a catachrestic fiction in a nonfiction essay. It enters into and takes up space in an essay in which it does not belong, and its insistent configuration across the alphabet functions as a means of *lingering* in the discourse of order-making.

I observe Borges’ “improper” passage is doing within the text “proper.” The passage within its surrounding paragraph and surrounding proper text, is the basis for my framework:

1. There is a text *proper*, authored by Borges within the understood and agreed upon genre of a non-fiction essay, within the discourse of man’s attempts to use language to make order and contain infinity.
2. There is an *improper* text, one that is non-serious, that is embedded in the text proper. This text, the fictional excerpt of the taxonomy, mirrors the surrounding text in the paragraph. It is recognized as a joke, a presence out of place. It is inappropriate, but it is not threatening.
3. This improper text, embedded in the paragraph and the larger essay, may be understood as an *interloper*. It has the presence of an actant, specifically someone who has wandered into the wrong room, or drifted out of their lane, uninvited and inappropriate to the text proper.

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<sup>30</sup> Borges, “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language,” 231.

4. This interloper *lingers*, as this improper presence within the text, and its act of lingering is through listing inappropriately. This lingering creates a break and a site of its own, a gap that is also a rest.
5. This occupation within the text *proper* is possible only through the *reader's* collusion with Borges' second authorship. It is historical with his writing and with my moment of encounter with it. This is a meeting place, to use Doreen Massey's term, between an absent author, a present reader, and the passage itself.
6. By lingering in this way, the improper text sustains a disruptive and rhetorical presence within the discourse of order.

Based on this analysis, I assess that heterotopias are small textual sites that disrupt the flow and rhythm of larger texts by their sheer presence. Heterotopias are uninvited guests, catachrestic interlocutors, whose very presence is disruptive and inappropriate. They are, to use heterotopia's medical definition, out of place. Moreover, heterotopias engage in a labor of lingering; the longer the passage lingers the more it dissolves and desiccates the established neutrality and factuality of the surrounding text and the myths that hold the discourse together. A heterotopia is an act of subtractive manufacturing, such that it both bores small passages into a text and *is* a passage into the desiccated discourse, creating both a puncture and a path. Heterotopias are not ahistorical; they activate the intimate intersection of time and place at which they are performed.

Heterotopias thus have the potential to gesture to what Samuel Beckett described as the highest goal for a writer in his day: "To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through."<sup>31</sup> Borges deploys heterotopias

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Beckett, "Excerpt from a Letter to Axel Kaun (July 9, 1937)" in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 1: 1929–1940*, eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

as elements within the world of his stories, perhaps most famously in “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.”<sup>32</sup> However, it is in his essay “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language” that Borges executes a heterotopia within his own text.

Within three years of *The Order of Things*’ publication, Foucault delivered two lectures that are helpful in considering his complicated relationship to heterotopias. Next, I consider his second and much more established and influential text, his 1967 lecture, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” regarding the conception of this term, heterotopia.

### **Foucault’s Heterotopia Found within Society**

Whereas the heterotopia of Foucault’s untitled preface has largely faded away, the second rendering of heterotopia, found within Foucault’s 1967 lecture, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” has an influence that stretches across fields as wide-reaching and disparate as city planning and literary and historical analysis. Heterotopias, along with utopias, are “Other Spaces.” However, where utopias are unreal, heterotopias are found in virtually all societies.<sup>33</sup> A heterotopia is a site within and separate from society. Its function can change over time. Heterotopias are linked to slices of time. It may juxtapose in a single real space several sites that

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<sup>32</sup> In Borges’ short story, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the narrator comes across what he learns is a fictional encyclopedia entry of a planet created by a secret society. Over many centuries and generations, this group has meticulously written mythology, drawn fake maps, and made records about Tlon, a fictional world where reality is based on perception and ideas, not physical objects. Near the end of the story, the narrator, writing in the future, reveals that the episteme, or foundation for thought, of the fictional world of Tlön has begun to seep into and take over our own. Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” in *Ficciones*, trans. D.A. Yates and J.E. Womack (Random House, 1962).

<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October 1984): 3. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>. Foucault first gave this lecture in French in 1967.

are otherwise incompatible. Heterotopias are penetrable, with a system of opening and closing. Entrance is either compulsory or requires certain gestures or acts of purification. Their central function is to either create a space of illusion that that exposes every other real place or to create a space that is meticulous and ordered, as a veritable practiced utopia.

It is worth noting the difference in tone and apparent goals in this lecture to that of the earlier untitled preface. In his 1967 lecture, which was given to a gathering of architects, Foucault seems to re-present heterotopia in a sterilized and ordered conceptualization. In this talk, heterotopia is strictly a site in society, including such examples as a garden, a brothel, a theater, a boat, and a cemetery. In this lecture, a heterotopia is not authored but emerges within most if not “every culture, in every civilization.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps because the lecture was given following the publication of his first writing on heterotopias (in *The Order of Things*), this talk has the effect of a revised and more thorough rendering of the concept. Perhaps it also seems more official because the term “heterotopia” is in the talk’s title, as opposed to buried in the text of the preface to *The Order of Things*.

However, upon revisiting this lecture in context with its predecessor, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” the lecture appears to be an attempt to discipline and tame heterotopias, to organize the destructive and corrosive element into and onto a scaffold, in which the heterotopia is now re-presented as a successful expression of the discourse surrounding Foucault. The talk is on brand with his authorial function. He has struck Borges’ impossible authorship from his own analysis. Moreover, Foucault has struck his individual messiness of his bodily presence from the discourse. Instead, Foucault re-presents heterotopias now as real places, ones *found*, worlds within worlds, mirroring what is outside. Rather than dangerous, Foucault

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<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 3.

here declares heterotopias serve a purpose in maintaining the culture in which they belong. There is no more talk of authorship, nor discourse. In this lecture, heterotopias are measurable, able to be organized. Foucault states that a heterotopia fits into six neat principles. The lecture designates two distinct kinds, heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation, depending on the level of development of a society. The heterotopias of this lecture to the architects can be identified, mapped out, measured, tracked. In this lecture, he does not mention his previous framing of heterotopias in terms of authorship (“in Borges”) but as sites in society. He presents the mirror as an example, in as far as mirrors are both objects and also passively reflect the real world. The danger and eeriness of Borges’ heterotopian presence and catachrestic interloping is painted over with a new, more sterile meaning.

I struggle with the absence of agency and authorship in Foucault’s highly influential talk on heterotopias, as it conflicts with his rendering of heterotopia only a year prior.<sup>35</sup> Beginning from his understudied preface offers an opportunity to return authorship to heterotopias. When authorship and agency are (re-)introduced to the discussion, certain passages change from passive to potentially active. In his fourth principle for heterotopias, for example, heterotopias are linked to “slices of time” and function “when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.”<sup>36</sup> Instead of reading this passively, how might we consider ways to actively author this slicing and breakage of time? Using Foucault’s first published writing on heterotopias and my reading of Borges’ passage within its original essay, this study recovers heterotopia’s authorship as well as heterotopia’s presence, agency, and “quality of monstrosity.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *The Order of Things* was published in French in 1966. It was published in English in 1970.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 6.

<sup>37</sup> *The Order of Things*, xvi.

The second lecture of note is “What is An Author?” which Foucault delivered in 1969.<sup>38</sup> Foucault gave his lecture a year later, and directly addresses criticism of *The Order of Things*, that he had unintentionally implied that certain individual authors represented or epitomized certain epistemes. To respond to this confusion, in this lecture Foucault proposes “the author function,” which encompasses a body of work that generates discourse, and which offers insights into this reframing of heterotopias. The “author function,” Foucault writes,

is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; . . . It does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals.<sup>39</sup>

Borges, the author mentioned of the preface of *The Order of Things*, and the heterotopia in his text, is noticeably missing from this lecture on the author function. Why is that? Perhaps it is because reckoning with the heterotopia would reveal the limits of the author function. The heterotopia, after all, disrupts and rends to pieces the discourse in which it has entered by its sheer presence. Addressing this would require Foucault reckoning with his own discursive self, and reckon with the power of a heterotopia to do away with it. Foucault’s author function fails to reconcile the heterotopia, leaving this lingering question: What is the author function in a heterotopia? I believe the answer to this query may be located in Foucault’s laughter, which activates his living (and already decaying) body.

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<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault gave his lecture “What is an Author?” in English in 1970 at SUNY Buffalo. The lecture was a modified version of his original 1969 talk at the Collège de France.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is an Author” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Robert Hurley, et al., ed. James D. Faubion, vol. 2. of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (The New Press, 2000), 216.

To address confusion arising from Foucault describing two phenomena using the same word, Robert J. Topinka has attempted to synthesize Foucault's disparate writing on heterotopias, suggesting that heterotopias (in general) may be understood as sites (whether sites in texts or places in society) where order is made legible and a new order is formed, with the clash of those forces producing "new ways of knowing."<sup>40</sup> Topinka's framing suggests the possibility of heterotopias in society that may be authored, real places within the cultural-spatial text of society, heterotopias in the Borges vein, that may be sustained for the duration of performance, attention, and relationship. I propose approaching this possibility through what I term *heterotopian performatives*.

### **Introducing the Heterotopian Performative**

Near the end of his essay, Borges determines that attempts at making total meaning using language is impossible because we cannot know the universe.<sup>41</sup> He writes that, nonetheless, "The impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot dissuade us from outlining human schemes, even though we are aware that they are provisional."<sup>42</sup> I am struck by the use of "schemes," especially in relation to the works of this study, among them scores, scripted plays, and performance art. The word *scheme* means an ordered system of arrangement, but it also connotes a secret plan of action, an intrigue that entangles its participants in a plot not so much to be dramatized but rather to be hatched.

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Topinka, "Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces," *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010): 56.

<sup>41</sup> Borges, "John Wilkins," 231.

<sup>42</sup> Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," in *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (University of Texas, 1964), 104.

Over the following four chapters, I expand heterotopia as a meta-literary device to performance of these schemes. In literature, a heterotopia already operates in ways distinct from other devices like metaphors or irony, as it already has a spatial and material presence in relation to its surrounding text and to the reader encountering it (a passage); a heterotopia has the presence of life—like a blossom or a sudden laugh—within a desiccated landscape or body. A heterotopia on the page also already has the presence of a whisper of a secret only the reader can hear, that seems to be spoken by a second author’s voice, within the ruins of the first author’s essay. Finally, a heterotopia on the page is already a performer, an interloper who mirrors its surrounding text.

A *heterotopian performative* thus may be encountered across three registers: as interloper, as place, and as a labor of lingering. Heterotopias in text, as shown by Borges, are uninvited guests, catachrestic interlopers, whose inappropriate presence is received as innocuous and amusing. The heterotopia lingers for the duration in which the passage is read, and its lingering presence is corrosive: The longer a heterotopia lingers in the text the more it dissolves and desiccates the myths of order that make the surrounding text’s discourse possible. In performance, artists in collusion with audience-participants, invoke heterotopias such that they insinuate themselves into spatio-cultural sites they are not invited into. It is here that the relationship and attention of artist, heterotopian figure, and audience create and sustain an ephemeral and authored spatial heterotopia, what I term a *peculiar*.

A heterotopian performative expands the available registers of thinking and experience beyond the page and onto bodies, place, and time. The strategy of interloper and lingering as a means of disrupting one’s one “text” and its attached discourse is manifested in embodied

performance. The project of this dissertation is to locate and examine heterotopian performatives across four modalities and the mythic dramatic figures entangled with them.

A heterotopia, with its eerie and uninvited *presence* in a text, and with its easy labor of disruptive *lingering*, already lends itself to performance; the transference off the page comes easily. Expanding this to performance, a heterotopian performative may be understood as disruptive, uninvited, and inappropriate labors of lingering. Deploying a variety of modes, they “do away with” the physical, relational, and discursive sites on which order has been made. Just like heterotopias, *heterotopian performatives* disrupt and dissolve these order-making sites and invite the participant to linger in, with, and as the unknown.

The notion of heterotopian performatives allows us to engage with both conceptions of the term such that heterotopias may be read as both embodied rhetorical acts as well as Other spaces simultaneously outside and within society for the duration of performance. I establish “peculiar” as the term for these authored, ephemeral heterotopic performance sites situated in physical space. Further, I introduce strategies of uncanny guides, dematerialization, viragos, and triptych audiences as means of embodied insistence through which heterotopia may be manifested and sustained in performance. By doing this, I will expand our ways of engaging with certain challenging and difficult-to-categorize material, among them installations, works of theatre for the very young, and performance scores.

So, when is the moment a heterotopia is *done*? In a text such as Borges’ essay, the passage in question requires a site to disrupt, and thus the double-authoring begins with first authoring of the initial site of the (con)text of order. Through synthesizing the pieces studied in this dissertation, I will show how the heterotopian performative is the action of authoring an environment where a heterotopia—that is, a confluence of place, figure, and action—may

emerge and be sustained. Therefore, a heterotopian performative begins with the moment the artist or playwright begins to compose the score, script, or map, what we might call, collectively, to draw on Borges' essay, *schemes*.

These are performance strategies that counter impulses toward escape from anxiety, decay, and unease with a choice to linger. I am interested in the labor of this lingering. These heterotopias do not happen by chance, nor do they naturally emerge as part of the fabric of society. It is here, in these ephemeral sites, that I wonder if an expansive and surprising understanding of "hope" may be found.

### **Distinguishing from Utopian Performatives**

Jill Dolan explores her concept of *utopian performatives* in her powerful book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theater*. Her project is a key inspiration for this study. Dolan uses J.L. Austin's writing on speech acts to situate utopian performatives as moments that exceed the performance itself, moments when "utopia is *done*."<sup>43</sup> She writes,

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.<sup>44</sup>

My project approaches utopias (and therefore heterotopias) through Foucault's discourse, so that I may ask: If utopia can be done within the scope of performance, what other Other places might this imply? This dissertation attempts to explore this gap. Mapping on Dolan's construction of

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<sup>43</sup> Jill Dolan, "Utopia in Performance," *Theatre Research International* 31, no. 2 (2006): 163.

<sup>44</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.

the utopian performative, I would propose that heterotopian performatives describe small but powerful strategies in which an interloper calls participants into a labor of lingering within a peculiar site, both within and separate from their socio-cultural place and time, in the process hollowing the *a priori* assumptions that underpin patterns of thought, and sustaining participants together within a disruptive unmeasured caesura of rest, with-ness, and care.

In his preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes Utopias in terms that evoke flow: “This is why Utopias permit fables and discourse,” he writes. “They run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*.”<sup>45</sup> The performances examined in this study emphatically do not run with the grain of language. Rather, they linger. Within Foucault’s rendering, a heterotopia is distinguished from a utopia in that it is a real place, a counter-site that is an “effectively enacted” utopia.<sup>46</sup> The possibility of authoring a real place and an effectively enacted utopia is where I sense opportunities for hope.

*Utopia in Performance* was published in 2005, and in her introduction, Dolan situates the attacks on September 11, 2001, and their aftershocks, the subsequent despair and pessimism, as a reason for the book’s urgency in that historical moment. I was in my second day of class in my freshman year of college on September 11, 2001, and the events of that day stood for decades as the defining catastrophe of my generation. However, in the years that have followed, it is only one of many sea changes and catastrophes. The devastation never seems to fall into the distance as something on which to reflect. We find ourselves at a distinctly different historical moment, and for that reason we may need to consider that hope itself may also be historically constituted.

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<sup>45</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 3.

## Methodology

I have identified a heterotopian performative as an entanglement of three elements: A passage (place-making), an action to sustain that passage (lingering, or what I term insistence), and a figure (an interloper). To approach the works of this study as such, I will use landscape-informed dramaturgy and spatial theory scholarship as my guiding framework. In addition, I have developed *interloper* and *insistence* to support the study.

### *Place (Landscape-Informed Dramaturgy and Spatial Theory)*

As a key aspect of heterotopian performatives is the authoring of spaces, for this reason spatial theory, especially landscape theory, will serve as a core methodology and critical lens for this study. To quote Jane Bowers, “landscape is not the same as nature.” Landscape, Bowers continues, “is a way of seeing, the imposition of a point of view upon nature. . . . Landscape is always artificial, always a composition, whether created as such by a landscape architect or organized that way by the eye of the perceiver trained by art to compose the view.”<sup>47</sup> Key to this landscape-centered approach to theatre is a posthumanist dramaturgy that registers that within a landscape in performance a human figure has the equivalent presence as non-human elements on stage. Elinor Fuchs explores this in her book *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre After Modernism*. Karinne Syers helpfully encapsulates the essence of landscape as a critical lens and dramaturgical tool, writing,

No single element of theater—script, scene, costume, light, sound—is necessarily foregrounded; the attention is directionally free, resulting in a self-aware exercise of attention, even attentiveness toward attention itself. Thus landscape plays are incomplete

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<sup>47</sup> Jane Palatini Bowers, “Jane Bowers on Gertrude Stein’s Theater Landscapes,” *Theater* 32, no. 2 (2002): 18.

without the mind of the audience; the movement of their attention is an equal part of the substance of the play itself.<sup>48</sup>

Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri presented landscape as a paradigm for analyzing theatrical works through their individual books, including Chaudhuri's *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*,<sup>49</sup> as well as their co-edited collection, *Land/Scape/Theater*,<sup>50</sup> which formalized this approach to analyzing texts, media, and performance as constructed landscapes. Landscape decenters the human figure and the protagonist. As Fuchs writes, landscape as a paradigm "forestalls the immediate . . . leap to character and normative psychology that underwrites much dramatic criticism."<sup>51</sup> Further, as Una Chaudhuri writes, landscape as a lens allows us to recognize space as a social construction.<sup>52</sup>

In "reading" socio-cultural sites, I rely on theories of geographer Doreen Massey and cultural theorist Michel de Certeau. Foucault writes that the intersection of time and space is "fatal,"<sup>53</sup> but Massey locates an intricate relationship between time and space. Rather than a fatal intersection, Massey says, time and space are "intimately connected."<sup>54</sup> Essential to this project is Massey's contention that a place is more than a surface along which to walk, it is always

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<sup>48</sup> Karinne Syers, "This Theater is a Strange Hole: Mac Wellman's Poetics of Appearance," *Postmodern Culture* 20, no. 1 (December 2010): 3.

<sup>49</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, *Land/Scape/Theater*, eds. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Elinor Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," *Theater* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 7.

<sup>52</sup> Una Chaudhuri, "Introduction," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 1.

<sup>54</sup> Doreen Massey, "Doreen Massey on Space: Interview with Doreen Massey," interview by Nigel Warburton, *Social Science Space*, February 1, 2013, <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/>.

linked to places beyond it, and that every place is always “a meeting place.”<sup>55</sup> In performance, this will allow me to consider these performances in terms of participants’ encounters with posthumanist figures and with themselves. Massey’s work establishes that all spaces, not only heterotopias, already embody a multiplicity of meanings and narratives rooted in one’s temporal relationship to them.

As these works are at the intersection of authorship, performance, and place, I rely on Michel de Certeau’s conception of the city as a text upon and through which individuals and power structures both read and write in dominant and subversive ways. To this end, I draw heavily from his text *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

In concert with landscape theatre as a critical lens, this study is informed by discussions of performance as understood via the spatial turn, particularly in relation to the notions of the “right to the city” and how social spaces are produced, a notion initiated by Henri Lefebvre in his foundational 1968 book *Le Droit a La Ville* and his 1974 book *The Production of Space*, respectively. The right to the city, writes Lefebvre, is counter to the notion of what he positions as the trendy “right to nature,” which, he explains, comes from a need to flee the “rotting” by urbanites for creativity, pleasure, and to “really” live. This right to the city “cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life.”<sup>56</sup> The right to the city, then, is not something that ought to be bestowed or earned, but to be claimed, as Lefebvre writes, “like a cry and a demand.” This project expands and complicates Lefebvre’s city to include sites of performance, and to the earth, be it the actual soil or socio-cultural sites of exile or both.

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<sup>55</sup> Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 154.

<sup>56</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville (The Right to the City)* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968), 138.

## *Interlopers*

Over the four chapters that follow, I locate performative figures or structures who are able to disrupt the flow of a cultural narrative. Following Borges' passage in "John Wilkin's Analytical Language," these figures or structures are marked as "non-serious" in that they are not seen as threatening nor fully legitimate. Further, I am drawing on J.L. Austin's passage in *How to Do Things with Words* to describe certain performative utterances. I examine this passage in closer detail in Chapter Two. Austin's passage reads,

A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances.

Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use.<sup>57</sup>

An interloper is non-serious in that it is received as a mirror, even a joke, and is able to have a parasitic effect on its "normal use." The figure of the interloper carries with it a presence equal parts amusing and threatening, and it is always tethered to territory.<sup>58</sup> In this framework, an

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<sup>57</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> As an example, consider Norman Rockwell's March 12, 1927 cover for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Rockwell's title, "The Plot Thickens (Two Men Reading Detective Stories)," contextualizes the book of interest, held by a slender man in a suit, a bowler hat, and glasses. The title "Detective Stories" is clear on the book itself. Beside him, a second man is leaning in to read the book as well. He carries two spoons and a fork in his breast pocket, a bandage on his cheek where it appears he has been injured. The bookish man sits up straight, giving side-eye. A half a century later, in 1980, a line of collectible figures by The Danbury Mint recast the moment portrayed in "The Plot Thickens" as a figurine featuring the two men, now with a new title — "The Interloper." What is implicit in Rockwell's magazine cover is made explicit when moved to three dimensions. The new name for the now three-dimensional work, by an unknown artist, decenters the event of reading ("Two Men Reading") and centers the working-class man ("The Interloper"), one out of place, disrupting the space for reading with his lingering, amusing,

interloper is fundamentally an outsider who has made its way into a dominant narrative and socio-cultural site while sustaining their non-serious presence. To borrow Patricia Hill Collins' term, the interloper performs as an "outsider within."<sup>59</sup>

As one who disrupts and holds a site within the narrative of the tragedy of which he is both within and apart from, the prophet Tiresias of Greek tragedy offers an exemplar of the interloper. Writing in 1803, the German poet and translator Friedrich Hölderlin identified what he saw as Tiresias's purpose within in the narrative in two of Sophocles' tragedies—*Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. Specifically, as an outsider and unwelcome guest, Tiresias is able to manifest and sustain a "tragic caesura" in the dramas, Hölderlin writes, which are constituted and sustained by his speech act.<sup>60</sup> At the point of intense suffering in the two tragedies, the order of thinking that has rhythmically underscored the plot to this point can no longer be sustained. The moment requires a "counter-rhythmic" interruption or rupture, also called a *caesura*.<sup>61</sup>

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and vaguely threatening presence. The 1980 figurine erases the detective book's title; it is now only a red nondescript book, a possession, a territory. Norman Rockwell, *The Plot Thickens (Two Men Reading Detective Stories)*, 1927.

<sup>59</sup> Feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins coined and developed her term outsider-within "to describe social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power. Individuals claim identities as 'outsiders within' by their placement in these social locations. Thus, outsider-within identities are situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice—they are not a decontextualized identity category divorced from historical social inequalities that can be assumed by anyone at will." Patricia Hill Collins, "Reflections on the Outsider Within," *Journal of Career Development* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1999), 85-88. With attention to the problematic misuse of "outsider within" in feminist theory, in this study I am applying the term "outsider-within" as a practical description for ways a heterotopia enters, as an interloper, into a discursive site and lingers within it.

<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, "Notes on *Oedipus*," trans. Jeremy Adler, Charlie Louth, in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 318.

<sup>61</sup> Hölderlin, "Notes on *Oedipus*," 318. Various translations title Hölderlin's essay "Remarks on *Oedipus*" and use the word "rupture" in this passage instead of "interruption."

As Tiresias is outside the narrative flow, he is able to void the basis for the corrupted grounds for meaning-making. To do this, Hölderlin writes, Tiresias “steps into the path of fate, as guardian of the natural power, which tragically displaces human beings from their life-sphere.” By holding this site through his speech act, he is able to send the protagonist “into another world and tear him off into the eccentric orbit of the dead.”<sup>62</sup> As in poetry but even more apparent in music, the caesura is a sudden break, an unmeasured rest, a disruptive holding between what has been known and the new foundational rhythm that will make thinking possible again.

Through Tiresias’s speech act (his monologues in the two dramas), he holds this caesura like an unmeasured musical pause, during which, Hölderlin writes, “nothing exists besides the conditions of time and space.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, this action has two registers: spatial and rhythmic. Hölderlin writes that within this site, man forgets himself, because “he is wholly in the moment,” and he forgets God because “he is nothing else but time.”<sup>64</sup>

In the chapters that follow, a surprising recurring element within these performances is a strategic “forgetting” of one’s subjecthood, in the position of audience-participants and in the position of the interloper. It is also here that, importantly, a caesura not only disrupts the rhythm but holds a site from which the previous rhythm cannot follow. This moment of lingering enables a reversal, an unavoidable transformation and, in a sense, a birth.<sup>65</sup> And while Hölderlin

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<sup>62</sup> Hölderlin, “Notes on *Oedipus*,” 318.

<sup>63</sup> Hölderlin, “Notes on *Oedipus*,” 324.

<sup>64</sup> Hölderlin, “Notes on *Oedipus*,” 324.

<sup>65</sup> Gabriel Trop has written extensively on Hölderlin’s conception of the tragic caesura, framing it in terms of both the body and place. Trop writes that the tragic caesura is more than a rupture, that “its physiological and poetic function is closer to the act of taking a breath, a making room for the emergence of order amidst the rush of phenomena.” Gabriel Trop, “Modal Revolutions: Friedrich Hölderlin and the Task of Poetry,” *MLN* 128, no. 3 (April 2013): 594.

identifies the caesura within narratives of anguish, the works I examine in this project are manifested in acts of surprising play, rest, and care. Where I am also differing is that these acts of holding are not based in the fictional narrative of characters in a story, but at the place and time of its moment of performance.

## **Lingering**

Key to a heterotopia is a means of radical and active lingering. The works across all four chapters in this project deploy both insistence and with-ness. Chapters 1 and 2 foreground acts of insistence, while Chapters 3 and 4 foreground with-ness.

### ***Lingering through Insistence***

The project of this dissertation is to understand *how* heterotopia may be realized in performance and its implications. As such, the second established element (after the interloper enters the discourse it is not invited into) is to linger. At first glance at the performances included in this study, it may appear that repetition is a key part of lingering. This is a repetition that leads to lingering. As I do not have a word readily available to describe this phenomenon, I look to Gertrude Stein's response to multiple accusations of repetition in her own writing. In her essay "Portraits and Repetition," Stein replies to this accusation with a question: "Is there repetition or is there insistence? I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition."<sup>66</sup> Repetition, Stein writes, is only in the description of an action. Insistence is an emphasis that can never be repeated. Insistence is an action that has a life of its own.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935), 166.

<sup>67</sup> Stein, "Portraits," 171.

Stein writes, “Then we have insistence insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way because emphasis can never be the same not not even when it is most same that is when it has been taught.”<sup>68</sup> Insistence, as I understand this, is a means of directing and then holding the reader’s gaze in text. To say, *look here, look, look, keep looking. See where and who I want you to see*. Repetition, on the other hand, is an act of remembering; it is backward looking.

What distinguishes the works of this dissertation from Steins’ landscapes is *where* these modes of insistence are deployed in performance. For Stein, she responds to the “nervousness” felt at the stage curtain, the disparate rhythm of the unknown, by leaning back and placing a frame around it, creating a landscape. From this purview, at a distance, she holds the stage in her gaze and holds the audience’s gaze with her own. Heterotopian performatives, I will show, deploy insistence at the site of anxiety, this “nervousness,” to linger with the unknown. These acts of seeming “repetition” or stagnation across three modalities both wear away the surrounding discourse, like water on stone, and at the same time invite the audience to linger with them in the absence that remains. My understanding of insistence is that it is entangled with a phenomenon of presence, and this insistence makes encountering a presence possible.

### ***Lingering through Radical With-ness***

Along with insistence, this project identifies what I term *radical with-ness* as a means of lingering in performance both inside and separate from a discourse. Social anthropologist Tim Ingold describes the term as such: “Where ‘of-ness’ makes the other to which one attends into its

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<sup>68</sup> Stein, “Portraits,” 171.

object, and ticks it off, ‘with-ness’ saves the other from objectification by bringing it alongside as an accomplice. It turns othering into togetherness, interaction into correspondence.”<sup>69</sup> As Foucault explains in his principles for heterotopias in society, to enter into a heterotopia requires “certain gestures” and even, in some cases, “purification.”<sup>70</sup> This requires a posthumanist attention to presence, requiring participants to allow their ascribed understanding of the self to rest, while opening opportunities for non-human elements, including absence, speech acts, sounds, and objects to have equal presence. I will show across the chapters how this lingering through with-ness allows participants to navigate *with* the artist, playwright, or performer, into and through hollowed landscapes. With-ness enables participants to correspond with uncanny guides, be in tender contact with figures of absence, navigate theatrical genres as derelict sites, and create theatrical worlds as a three-part body.

## Literature Review

This project joins a tradition of scholars considering difficult-to-categorize, experimental works, and the movement away from representational art to works that ride the line between art and theatre, or which situate process as the art object. This project contributes the concept of “heterotopian performatives” to the study of embodied performance, along terminology including peculiars, insistence, hollows, among others. It will also contribute to the growing field of landscape theory scholarship as the first full-length study to examine a wide range of embodied performance works as both heterotopias in the rhetorical sense and as ephemeral performance sites.

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<sup>69</sup> Tim Ingold, “On Human Correspondence,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19–20, <https://knowingfromtheinside.org/files/correspondences.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 7.

Kristine Stiles' seminal essay "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts"<sup>71</sup> and Shannon Jackson's groundbreaking study *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* are essential in this project.<sup>72</sup> Amelia Jones' definitive *Body Art: Performing the Subject* informs my project, especially her framework outlining the exchange between body and audience, and the notion that body art has power and potentiality, especially for those historically excluded.<sup>73</sup> My project will distinguish itself from these works by extending the notion of the body to non-living objects, including buildings, articles of clothing and fabric, and spaces where bodies used to be. I rely on Jackson's exhaustive analysis of notions of labor and performance, but while *Social Works* is interested in performance at the intersection of theatre and visual art, my project focuses on the intersection of performance and literature.

Sally Banes' *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* positions Greenwich Village as a heterotopia (in Foucault's spatial conception) and examines the interplay of ideas between multiple artistic communities (including Fluxus).<sup>74</sup> This work helps me to situate the place and time in which Benjamin Patterson's *A Very Lawful Dance* and *First Symphony* were first realized, as well as the historical place and time in which Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was developed for production. While Banes approaches a neighborhood as a heterotopia, with its myriad residents, my project approaches heterotopias as a doing (as in, a rhetorical act), a figure (an interloper into a text), and a site created and sustained in performance.

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<sup>71</sup> Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance, A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993).

<sup>72</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Routledge, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>74</sup> Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

This study joins ongoing discussions of the nature of performance and the body. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan investigates performances that, citing Jacques Derrida, enact “the now of writing in the present time.”<sup>75</sup> Whereas Phelan is interested in the political power of the unmarked, unspoken, and unseen, I am interested in the subversive, corrosive, and rhetorical presence of the artist as interloper, who, in collusion with the audience, hides in plain sight.

This project joins a long tradition of productively reading J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* in discussing performance. This history includes Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, where Butler implicitly draws from Austin’s speech act theory, particularly the concept of “performativity” and gender;<sup>76</sup> Jill Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*, in which Dolan applies her concept of utopian performatives;<sup>77</sup> and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker’s queer reading of Austin’s brief passage in terms of embodied performativity.<sup>78</sup> Butler deploys Austin’s speech act theory to approach gender as a performance, Dolan uses Austin’s notion of performative utterances to establish utopian performatives. Sedgwick and Parker located queerness within performativity. My project, however, mines Austin’s exclusionary passage for language for discussing the infectious “certain kinds of ill,”<sup>79</sup> the monstrous contagion at the heart of performance and poetry that threatens ordinary speech. I use

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<sup>75</sup> Peggy Phelan, writing about Jacques Derrida, in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 149.

<sup>76</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge), 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Andrew Parker, *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>79</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 21.

strategic catachresis to read Austin's excluding language—peculiar, hollow, parasitic, void, in a productive light.

Recent dissertations and monographs have discussed these works in various ways. Niki Tulk's monograph, *Performing the Wound: Practicing a Feminist Theatre of Becoming*, for example, also considers the performer-audience dynamic and the presence of absence in performance.<sup>80</sup> While Tulk's study foregrounds trauma studies, my project centers spatial theory and landscape-based dramaturgy to locate embodied performances that systematically empty socio-cultural sites. I use a framework that applies what I term insistence (as in Chapters 1 and 2) and "with-ness" as defined by social anthropologist Tim Ingold to enter into and linger in seemingly neutral narratives as derelict sites (as in Chapter 3) or practice world-building within theatre proper (as in Chapter 4). While I also examine a work by Ann Hamilton, I apply landscape and my heterotopian performative framework to de-center both character as well as the audience's notions of subjecthood.

Much scholarly attention has been given to Foucault's conception of heterotopias as outlined in his talk, "Of Other Places: Utopias and Heterotopias." This is especially prevalent in city planning, geography, and analyzing heterotopias as spatial sites represented in literature. In "Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space," for example, Joanne Tompkins analyzes theatre spaces as heterotopias within Foucault's spatial model.<sup>81</sup> In my project, I approach these performances through both Foucault's earlier textual conception of heterotopias and his spatial model, approaching ephemeral performance spaces as authored.

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<sup>80</sup> Niki Tulk, *Performing the Wound: Practicing a Feminist Theatre of Becoming* (Routledge, 2022).

<sup>81</sup> Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Playwrights have written about their experiences of locating ephemeral sites and phenomena within drama when the ability to think with available language is suspended. Playwright and poet Mac Wellman places his attention on the holes in the line itself. In his essay “Speculations: An Essay on the Theater,” Wellman identifies “The strange” as “the new dimension that is formed” by what he terms “apparence,” the removal of theatre and character from drama. He locates it at the site in drama that is experienced outside what is known, where new thought are possible.<sup>82</sup> The plays and performances of this project also encounter “the strange,” and are also bound by place and are informed by their historic moment of that place. However, where Wellman’s plays manifest a site of absence that is intense and filled with terror, the works of this project linger within it to surprising elements of rest, care, and with-ness. They sustain an uncanny rest within what I term “peculiar,” sites outside the jurisdiction of the ordinary.

Finally, this works joins a conversation about lingering and rest as inherently political acts. Recent research across multiple fields, including literature, philosophy, and social justice, have focused on the problem of what cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han terms a “temporal crisis.” In *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering*, for example, Han explores society’s temporal crisis, which he terms “dyschronia,” which causes time to feel as though time lacks a proper rhythm, that it is going by faster than it should, and that it is fluttering aimlessly.<sup>83</sup> This time crisis removes the ability for contemplation from everyday life. The act of lingering in

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<sup>82</sup> Mac Wellman, “Speculations: An Essay on the Theater,” in *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field: Nine New Plays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). See Karinne Keithley Sayers analysis of Wellman’s poetics and his strategies for what she terms “writing us into these registers of thinking.” Karinne Keithley Sayers, “This Theater is a Strange Hole: Mac Wellman's Poetics of Apparence,” *Postmodern Culture* 20, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>83</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering* (Medford, PA: Polity, 2017).

a world in such a time crisis, then, is a political act, an act of resistance, and one that cannot be done in isolation. Tricia Hersey, in *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*, presents rest as a form of political resistance against relentless demands of white supremacist and capitalist systems.<sup>84</sup> Rest, Hersey writes, is necessary for dreaming. My project expands on these conversations by emphasizing the possibilities of disruptive rest within performance and identifies necessity of invitation and collusion in order for it to be sustained.

### Chapter Summaries

Each chapter examines a mode of authoring heterotopia in performance—across the entangled elements of place, bodies, and schemes. At the beginning of each chapter, I establish a spatialized point of contact with an established art movement that informs contemporary theatre-making. Specifically, these are Gertrude Stein’s response to feeling out of sync with the emotions on stage through landscape, the Symbolists movement’s desire to clothe the Ideal, Modernist plays’ geopathological approach to home, and Allan Kaprow’s stated need to flee the gallery space as part of the development of Happenings. Each chapter then investigates performance works that offer a counter-response to anxiety of order and place. Following Doreen Massey’s notion that every place is always “a meeting place,” I identify posthumanist relationships found within each modality.

In this introduction, I have lingered on the singular example of a heterotopia presented by Foucault and laid out a working definition of the term such that it may be applied and examined as a performative in the chapters that follow. I examined the discourse of the essay, “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language” to identify the discursive site Borges shatters, desiccates, and

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<sup>84</sup> Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* (Little, Brown Spark, 2022).

does away with. This discourse, that of organizing speech and language, conjures J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, and the exclusion of certain speech acts that sound uncannily similar to heterotopias. I identify the impulse to organize the infinite as the site of chaos where a heterotopia is possible.

Chapter One, *Uncanny Guides, Strange Rest: Heterotopias of the Map*, establishes a methodology for the chapters that will follow, through an inquiry into a selection of performance works of an artist or artists as heterotopian performatives, considering their site of order-making, their interlopers, ways they linger, and the peculiar sites they sustain. In this chapter, I examine works that displace power and authority onto uncanny guides as interlopers into a discursive site, and then use what I term *insistence* to sustain the site. This chapter I examine 600

Highwaymen's *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call* and scores by experimental composer and Fluxus founding member Benjamin Patterson through the lens of an uncanny guide. Case studies include Patterson's untitled rest at the tomb of Gertrude Stein, his scores *Traffic Light—A Very Lawful Dance for Ennis* and *First Symphony*.

In Chapter Two, *These Bodies Grown in Absence: Heterotopias by Hollow-ing*, I examine works through what I term "dematerialization," physical acts of insistent wearing away or covering of bodies both human and non-human, living and nonliving, along discursive sites of order.<sup>85</sup> This strategy allows participants to encounter *hollows*, figures of absence and tenderness. I examine three video traces of the following performances: LaToya Ruby Frazier's

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<sup>85</sup> The term dematerialization was introduced within art theory in the 1968 essay "The Dematerialization of Art" by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler. The authors imagine a future where the aesthetic object ceases to materially exist, becoming entirely conceptual. I am applying this term to the action of wearing away material through acts of insistence. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art." *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968), 31–36.

untitled performance outside a Levi's pop-up, Alison Knowles' *Loose Pages*, and Ann Hamilton's *the event of a thread*.

In Chapter Three, *We Enter Hell through Open Mouths: Heterotopias with Viragos*, I ask what does telling a woman's story using a form in which she does not belong do to the discourse itself? These works use "with-ness," as defined by Tim Ingold, to link audience, playwright, and a character who is both inside the story and outside the discourse (what I term a *virago*). I examine Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by way of acts of stealthily breaking and entering decayed and ruined socioeconomic-cultural structures and then lingering within them. This strategy, I propose, allows these playwrights to enter into and navigate the discourses of, for *Top Girls*, the well-made play and, for *Funnyhouse*, the site of Edith Sitwell's *Façade*, as entrances into narratives of order-making.

In Chapter Four, *Care and a Three-Part Body: Heterotopias as Triptychs*, I locate with-ness as a strategy for occupying and sustaining a peculiar site within a discourse of order. I offer "triptych theatre" as a strategy for both reading heterotopian performatives in certain works of "sensory theatre" and for deploying them. I consider it the approaches across three works: Magnet Theatre's *Scoop*, Replay Theatre's *COCO*, and Oily Cart's *Splish Splash*. In the study's Conclusion, I synthesize discoveries across the chapters and consider the implications of the heterotopia as a literary and dramatic device. I return to Borges' essay to examine his use of "scheme" in relationship to the writing and construction of these works. I explore possibilities, first through a brief considering of what I see as another heterotopia in literature, Georges Perec's novel *A Void*, and explore possibilities for dramaturgical research through a brief reflection on a performance-as-research project using elements observed in this project, and I

examine ways that definitions and experiences of “hope” may be extended to sites of absence and ruin.

### **Statement of Positionality and Conclusion**

The goal of this project is to establish *heterotopian performative* as a productive lens through which to engage with themes of authorship, ruin, and world-building. In this introduction, I have provided a close reading of Foucault’s singular example in its context (Borges’ essay “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language”) to elucidate its performative nature, which I argue works to disrupt and do away with the site (nonfiction) in which it is situated, and its implications. This project seeks to open paths for modes of reading certain performance works. The goal of this dissertation is to establish what a heterotopian performative *does*, how it has been *deployed*, and the phenomena and generative possibilities that have been illuminated through their use. This project considers moments when audience, performer, and place co-author and sustain ephemeral “peculiarities” that are both separate from and within the cultural texts in which they are bound. In these performances, the sites on which order is made (be it speech act theory, the page, and the hierarchy of theatrical audience) are simultaneously made legible, destabilized, and “done away with.” That is, made null and void. In the absence of a “common ground,” a new landscape is sustained, a caesura, a resting-place, where knowledge is not produced but encountered.

This is not an attempt at an exhaustive exploration of heterotopia in performance, but rather a beginning inquiry into locating heterotopia in performance, some of their modalities, and an investigation into what is encounterable in the peculiar rests they author. The selections of works are both informed by and limited by my own personal interests, positionality, and

experience of this historical moment; I am a white neurodivergent woman. I grew up in a middle-class household, moving back-and-forth between a town on the fringes of London's metropolitan area and the Southeastern United States. I am a mother and co-caregiver to two children, both of whom have so-called invisible or hidden disabilities. I am a playwright, and I am interested in ways a play may be constructed and read beyond the creation of representative, aesthetic objects.

These works, I propose, are significant because they not only question dominant narratives of socio-cultural sites, their apparent neutrality of spaces, of people, of time, and of relationships. Rather, these works wear away the glue that holds constructed narratives together, actively disrupting and *occupying* these dominant narratives. And through the act of rest and lingering in sites where order is not possible, they position new landscapes, and possibilities for the production of knowledge. By examining these works in this way, we can locate strategies for disrupting the neoliberal model of spectatorship, moving toward a model built on uncanny relationships with one another and with the unknown.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**UNCANNY GUIDES, DISRUPTIVE REST:**  
**AUTHORING HETEROTOPIAS OF THE MAP**

**Introduction**

The project of this study is to examine how heterotopias may be authored through performance, by way of an interloper, a means of lingering, and place-making.<sup>86</sup> I have posited that a heterotopia in both a written text and in embodied performance may be approached as an interloper who holds a space, a passage, in a text that is built on a discourse of order. In this way, a heterotopia is a figure (a presence), a place (a passage), and an action (lingering). It is a collusion of trespassing in plain sight, and as such, requires a reader-participant for it to sustain its site. This first chapter begins an inquiry that will continue throughout this study, asking: How does one enter a “text” with one’s corporeal body? How does one do so as a non-serious interloper in plain sight? How does one perform a labor of lingering? And for what phenomena does this approach clear the way?

Transferring the heterotopia from the page requires establishing the notion of “text” in an ostensibly nonfiction essay into the text of socio-cultural sites in society, where living and non-living bodies, places, and ideas are organized and ascribed meaning as texts. Beginning with the premise that heterotopias may be applied in performance in a multitude of modalities, I first

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<sup>86</sup> I am beginning from Foucault’s first writing on heterotopias in the preface to *The Order of Things*. In his preface, Foucault uses a passage by Borges as his singular example.

consider a modality of displacing power onto an uncanny guide and then following it, opening opportunities for both author and reader/audience to linger in the discourse as an uncanny, impossible, and disruptive rest.

### **A Different Approach to Being Out of Sync**

Gertrude Stein, credited with first articulating the poetics of landscape theatre, began writing plays following a response as an audience member when her own emotions and the emotions of the play were out of sync. This feeling of anxiety, which she described as “nervousness,” was evidenced by a need “to go faster or to go slower so as to get together.”<sup>87</sup> To address this problem, Stein drew from her interest in portraits to approach writing her own plays, “the thing seen,” as landscapes,<sup>88</sup> such that the plays would be, in a way, fixed, relieving the audience of the anxiety of trying to catch up or move backwards to be in sync with a play’s story and characters emotionally.<sup>89</sup> Stein writes,

I felt if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there and so the play being written the relation between you at any time is so exactly that that it is of no importance unless you look at it. Well I did look at it and the result is in all the plays I have printed as *Operas and Plays*.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Plays” in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon House, 1935), 93-95.

<sup>88</sup> Stein, “Plays,” 94.

<sup>89</sup> Stein, “Plays,” 95.

<sup>90</sup> Stein, “Plays,” 122.

Importantly, the landscape is “not moving but being always in relation, the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any details to any other detail.”<sup>91</sup> Elinor Fuchs argues that it is likely Stein not only referred to literal nature and natural landscapes depicted on the stage, but that she used landscape as a metaphor to describe a specific phenomenology of spectatorship, “a settled-back scanning or noting, not necessarily of a natural scene, but of any pattern of language, gesture and design as if it were a natural scene.”<sup>92</sup>

The works of this first chapter also approach the problem of being out of sync. However, rather than approaching plays as landscapes for the audience to encounter without an emotional narrative, these works deploy an uncanny figure, a hollow guide, not to be *viewed* but with whom the audience may choose to become entangled in an impossible correspondence. Where Stein holds the landscape in the audience’s gaze at a distance, such that the trees, the sky, and human figures on stage are always in relation, in these works the audience is invited to enter into the works’ schemes, becoming willfully enmeshed in an uncanny posthumanist correspondence. The results of this impossible relationship, I will show, is a subversive act of map-making in Michel de Certeau’s thinking of strategies and tactics. Moreover, this entanglement sustains a shared labor of lingering within a socio-cultural text, creating a surprising phenomenon of disruptive *rest*.

I begin by considering performances of mapping and lingering within an uncanny phone call.

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<sup>91</sup> Stein, “Plays,” 125.

<sup>92</sup> Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 94.

### *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*

*A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call* is an experimental, immersive piece by 600 Highwaymen, the writing and directing duo Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone. Between November 2020 and February 2021, callers-as-audience in the United States and world-wide were invited to attend this one-hour-long piece by calling a given number at a certain assigned time.<sup>93</sup> This work is the first of a triptych of shows by 600 Highwaymen produced between 2020 and 2022. The two works that followed are *A Thousand Ways (Part Two): An Encounter* and *A Thousand Ways (Part Three): An Assembly*. Unlike *A Phone Call*, these works required participants to be physically present in order to attend.

I attended *A Phone Call* one morning and night in late February 2021, nearly a year into the global Covid pandemic and quarantine lockdown. To attend, I locked the bedroom door, sat alone on my bed, and made a scheduled phone call to a number that had been given to me by email. I then entered a code to enter a private conference line. With me on this shared conference line were two other figures: A second “attendee” calling in, whom I did not know and whose name I never learned; and a pre-recorded, digital voice. Over the hour-long “performance” that followed, the digital voice served as a guide, an interlocutor, a storyteller, and an interrogator.

In Borges’ “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language,” I identified how authoring a heterotopia allows an author to enter into a discourse surrounding order through a non-serious interloper, and then sustains and occupies that site with the reader. *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call* was able to enter into a discourse of order bound to its historical place and time. This particular phone call for me took place eleven months into the Covid-19 quarantine and

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<sup>93</sup> 600 Highwaymen, *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, performance, Arizona Arts Live, February 27 and 28, 2021.

lockdown, set in the non-place of restless rest and isolation of the bedroom. Key to the Covid-19 quarantine was the organization of both places and distances from one another as safe or unsafe. Being close with one another, being indoors, and talking, was dangerous.

In my experience of attending *A Phone Call*, fixed points of knowledge began to be worn away within moments. “You’ve made it to the right place,” said the voice, which was clearly pre-recorded and markedly feminine. The voice “spoke” in a distinctly stilted way, which made her artificiality clear; the effect was a machine performing machine. “I am a voice to help this along. I’ll try to speak with clearness. This is a way to see one another. Words are all we have.”<sup>94</sup> Many elements that make up a place were already in quotes: “I” am a “theatre-goer.” The voice is “she” and is “talking.” And there are two of us “together,” listening and affirming a digital voice.

Each element of *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*—among them a phone call with a stranger, unexpected questions over the phone, the phone itself, theatre, the pandemic—were already marked by personal, cultural, and societal anxiety. The structure of the performance, however, with the neutrality of the guide as only an uncanny robotic-yet-feminine voice, the established boundaries of performance with clearly marked beginning and ending, and the immediate camaraderie of a shared adventure with a stranger experiencing the same factors, created a sense of being in sync. Even the pressure of the phone against my ear felt strangely comforting in its neutrality, distinctly different from my typical response to holding a phone to listen and speak. As with Stein’s landscape, the uncanny voice was something to be encountered. The difference is that instead of the aesthetic distance afforded by leaning back and away from

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<sup>94</sup> 600 Highwaymen, *A Phone Call*. The digital voice’s spoken line, “Words are all we have” harkens to a possibly spurious quote frequently attributed to Samuel Beckett.

the anxiety of the unknown, 600 Highwaymen invited participants to lean into this site and linger there.

In this performance, two anonymous callers are instructed to assign themselves names, either A or B. I chose A, the other caller chose B. “This might feel like a conversation,” the uncanny woman told us. “It is not.”<sup>95</sup> The voice asked us (now A and B) questions, among them yes or no questions about ourselves, questions about our pasts, our parentage, our languages, our eyes. She instructed us to describe our rooms by focusing only on yellow objects we could see from where we sat in the room. I listened as “B” described a wall hanging. It was yellow, with spirals filled with smaller details. This mapping extended to a raised-relief topography of our physical bodies as part of the map, as the voice instructed us to each trace down with our fingers, along the boundaries of our noses as she counted down from five. The voice also told a story in pieces about a memory of getting stranded on the side of the road. We listened.

By the end of the hour, I had moved and been moved by the guide to my darkened bathroom, where I stood, listening and responding. In the final moments of the performance, my space had become only words to describe it. This speaker/commander performed impossible speech acts. Which asks whether a speaker needs to be able to breathe, to remember, to be capable of mourning or forgetting, in order for their statements and questions to have, to borrow from speech act theory, sense and reference. The shared acts of listening to and following the uncanny woman held us to the site, using what I would term *insistence*. Each question was different (in Patterson’s *First Symphony* later in this chapter, he asks each person the same question, “Do you trust me?”), and yet the action of wearing away or hollowing out the constructed sense and reference of our subjecthood was repeated each time.

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<sup>95</sup> 600 Highwaymen, *A Phone Call*.

The day before my scheduled phone call, I received a somewhat cryptic email with the phone number to call and a code to enter. Near the end of the email, in bold text, it read, “This experience is between you and a stranger. It cannot take place without your presence.”<sup>96</sup> This experience could also not take place without the presence of the impossible speaker. There is something monstrous about the uncanny voice, not the ever-so-clearly robotic voice on its own, but rather the relationship it entangles the two callers within. Monstrosity, Patricia MacCormack writes, “can be thought as an imperative in forming relations which enter subjects into becomings.”<sup>97</sup> The heterotopia invites participants to enter their own subjecthood into becoming.

Another attendee, reflecting on their experience online, described the mechanical voice and the absence of a sense of dialogue “both alienating and absolving.”<sup>98</sup> Hui Peng, writing in *Theatre Journal*, describes the feeling of intimacy she experienced during *Part One* as “disembodied intimacy,” as the connection “was built on a shared consent that they responded to the voice verbally and physically.”<sup>99</sup> My subjecthood is becoming “A” for the duration of this call. My actions are bound to the voice giving commands, and the task of listening to another person-turned-letter, “B.” Through the duration of the hour-long call, we sustained this state of becoming while also sustaining this uncanny site.

In her preview for 600 Highwaymen’s piece, Laura Collins-Hughes, writing for *The New York Times*, situated the work in the historic moment by evoking decay. “Social distance has left

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<sup>96</sup> Arizona Arts Live and 600 Highwaymen, email for *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, received February 26, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Patricia MacCormack, “The Queer Ethics of Monstrosity,” in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, eds. Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 255.

<sup>98</sup> Taylor Jasper, “Here’s Why You Should Try *A Thousand Ways*,” *The Momentary*, March 16, 2021. <https://themomentary.org/blog/heres-why-you-should-try-a-thousand-ways/>.

<sup>99</sup> Hui Peng, Review of *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*. *Theatre Journal*, December 2021, 571–572.

us rusty when it comes to connecting with strangers,” she writes. She describes the show’s purpose in practical terms, as a means for individuals to “practice” connecting with strangers after months of isolation during lockdown.<sup>100</sup> Collins-Hughes writes that *A Thousand Ways (Part One)* resists easy categorization. “It sounds odd to describe an hour-long telephone chat . . . as a work of theatre, and I’m not even sure that it qualifies.”<sup>101</sup> It is perhaps easier to categorize the piece in terms of something more practical, like working on our social skills. However, the rust is important, as it evokes a site, a ruin, however, small, transformed by deterioration and neglect. It is within this rusty site that *A Thousand Ways (Part One)* invites participants to linger. Further, to cite Hölderlin’s caesura, it allows our ascribed subjecthoods to *rest*.

I attended *A Thousand Ways (Part One)* two times, but only once to completion. Both times, the other anonymous caller was somewhere else, potentially anywhere.<sup>102</sup> As I mentioned, the experience of attending *Part One* was historical, nearly a year into lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic. The first time I attended, the boundaries of this site within the site was thrown into sharp relief when the encounter abruptly ended shortly after person B’s father-in-law collapsed onto the floor. I did not hear her father-in-law fall, but I heard person B gasp. I heard her voice change, and I heard her voice quiet as she went to him. “I’m sorry!” she said to me, but perhaps also to the uncanny voice. “I have to help him.” It was as though she was standing at the threshold to leave.

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<sup>100</sup> Laura Collins-Hughes, “Strangers on a Phone, Theatrically Speaking,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Collins-Hughes, “Strangers on a Phone.”

<sup>102</sup> For On the Boards’ February 2021 presentation of *Part One: A Phone Call*, seventy-three percent of callers/participants were from twenty-five miles or more outside of Seattle. Gemma Wilson, “This Time It’s Personal: 600 Highwaymen’s Intimate ‘A Thousand Ways,’” *American Theatre*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/03/26/this-time-its-personal-600-highwaymens-intimate-a-thousand-ways/>.

“Okay! That’s—I’m—” I said. “Goodbye,” she said, sadly. In this strange in-between, we were neither and both our letters and our names. She hung up, ending the call with a sudden silence. “Hello?” I said quietly, in the now empty, roomless room. The uncanny digitally voiced woman had left, too. More unsettling is the possibility that she was present but now unable to correspond with without everyone’s presence. I hung up the phone, thrown back into the material world, the boundaries of the two worlds now in sharp, sudden relief. Even the materiality of the phone felt strange. I quickly dropped it. The other performer, the other woman who was a person, like me, was in that moment in a situation with a family member I had no way of aiding in.<sup>103</sup> As the uncanny voice said, the performance cannot take place without our presence. The room could not be sustained without us both as well. The wall between the space of the heterotopia and the “real world” is porous, illuminating how close a heterotopia is to the established order of things.

The second time I attended *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, I further experienced the sense of the opening and closing boundaries of this Other place. In this instance, the other caller with me, this time a man, was flustered by the premise of the show. My co-participant’s answers often ended with a question mark, and he laughed at my responses to the questions in disbelief. In the final moments in the dark, when the uncanny woman told us to say something we would remember about each other, his memory of me was not something I said about myself but how he had felt creepy when I had, during the call, said I could see him in the darkness of the bathroom. As with Patterson’s *First Symphony*, discussed later in this chapter,

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<sup>103</sup> After the performance ended prematurely, I called the number listed in the initial email from Arizona Arts Live and 600 Highwaymen to see if I could locate caller B’s contact information to follow up with her. I was told that it was not possible to share that information. Later, I learned that some theaters had hosted Zoom sessions for participants to reflect on these experiences. Some participants were able to find their co-participant through this.

each participant receives an invitation and makes a choice. In Foucault's rendering of a heterotopia in a society, he says that one must "submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures."<sup>104</sup> To author a heterotopia within a socio-cultural site requires a willingness to submit to this purification of one's subjecthood, to agree to enter into a state of becoming, to use MacCormack's term, for the duration of the performance and the place-making.

In moments throughout the one-hour phone call, the uncanny woman paused the back-and-forth of questioning and instructions to narrate or "recall" a story of being stranded on the side of the road. The story, told by the voice in first person, felt like an echo of an absent playwright's own memory or imagination, spoken and embodied through the bodiless and uncanny woman. Near the end of the hour, the voice completes "her" narrative monologue. "This will be something we remember," she says.<sup>105</sup> It is unclear whether the voice is describing "we" as the people within the story or "we" as the three now all uncanny figures of this phone call. The statement is also an indirect directive to remember, and it is an instruction that both A and B have been primed to follow. It is impossible, of course, that there could be a "we" who remembers, when one of us is only voice. And yet, in this site where all three of us are only voices, it is possible, and it is true. In *A Thousand Ways*, the act of retaining something—a record, a trace, to quote Georges Perec's definition of "to write,"<sup>106</sup>—comes at the cost of one's

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<sup>104</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 7.

<sup>105</sup> 600 Highwaymen, *A Phone Call*.

<sup>106</sup> The full passage by Georges Perec reads, "To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs." Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Essays* (Penguin Classics, 2008), 92.

own subjecthood, temporarily worn away bit by bit during the hour-long performance, until both callers have become, like the digital guide, only voice.

This act of hollowing, undoing, detaching, and shedding one's self while in this heterotopian site resonates with Foucault's own conception of "experience," the goal of which, he writes, is "wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or dissolution."<sup>107</sup> Foucault's interest, G.L. Bruns writes, should be understood as an interest in "freedom, not just from others, but from oneself, or even from being anything like a self or entity of any sort."<sup>108</sup> The violence in Foucault's language calls to mind Stein's repeated use of "groping" to describe working toward a continuous present.<sup>109</sup> The performance of *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, along with the works that follow, offers a means of hollowing our selves and our constructed rooms through a surprisingly tender relationship of listening and connection in this extra-ordinary correspondence.<sup>110</sup>

### **Tactical Map-Making**

Approaching *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call* in terms of a heterotopia illuminates a means of both mapping a space while also moving through it as a practiced place. This strategy opens opportunities for disruptive, even corrosive, lingering. In this section, I use

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<sup>107</sup> Foucault, quoted by G.L. Bruns, *On Ceasing to be Human* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>108</sup> Bruns, *On Ceasing*, 59.

<sup>109</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation," in *Writings and Lectures: 1911–1945* (London: Peter Owen, 1967), 25.

<sup>110</sup> For another example of the use of voice and instruction that manipulates sound and a sense of presence, see Janet Cardiff's audio installations. In "Conversations with My Mother," for example, Cardiff invites participants to select a rotary phone and eavesdrop on a recording of a conversation with the artist and her 93-year-old mother.

Michel de Certeau's writing on the two vantage points—of strategy and of tactics—to consider how the heterotopias of this chapter deploy both at once. To do this we should briefly define de Certeau's use of strategies and tactics, place and space, and maps and tours.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau assesses that the city is composed of binary vantage points and the “calculations” informed by one of two positions: The strategic, from above, and the tactical, from the ground level. According to de Certeau, a *strategy* is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships” from which a subject with will and power can mark its “‘own’ place,” isolated within “a world bewitched by the invisible power of the Other.”<sup>111</sup> De Certeau marks this as the “typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy.”<sup>112</sup> A *tactic* is, according to de Certeau, “an art of the weak,” that enables resistance to strategy in small ways. Like strategy, a tactic also has a calculated action, however this is within the “space of the other,” where there is, unlike the strategy, no “proper locus.” The tactic, on the ground level, must operate moment to moment, as a “guileful ruse,” and its most powerful element is time. However, according to de Certeau, while a tactic takes advantage of opportunities found in the “cracks,” it lacks a site to “stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids.”<sup>113</sup>

*Place*, according to de Certeau, is the fixed, structured area that has been determined by architects, city planners, and other authorities and which marks it as proper. This is opposed to *space*, which, according to de Certeau, “is a practiced place.”<sup>114</sup> Where place is the realm of

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<sup>111</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36.

<sup>112</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36.

<sup>113</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

<sup>114</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

strategy, space is the realm of tactics. *A Thousand Ways (Part One)* configures a relationship where an uncanny figure (a guide) is made “a subject with will and power” (as in a strategy) to be isolated. This subject is not as a business, an army, or a scientific institution, but is manifested by displacing power onto the figure of an interloper, an uncanny guide. The performances of this chapter do not mark a new path within the given grid, but instead sneak in a new grid for the duration of performance, a new acceptable script by way of an interloper. Following this new script invites the potential for the tactical manipulation of time by way of a disruptive, impossible, and improper rest.

### **Benjamin Patterson’s Micro-Environments and Uncanny Guides**

*A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call* has a historical counterpart in performance scores by Fluxus performance artist and experimental composer Benjamin Patterson, most apparent in his score titled *First Symphony*. I examine this score in the final section of this chapter, to encounter Patterson’s interrogator in relationship to the computerized, artificial, feminine, and disembodied voice in *A Thousand Ways*. To establish this possibility, I will first engage with three Patterson works in which the power of map-making and order-making has been displaced such that the embodied “reader” can perform and experience sacred, disruptive *rest*.

Benjamin Patterson was a performance artist, experimental composer, and musician, as well as a founding member of Fluxus and the group’s singular Black member. As with Borges’s heterotopian passage, Patterson’s works sustain the passage through a relationship of power and anxiety with his audience (in relationship to his art book *Methods & Processes* he calls the

audience the “reader-participant.”)<sup>115</sup> We can thus approach his scores as both charts for passage-making within a discourse of order and also instructions for a labor of rest and lingering within them. To use de Certeau’s language, Borges and Patterson show the possibility of being at once strategist and tactician.

In Patterson’s understudied essay, “Notes on PETs,” the artist articulates a problem that had driven his work for the four years prior. He writes that he believed that the role of the artist is “the duality of discoverer and educator—discoverer of the varying possibilities for selecting from environmental stimuli specific percepts and organizing these into significant perceptions, and concurrently, as an educator, training a public in the ability to perceive in newly discovered patterns.”<sup>116</sup> Historical avant-garde works such as Dada and ephemeral performance pieces such as Happenings, were, according to Patterson, hindered by the boundaries of the aesthetic art object, which in effect blocked the viewer from the discoveries in the “environment” the artist is attempting to share. While these movements rejected traditional methods, Patterson writes, the focus is still “exhibition.”<sup>117</sup> Because of this, “the observer is still on his own to devise methods by which he may assimilate these new patterns into his own mentality. The result in terms of conversion or assimilation can only be uneven and certainly not predictable.”<sup>118</sup>

Stein responded to the problem of the audience and the play being emotionally out of sync by leaning back and making portraits and landscapes. Patterson also identifies this problem, but responds by focusing his attention on, to use Doreen Massey’s term, a meeting place, over the aesthetic object. By crafting “micro-environments, composed of instructions relating back to

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<sup>115</sup> Benjamin Patterson, “Notes on PETs,” in *The Four Suits* (Something Else Press, 1964), 52.

<sup>116</sup> Patterson, “Notes on PETs,” 49.

<sup>117</sup> Patterson, “Notes on PETs,” 52.

<sup>118</sup> Patterson, “Notes on PETs,” 52.

the reader-participant,” Patterson set about his goal to open up ways into spaces for the audience and artist to be present together with the artist’s discoveries.<sup>119</sup> *First Symphony*, which I discuss at the end of this chapter, was a part of this experiment to use anxiety in this teaching of new patterns. This score, Patterson writes, “structured a social environment using individual anxiety and group allegiance.”<sup>120</sup>

Bill Dietz calls for a reconsideration of Patterson’s work through the artist’s own established lens outlined in Patterson’s short essay. Diez suggests that the Fluxus scores for which Patterson is most known, namely *Paper Piece* and *Lick Piece*, rather than epitomizing his work, are actually “rather spectacular exceptions in the trajectory the artist himself was seeking to articulate.”<sup>121</sup>

En route to discussing *First Symphony* and its deployment of an uncanny guide, let us consider two of Patterson’s works leading up to this score’s first realization in 1964. With de Certeau’s tactics and strategies in mind, I next consider Patterson’s untitled, 1962 performative rest at Gertrude Stein’s tomb. To reach this impossible rest at her tomb requires a long walk, acts as interlopers, and an uncanny map. I will then look to Patterson’s *A Very Lawful Dance for Ennis* to consider Patterson’s developing use of displacement of power of order-making onto a non-human figure and his ongoing use of lingering and rest.

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<sup>119</sup> In “Notes on PETS,” Patterson writes that his 1962 self-published art book, *Methods & Processes*, was his first attempt at “conditioning” with “reader-participants.” Other attempts included *Tour* and *Examination*, both in 1963.

<sup>120</sup> Patterson, “Notes on PETS,” 53.

<sup>121</sup> Bill Dietz, “Benjamin Patterson’s Lost PETS,” in *Sneak Review* (2014), 44.

## Robert Filliou and Benjamin Patterson's Untitled Rest at the Tomb of Gertrude Stein

The first Fluxus festival took place in September 1962 in Wiesbaden, Germany.<sup>122</sup> Two months prior to the festival, on July 2, 1962, artists associated with Fluxus, Happenings, and other experimental groups gathered in Paris to perform at Galerie Girardon (the home of a wealthy supporter, Ursula Girardon). This event was titled *Sneak Preview* and was scheduled to begin at 10:40 p.m. that night. Leading up to the event was a sneaky preview to the *Sneak Preview*, by way of a nineteen-hour vernissage leading to the performance event across and around Paris by foot, by autobus, and by subway. This vernissage was undertaken by Benjamin Patterson and Robert Filliou.

There is not a single photograph, video, or audio recording that remains of the *Sneak Preview* event, nor of Filliou and Patterson's epic tour of Paris that precedes it.<sup>123</sup> The remaining trace is the itinerary, handwritten in black ink on brown wrapping paper and used as an invitation and announcement.<sup>124</sup> This itinerary was copied, folded up, and mailed out to artists and friends; as such, it performs the three roles of map, itinerary, and invitation.<sup>125</sup> In the margins of the map/itinerary read the details of planned performances of artists including Nam June Paik, Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, and George Brecht, individuals who would go on to be historic names in

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<sup>122</sup> See Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002) for a history of Fluxus.

<sup>123</sup> Bertrand Clavez, "Patterson's Parisian Years: A Seminal Moment on Fertile Ground," in *Benjamin Patterson: Born in a State of FLUX/us*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012, 208.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Filliou and Benjamin Patterson, *Announcement for Ben Patterson's Exposition à Paris and Sneak Preview: Fluxus, Paris*, July 3, 1962. Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York. For access to the image for the piece, see the Bonotto Foundation's archive online.

<https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/collectivefluxus/announcement/3148.html>.

<sup>125</sup> Benjamin Patterson, "Oral History Interview with Benjamin Patterson, 2009, May 2," Smithsonian Archives of American Art, interview transcript. [https://www.aaa.si.edu/download\\_pdf\\_transcript/ajax?record\\_id=edanmddm-AAADCD\\_oh\\_282777](https://www.aaa.si.edu/download_pdf_transcript/ajax?record_id=edanmddm-AAADCD_oh_282777).

experimental theatre. At the bottom of the invitation reads SNEAK PREVIEW. FLUXUS—HAPPENINGS, ENVIRONMENTS, POÈMES, DANSES, COMPOSITIONS. This is followed, in bold, by “**fluxus.**”<sup>126</sup> What is striking about the map-itinerary-invitation is the comically inordinate amount of time (at least nineteen hours) and space (about ninety percent of the page) the untitled preview (Filliou and Patterson’s vernissage) occupies compared to that of the proper performance (the Sneak Preview). The journey by Filliou and Patterson on the page performs a tactic that subversively occupies the invitation and that also occupies a cartographic representation of Paris. Performancing as preface, Filliou and Patterson’s performance is played in a minor register.

I would like to examine Filliou and Patterson’s vernissage by way of its uncanny guide, Patterson and Filliou’s performance of interlopers, and their subversive moment of impossible rest.<sup>127</sup> The itinerary-map-invitation marks out about twenty-eight stops and their means of travel between them, beginning at about 4 a.m. that morning. This hand-written path zigzags across the marked-out city. At first glance, the markings seem as though they may document or track the movements of someone drifting through the city (like a flaneur) or the unpredictable movements of a stray cat during a day and night. The map is plotted out in French in what appears to be Patterson’s handwriting in black ballpoint pen, with Filliou’s spelling corrections written in red.<sup>128</sup> Long stretches on the metro or autobus are directives by this guide, with dashes that rush

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<sup>126</sup> Robert Filliou and Benjamin Patterson, *Announcement*.

<sup>127</sup> Walking has a long and powerful history in relationship to performance and place-making. See Marla Carlson’s essay “Ways to Walk in NYC After 9/11” that applies de Certeau’s reading of the city and walking to an analysis of immersive performance works.

<sup>128</sup> The handwriting on the “Announcement” matches Patterson’s handwriting in his score for *Paper Piece*. Patterson also signed the opposite side of the Sneak Preview invitation underneath the words “text imprime,” also in his handwriting. Some texts regarding the Sneak Preview credit Georges Maciunas with planning out and mapping out

up to a vertical point and then back down again. Each stop is marked with a dot enclosed by a circle.

At 4 a.m., in a liminal time when it was no longer night but also not yet day, Filliou set out into the city wearing a black hat and a long black coat, following the map. Underneath and within this uncanny hat was the site Filliou termed his “Galerie Legitime.” On this occasion, Filliou’s gallery featured tiny cheese boxes, each containing individual “puzzle poems,” works of found text and images constructed by the artist and composer Patterson that a reader-participant must assemble to read. Mirroring the Jewish peddlers he would see in the Parisian neighborhood in which he lived, Filliou offered these “wares” to passersby, selling the puzzle poems for five francs a piece.<sup>129</sup> Patterson walked a few feet behind Filliou, carrying more of his puzzle poems in cheese boxes and matchboxes to restock the “Galerie Legitime”<sup>130</sup> as needed. While Filliou performed peddler, he also performed a moveable site for his gallery. Patterson performed as artist and inventory clerk. Both performed flaneur.

According to Patterson, Filliou had invited him for the first touring exhibition of the Galerie Legitime, the space in his hat, which Filliou had made in response to Marcel Duchamp’s gallery of miniatures in a suitcase.<sup>131</sup> Once Filliou’s path was on the map and his hat was moving through the street, he brought a living embodied character into the art in the form of an interloping peddler. At least, it must have appeared that Filliou was wandering aimlessly, with

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the announcement and tour. However, the handwriting does not match, and I have not found an interview where Patterson includes Maciunas as a part of the planning or of the journey itself.

<sup>129</sup> Antonia Pocock, “Benjamin Patterson, Puzzle-Poems (1962),” in *African American Artists and the Museum: 2016 Museum Consortium Study Sessions* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 36.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Filliou, “Galerie Légitime: 1962–1972,” ed. Michel Giroud, François Curlet, et al. Robert Filliou: Catalogue raisonné des éditions et multiples (Les Presses du Réel, 2003).

<sup>131</sup> Marcel Duchamp or Rose Selavy, “La Boîte-en-valise,” 1935–1941 and 1958, mixed media assemblage, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Patterson following behind. However, the two may be understood as heterotopias, mirroring and subverting the performance of wandering. This map is not a document recording Filliou and Patterson's wandering, but rather an invitation and a wayfinder. This invitation and itinerary confound the implication of wandering. Filliou's peddler extends and reconceptualizes the metaphor De Certeau makes to "the long poem of walking." Walking, de Certeau writes, "manipulates spatial relations, no matter how panoptic they may be. It is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them)." It is "like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of rhetoric. They can even be said to define it."<sup>132</sup>

Filliou performs as a peddler, and he is also performing as a flaneur. He is an interloper for both, as he both creates a topography with his movements through the city while also *following* the movement as given by the map. His body is the site on which his Galerie Legitime is hidden in plain sight, atop his head. His body is akin to Foucault's boat as heterotopia; his body in the scheme of the map is a non-place that moves between two marked points, again and again and again. Patterson, performing the roles of artist and stock clerk, paradoxically follows Filliou (who is performing peddler and flaneur) while also being the map maker.

It was hot that day in early July.<sup>133</sup> At 9:30 a.m., the map shows that Patterson and Filliou had made six stops, with twenty more to go.<sup>134</sup> All that remains as evidence of this seventh stop

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<sup>132</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.

<sup>133</sup> The temperature high that day in Paris was documented as 85 degrees Fahrenheit. <https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/paris-il/year-1962>, based on NOAA data.

<sup>134</sup> See A. Pocock, "On Tour with Benjamin Patterson" for an examination of Benjamin Patterson's other tour-related scores.

is a circle marked on the parchment with a black dot inside and the directive beside it. It is one of about twenty-eight such black dots and circles, each looking like punctures from a tiny needle. For the seventh stop, the marking on the page is a pinpoint in a larger text, an ink dot in a circle, between two dashed lines, one from Place Pigalle (by way of “metro ou autobus”) and the other line leading to Place de la Republique. It does not have a title, nor quotation marks to mark it as an official performance. In Patterson’s handwriting, the text beside this puncture reads,

9h. devant la Tombe de Gertrude Stein, au cimetière du Pere Lachaise, le 94th division,  
lique 77, no. 12–97.

Au même endroit, sans deragues le sommeil de l’artiste.

*Translation: At the same place, without disturbing the artist’s sleep.*

This marking and description indicate the moment that sometime after a stop at Place Pigalle public square, and before the next scheduled stop at Place de la Republique, the two artists performed and sustained a scheduled thirty-minute rest at the tomb of Stein. This “tomb” is one of two gravestones on the map (the other is a stop at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier). However, this is the only point on the map marked as a *rest*, punning eternal rest, musical rest, and temporary stop to sit and catch your breath.

Patterson later reflected that at the time of the Parisian tour, he still considered himself within the same movement as Stein,<sup>135</sup> who he saw as an influence, along with John Cage, the Russian constructivists, and others.<sup>136</sup> Stein, the wealthy heiress of a well-known Jewish family,

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<sup>135</sup> Benjamin Patterson, “I’m Glad You Asked Me That Question,” in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers Between African America and Germany*, ed. Maria I. Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>136</sup> Benjamin Patterson, “A conversation with Fluxus artist Benjamin Patterson,” interview by Gregory Burke, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2000,

and Patterson, the middle-class son of two African-American professionals, seem to exist in different universes. The two never met, but the course of their early lives followed surprisingly similar routes: Both Patterson and Stein were born in Pittsburgh; their first homes are located less than two miles away from each other. Both artists were ex-patriots who both moved to Paris when they were 27, Stein in 1903 and Patterson in 1960. Both resided in Germany as well as Paris. Both were influenced by opera. Both were marked as outsiders in their fields, Stein a queer woman and Patterson a Black man.

Patterson's rest with Stein illuminates the catachresis intrinsic to all cemeteries and their residents at rest. Stein's tomb is not what one imagines a tomb to be at all. It is a simple grave with a stone, on top of which lie hundreds of pebbles placed there by visitors. At first glance, it seems to read only her name in large capital letters: "GERTRUDE STEIN." At the very bottom of the stone, in tiny script, reads her birthplace, misspelled; the date of her death is a year late<sup>137</sup>. This information, relegated to the very bottom, reads like a footnote. Behind the stone, hidden on the other side, reveals another name and the presence of another body, that of Alice Toklas. Toklas's name is written in a smaller script, with the dates and sites of her beginning and end. It is helpful to consider Patterson, twenty-eight years into his life, and Stein, nearly sixteen years into her death, intersecting for a thirty-minute appointment at a site of rest. There are no images or photographs to capture this event, little in the way of ephemera, save the map. The scheduled non-performance performance makes visible the paradox of "eternal rest." In musical

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d34daba05ccc80001b069a6/t/5fd13c4f9deafa3d82cf5d99/1607547983564/Benjamin+Patterson.pdf>).

<sup>137</sup> Gertrude Stein died July 27, 1946 in Paris, and was interred in Paris at the Pere Lachaise Cemetery. For more details on Stein's life, see Janet Hobhouse, *Everybody Who Was Anybody: A Biography of Gertrude Stein* (Anchor, 1989).

composition, rests are intervals, not finalities. By disrupting eternal rest, Patterson and Filliou's performance makes the second year on a gravestone a starting point for an individual and personalized eternity.

In his speech on heterotopias within society, Foucault uses the cemetery as his central example of real spaces inside and outside society that serve specific functions depending on the historical moment. However, with its own constructed narrative, Pere Lachaise is no ordinary cemetery. Neither a part of the church nor set apart from the city, Pere Lachaise is Paris's most significant green space, nicknamed *la cite des morts*, the city of the dead. Architect Alexandre-Theodore Brongniart used English gardens as a template, and the effect is that of a quiet town of cobblestone paths and tiny cottages, whose residents, many of whom were celebrities in their time, are always sleeping. And while one may rest eternally, there is an ongoing lease to stay in Pere Lachaise. Many bodies of the dead are cremated after a few years, and their ashes are placed in a shared site in the cemetery. Almost all other Parisians who have died are buried in the suburbs, under identical white gravestones in neat rows. A spot in a suburban cemetery lasts five years, at which point one's remains may be moved from their assigned space to a general ossuary.<sup>138</sup> Subversively resting at this site holds a space after the established rhythms of the historic avant-garde and before what comes next. This performance of a rest, offers, to draw on Hölderlin's notion of the tragic caesura, a "counter-rhythmic" rupture and rest.<sup>139</sup> What comes afterward may then function without being a variation of the avant-garde but be heard for its own rhythms.

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<sup>138</sup> Kim Willsher, "In the Dilapidated Cemeteries of Paris, a Grave is Only for the Rich," *The Guardian*, October 7, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/07/paris-cemetery-dilapidated-grave-only-for-rich>.

<sup>139</sup> Hölderlin, "Notes on *Oedipus*," 318.

For Stein to maintain her landscape of indeterminacy, she must maintain her own sense of self in the Modernist tradition. Whereas Patterson deploys authorship as a means of becoming continually indeterminate, as is anyone who accepts his invitation of the map. Patterson's second authoring within his map makes it possible to practice what Foucault calls for in an author when he declares that, "In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears."<sup>140</sup> I will next discuss an early score by Patterson, *A Very Lawful Dance for Ennis*, which similarly activates a nonhuman object as an uncanny guide, effectively making space for both authoring and disappearance.

### ***A Very Lawful Dance for Ennis, June 1962***

Patterson and George Maciunas first realized *A Very Lawful Dance* in Times Square in 1964, but Patterson composed the score in 1962, a month before the walk through Paris with Filliou and shortly after the birth of Patterson's first child, Ennis. In this score, Patterson follows the event-score model established by George Brecht; he puts a frame around a simple action—crossing the street when the traffic light changes to green, and waits while the traffic light is red. The score reads:

TRAFFIC LIGHT—A VERY LAWFUL DANCE—FOR ENNIS

A traffic light, with or without special pedestrian signals is  
found or positioned on street corner or at stage center.

Performer(s) waits at real or imaginary curb on red signal,  
alerts self on yellow signal,

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<sup>140</sup> Foucault, "What is an Author?" 225.

crosses street or stage on green signal.

Achieving opposite side, performer(s) turns, repeats sequence.

A performance may consist of an indefinite, an indeterminate  
or a predetermined number of repetitions.

Benjamin Patterson, Wiesbaden, June 1962<sup>141</sup>

Patterson complicates the Fluxus model by introducing the implicit act of lingering in the action. This is lingering to wait for the light, and also lingering at the sight of the traffic light itself instead of moving on to the next part of one's journey. Through the act of repetition, more specifically *insistence*, the action of crossing the street transforms. The point of action is displaced from the walking and shifts into one that is relational—the act of waiting, listening, and responding to a signal to move. The *relationship* between the performer and the traffic light is thus made the focus.

As with the map in “Sneak Preview,” there is no vocal speech spoken by the traffic light to instruct when to go and when to wait. Were there to be a digital voice speaking, this would be in a similar mode as the voice in *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, in which a voice gives instructions, but there is not a voice speaking them. The *exercitive power*, to use J.L. Austin's term, is “the exercising of powers, rights, or influence,” especially over others.<sup>142</sup> This includes appointing, ranking, and ordering, among others. Particular to exercitives, Alex Willsey writes, is “the authority required to perform them.” Willsey continues, “To order another person to do some action, to normatively require behavior of them, a speaker must have the authority to

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<sup>141</sup> Benjamin Patterson, *A Very Lawful Dance for Ennis* (1962; Published in *Benjamin Patterson: Born in a State of FLUX/us*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012), 156.

<sup>142</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 150.

do so.”<sup>143</sup> In *A Very Lawful Dance*, this authority is bestowed on, or perhaps taken by and sustained by, the traffic light. This authority is displaced onto the traffic light, again and again, by the performer’s choice to continue to follow the score.

Nearly fifty years after he first performed *A Very Lawful Dance* in Times Square, in a performance of *A Very Lawful Dance* in Germany, Patterson responded to a question as to why they were doing this score. He answered that they were doing this to have the experience of “doing something very legal.”<sup>144</sup> There is indeed a sense of civil disobedience in the lingering and occupying the unnamed site between these two traffic lights. PD McDonald thoughtfully considers Patterson’s group performance scores as “miniature acts of civil disobedience that ramp up some small human action until it overwhelms a fragile bureaucratic system.”<sup>145</sup> The participants (called “performers” in the score) are interlopers, crossing the road improperly and in plain sight. Bertrand Clavez points out this subversion in the hidden result within the score, when he writes, “The performers, while being perfectly respectful of the law as they cross the street on the green signal for pedestrians, end up completely blocking traffic with their unremitting crossing.”<sup>146</sup> The insistent crossing seems almost to wear away the road itself, as if by erosion or, to put this in terms of a body, abrasion. Performing the score is an invitation to passersby to perform the score and join the entanglement of following the uncanny authority and also occupying the space.

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<sup>143</sup> Alex Willsey, “Authoritatively Speaking: A Speech Pragmatic Analysis of Authority and Power” (PhD diss, University of Chicago, 2021), 19.

<sup>144</sup> Benjamin Patterson, “What’s Happening a Very Lawful Dance for Ennis Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,” YouTube. Uploaded December 29, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PqLJwd1Fps&ab\\_channel=YelizUsta](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PqLJwd1Fps&ab_channel=YelizUsta).

<sup>145</sup> PD McDonald, “Playfulness 1947–2017: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Games” (PhD diss, The University of Chicago, 2018), xii.

<sup>146</sup> Bertrand Clavez, “Patterson’s Parisian Years: A Seminal Moment on Fertile Ground,” in *Born in a State of FLUX/us*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012), 207.

By repeatedly displacing the power of the directive-giver onto non-human traffic lights, the figures crossing the street are neither performers nor audience members, but becoming something closer to tennis balls or pong, bounced back and forth at the will of the traffic lights. They also echo Foucault's conception of the "boat" as the "heterotopia par excellence," the gathering of bodies endlessly crossing, waiting and watching, and crossing again, becoming the floating "piece of space, a place without a place."<sup>147</sup> Where Foucault sees the boat as a manifestation of colonies, the participants, in collusion with the traffic light and the score, colonize and occupy the established site of sense and order-making.

The "rests" between crossing the street during *A Very Lawful Dance* operate as breaths that allow performers to consciously choose to return to the space as a non-subject once again. Through this, performers create a new landscape in collusion with each other, with the text, and with the traffic lights. Furthermore, because this is non-serious, the directive impossibly given (by the non-human object) and impossibly received (by the performers) infects the minor act of crossing itself, wearing away the orders of thinking that make authority possible.

Patterson had very recently become a father when he wrote *A Very Lawful Dance* (Ennis is the name of his son). Tess Taylor suggests that in this score Patterson is not only placing a frame around the ordinary act of crossing the street, but he is lingering on the relationship between parent and child making sense of the world together. "I can imagine how this piece resembles one of the many explanations a parent gives a child," Taylor says. "You can picture the parent in love with their brand-new human, who is just registering light and color at all. And the parent explains that the world is one long dance of color and light. Our odd human lives are

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<sup>147</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 9.

made of going forward and slowing and stopping before going again.”<sup>148</sup> Patterson recontextualizes the ordinary as a dance, a lawful one. It is a dance in which one partner, who happens to be non-human, leads.

The insistent act of following and waiting in response to the traffic light creates the effect of the traffic light in a state of becoming a character, a figure, a person. In the following section, I examine a score by Patterson that is also titled to evoke music. This piece also uses an insistent directive. Where the nonhuman traffic light becomes, through relationship, becoming human, in the piece that follows, Patterson’s subjecthood becomes uncanny.

### ***First Symphony, 1964***

Patterson first realized<sup>149</sup> *First Symphony* as a performance score in May 1964 at the FluxConcert Hall on Canal Street in New York City.<sup>150</sup> Other significant experimental works were happening at the same time. That same month, Carolee Schneeman premiered *Meat Joy* at the First Festival of Free Expression in Paris. Only a few blocks away, at the East End Theater, Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* had recently finished its fifty-show run. Let us consider two performances of Patterson’s *First Symphony* through two traces. I will first consider the text of *First Symphony* in 1964, and then secondly through an audio recording made of a performance in 2013.

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<sup>148</sup> Tess Taylor. “Benjamin Patterson: Full Moon, Warm, Silver Clouds,” produced by Getty. Recording Artists podcast, October 10, 2023, Podcast, 36:00. <https://www.getty.edu/recordingartists/season-2/patterson/>.

<sup>149</sup> Fluxus artists commonly used the term “realize” to describe performances of their pieces on a specific date. The musical-based term “realize” opens up space for the performer to bring their own act of reading and understanding the score. This includes realizing another artist’s score in a different way or even realizing one’s own score in a different way than previously done.

<sup>150</sup> The FluxConcert Hall, also called the FluxShop and Flux Headquarters, was located in a second-story loft space at 359 Canal Street.

The opening moments of *First Symphony* are situated as a passage, a threshold into the seating area of a space for a performance or a ritual. The score reads,

FIRST SYMPHONY

One at a time members of audience are questioned,  
“DO YOU TRUST ME?” and are divided left and right, yes  
and no,  
the room is darkened,  
freshly ground coffee is scattered throughout the room  
May 1964  
New York City<sup>151</sup>

In the above score, Patterson deploys several strategies for disappearance through his objects, passive use of speech, and place and their interconnected relationships of power, strategically wearing away his personhood, and bringing him closer to the uncanny guide of the traffic light. This action of doing away with or transgressing selfhood may be referred to as “extra-ordinary directives,” with extra indicating a directive outside the jurisdiction of ordinary speech.

The sequence of surreal actions, the capital letters of the question, and the fantastical final “image,” has been received as a puzzle for scholars. Dick Higgins describes Patterson’s pieces, including *First Symphony* as “psychological experiments along the lines of Zen koans.”<sup>152</sup> A koan is, in simple terms, a paradoxical question in Zen Buddhist that helps bring students out of

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<sup>151</sup> Benjamin Patterson, *First Symphony* in *Benjamin Patterson: Born in a State of FLUX/us*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012), 160.

<sup>152</sup> Dick Higgins, *What to Look for in a Book—Physically & Catalogue 1965-66* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966).

specific forms of thought and into a realm of pure awareness.<sup>153</sup> There are certainly connections between the Western understanding of koans and *First Symphony*. The score creates repetition of the impossible question, “Do you trust me?” and the repeated answering of “yes” or “no” sets a meditative rhythm. By answering and being placed as a consequence of their answer, the audience is “divided,” giving up their stable selfhood and entering, together with one another and with their teacher, Patterson, into a landscape where their own being is indeterminate, no longer person nor character. Patterson wrote that he was interested in mysteries as subjects of study, but found that a mystical approach to mystery “does much to either advance understanding or inspire awe.”<sup>154</sup>

In her seminal 1993 essay on Fluxus, “Between Water and Stone,” Kristine Stiles approach Fluxus artists in terms of their engagement with the infinite. However, as Patterson is the singular Black member of the group, she reads Patterson’s work, particularly *First Symphony*, as political provocation in terms of the white audience. This reduces the work to a message or a shock to the white audience’s system. Stiles writes,

Significantly in his ‘first’ symphony, Patterson seemed to confront his predominantly white, avant-garde audience with its veneer of sophistication, that gloss that thinly cloaks deep and unresolved racial conflicts. In polling his viewers’ ‘trust,’ he then perhaps

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<sup>153</sup> “Koan,” *New World Encyclopedia*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Koan>.

<sup>154</sup> In a self-interview titled “I’m Glad you Asked me that Question,” Patterson states, “There are certainly such things as mysteries, and they are wonderful subjects for study, but I don’t find that a ‘mystical’ treatment of a mystery (such as the mystery of death) does much to either advance understanding or inspire awe. On the other hand, toys and kitsch are instruments for measuring how much we have trivialized life. In the end, the types and qualities of the objects that I have used for iconographical purposes limit me only in the rigor required to find precise and meaningful solutions to their relatedness—both internally and externally.” Benjamin Patterson, “I’m Glad You Asked Me That Question,” in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers Between African America and Germany*, ed. Maria I. Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 346.

incriminated those with *and* those without confidence in him by covering the space with the color brown (scattered coffee grounds), a metaphorical stain that might be understood as the taint of race that conditions and shapes the social exchange of blacks worldwide. Although never directly stated, Patterson seems to have suggested that whether belief is offered or deferred, the lives and hopes of those without white-colored skins, for whom white society offers neither recognition nor responsibility, remains negated, a negation signified in the scattered brown granules (individuals?).<sup>155</sup>

The question mark at the end of the quoted passage hints at the element of guessing that accompanies Stiles' assessment. The point of departure for this chapter is to afford *First Symphony* the same reading with the infinite that has been given to others.

*First Symphony* consists of five lines, each written in the passive voice. Approaching each line individually offers a striking example of both a landscape play and a lang-scape.<sup>156</sup> To use Elinor Fuch's place-centered dramaturgy, if we read *First Symphony* as a small planet,<sup>157</sup> it is a planet in a negative register, filled with the passive voice. Save *First Symphony*, Patterson's other scores are virtually all written using active language. This passive language accomplishes a number of things. First, it hides a speaker, the one who questions. Without an identity, the speaker is only the act of questioning. Secondly, the passive voice displaces the action one would normally find highlighted in an event score, as they are typically didascalica, instructions for

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<sup>155</sup> Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance, A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, 62-99 (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 79.

<sup>156</sup> Jane Palatini Bowers adapts Stein's term landscape to lang-scape to focus on the deployment of rhythms, structures, and sounds in her plays. See "The Play as Lang-Scape: 1920-1933" in *They Watch Me as They Watch This* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

<sup>157</sup> See Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet."

action. In *First Symphony*, however, the verbs across the piece are variations of “to be”: are, are, is, is. And the action words are made into adjectives—question, divided, darkened, and scattered. The effect is one in which the action is to be; members of the audience *are*. The room *is*. Freshly ground coffee *is*. This contributes to the sense of a landscape. Akin to a traditional musical score the title recalls, in performance there amounts to four movements, all initiated through the passive voice: The audience is question, are divided, is darkened, is scattered. Patterson deployed the power of the passive or negative register in other aspects of his work, such as his use of interviewing himself.

Julia Robinson has written that, to the first generation of postwar artists, “More plausible as a space for operation . . . were the ignored or unprivileged spaces, the negative registers of everyday life.”<sup>158</sup> Here in the “negative register” of passive language and oppressive speech, Patterson situates a way station where power and the present are present in meaningful ways. Two strategies hide within the first and second lines of *First Symphony*:

One at a time members of audience are questioned,  
“DO YOU TRUST ME?” and are divided left and right, yes and no.

Like the map of “Sneak Preview,” the printed score of *First Symphony* serves as both an artifact and an invitation. When we consider the question “Do you trust me?” as an invitation, it is not a matter of Patterson making anyone into objects, but rather audience, objects, performer

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<sup>158</sup> Julia Robinson, writing about Adorno and others in “The Brechtian Event Score: A Structure in Fluxus,” *Performance Research* 7, no. 3 (2002): 110–123.

and site are made accomplices, in with-ness, sustaining this site.<sup>159</sup> I term this site a peculiar, for the duration of the performance. Everyone and everything, Patterson included, is made uncanny.

Like Borges, Patterson was a librarian for a period of his life, and both shared an obsession with ordering. Patterson is particularly interested in questions throughout his work, “cultivat[ing] a quest for the questions that the answers hide.”<sup>160</sup> Questions are means of organizing, clarifying, dividing, and sorting, and they have their own poetics. The question of “Do you trust me?” is more than a question. When one answers this question, one is sorted into the audience. As such, it is an invitation to answer and evokes the site of an entrance.<sup>161</sup>

Hidden in the first two brief lines is a line of dialogue made massive. “DO YOU TRUST ME?” Written in capital letters, the question appears only once in the score, but in performance, it is manifested again and again and again. A man asks, “Do you trust me?” and each audience member answers again and again until sense and reference have been worn away, hollowed out, until nothing remains of the question but its illocutionary force. If the speaker’s selfhood is

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<sup>159</sup> Tim Ingold writes that “With-ness” must be understood in terms of how it transforms relationships. He writes, “Where ‘of-ness’ makes the other to which one attends into its object, and ticks it off, ‘with-ness’ saves the other from objectification by bringing it alongside as an accomplice. . . . ‘Of-ness’ makes an object of that to which one attends, whereas ‘with-ness’ brings it alongside as a fellow-traveller.” See definition of with-ness in *Critical Concepts for the Creative Humanities*, 36.

<sup>160</sup> See Ndikung, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng, “Introduction” essay in exhibition program, for “In What Century Will the Earth’s North and South Poles Change Polarities? On, of, for, with Benjamin Patterson,” 12–17, *Berlin: Savvy Contemporary—The Laboratory of Form Ideas*, 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Themes of agency and entrances appear in much of Patterson’s performance-based work, notably his public entrances to The Museum for the Subconscious. In 1996, Patterson the first “public entrance” to The Museum for the Subconscious, designed “to collect, preserve, study and exhibit one of mankind’s most extraordinary, most determining, but also, least understood attributes—the subconscious,” cemented onto the cliff of a mountain in Okandukaseibe, Namibia (where 27,000-year-old charcoal and ochre drawings of animals were found). At least five other entrances were established before his death in 2015, including in Tel Aviv, in Wiesbaden, and on a mountain in Salta province, Argentina.

indeterminate in “Do you trust me,” then what does that make the “you”? The fact of the listener’s own selfhood is made indeterminate, bringing them into the makeup of the landscape. It accumulates: *Do you trust me? Do you trust me? Do you trust me? Do you trust me?* And on and on. Patterson uses insistence such that it creates and sustains a relationship of power. The insistence of an impossible question and affirmation to that question wears the question’s sense and reference, systematically, away. The question’s correct answer is irrelevant. The question is a riddle. This figure presents the question more than asks it, like a Sphinx or a troll at a bridge. The question is an object, encountered at a certain place and at a certain time.

For this speech act (the question) to be “felicitous,” or true, to use Austin’s terminology, is based on its locutionary force. The respondent need not answer the question “correctly,” for the question to hold up as a question, but only agree that it *is* a question. Each member of the audience, then, is complicit in its construction as valid and thus are implicated in the creation and sustaining of this site. The construction of the score situates the questioner as an uncanny guide, and the invitation offers the audience an opportunity to be entangled with him.

Next, I consider recorded audio of Patterson’s 2013 realization of *First Symphony*.

### **An Audio Trace: *First Symphony*, 2013**

Nearly fifty years after his first performance of *First Symphony* with Fluxus in Manhattan, Patterson realized his score in a retrospective of his work at the Roulette Theatre in Brooklyn.<sup>162</sup> A recording of the concert was made, and it offers an invaluable opportunity to listen to *First Symphony* in performance.

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<sup>162</sup> The performance took place on November 12, 2013, at about 8 p.m. See information about the event at Roulette’s online archive for “Performa 13: Benjamin Patterson—Action as Composition: A Retrospective Concert,” <https://roulette.org/event/performa-13-benjamin-patterson-action-as-composition-a-retrospective-concert/>.

Like Patterson's rest at Stein's grave, in this audio recording, *First Symphony* evades documentation. The audio begins only once Patterson steps onto stage, at the moment when the lights are out, before he opens the coffee canister. The producers of the retrospective apparently did not realize the opening moments at the threshold of the theater were a part of *First Symphony*. The result is that most of *First Symphony* is displaced, outside the frame of the program, the running order, and the stage.

The first sound the recording captures is about halfway through *First Symphony*. In the recording, we hear an audience quietly talking amongst themselves, waiting for Patterson, at that time now seventy-nine years old, to begin his retrospective performance. He has, of course, already begun. We hear a hush come over the crowd at the sight of Patterson walking on stage. We cannot hear this, but Patterson raises his arms, and darkness falls.<sup>163</sup> A minute and a half passes, and then in that darkness, we hear "POP!" After another while, another "POP!" Then, "Sshhhhhh. Shhh-shhh-shhh."<sup>164</sup>

After this, the audio is quiet for what seems like a long time. Finally, the artist clears his throat. "Does anybody—smell anything?" The audience laughs, unsure whether what he is saying is part of the score. Patterson, in the shared darkness, notes that they don't make coffee how they used to.

In his 2013 retrospective, Patterson wore aviator sunglasses and a magenta shirt.<sup>165</sup> This seemingly small detail—an accessory and a gesture toward a costume—reveals ways in which Patterson realized, read, and translated what I read as the passive voice and work of

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<sup>163</sup> Gillian Turner Young, "An Audience is Divided: Benjamin Patterson, Clifford Owens, and the Politics of Representation." *TDR: The Drama Review* 58 (2): 115–131, 2014.

<sup>164</sup> Benjamin Patterson, "Performa 13: Benjamin Patterson—Action as Composition: A Retrospective Concert." Audio.

<sup>165</sup> Young, "An Audience Is Divided," 115.

disappearance inherent to his own fifty-year-old score, deepening its meaning and his engagement with it. The aviator sunglasses, which are not mentioned nor directed to be worn or included in the score, are key to the performance of the score as written. The use of the sunglasses and colorful shirt has multiple functions: They diffuse and dampen Patterson's own subjecthood. The aviator sunglasses gesture to policing and authority, but they are countered by the brightly colored shirt, creating a sense of a non-serious authority figure; the displacement of Patterson's subjecthood complicates the subject and object in the question "Do you trust me?"

If the speaker's selfhood is indeterminate in "Do you trust me," then what does that make the "you" who answers and responds? The fact of the listener's own identity is thrown into question. In responding to the question and being sorted, each participant willfully transforms into parts of a landscape, much like the performers do in *A Very Lawful Dance*.

Patterson's use of material objects and the way he enables character and constructed notions of the human to be worn away allows for the emergence of *extra-ordinary* speech, with extra- meaning "outside." Patterson as the hollow guide, in the mode of the uncanny guide in *Lawful Dance, A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, invites audience to join him as accomplices in lingering within the site of the question itself and of the site of their subjecthood.

Patterson heightens this sense of void through the darkening of the room. The final moment of *First Symphony* takes place, like the final moments of *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, in darkness:

the room is darkened,

Freshly ground coffee is scattered throughout the room.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Patterson, *First Symphony*.

For the fifth and final time, the passive voice is a description, not a call to action: “The room is darkened.” In the instance of this line, the room was always darkened, is darkened, the room will always be darkened. In this darkness, two final objects—a coffee canister and coffee grounds—speak (or, in the framework of a choral symphony, they sing). The coffee canister is invoked in this minor register of passive voice, hidden in both the text and in the literal darkness of the room, hidden in the directive implicit in the freshness of the ground coffee. In the darkness, the new coffee canister opens, letting out a *POP!*<sup>167</sup>

Because *First Symphony* is not bound by the presence of Patterson, but rather the uncanniness of the speaker, the score is not locked into a particular moment in time. It is, however, always directly reflecting and subverting the basis for thought in the historical moment in which it is performed. In 1964, in the dark, at the height of protests around the Voting Rights Act, marches, tear gas and police brutality, it must have been tense when the canister spoke its line. Stiles writes that, according to Patterson in a letter, “this popping noise triggered anxiety in anyone who had heard a smoke or a tear-gas canister detonated during military experience or civil rights marches.”<sup>168</sup> In the darkness, the coffee canister speaks, and afterward we hear the encounter of the coffee grounds with the ground. As with the *A Phone Call*'s final transformation into pure voice, the audience of *First Symphony* lingers within and as a landscape at rest. When I listen to the audio of *First Symphony* today, in 2025, I hear ashes poured into a grave.

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<sup>167</sup> Benjamin Patterson, “Performa 13: Benjamin Patterson—Action as Composition: A Retrospective Concert.” Audio.

<sup>168</sup> Stiles, “Between Water and Stone,” 79.

## Conclusion

This chapter launches an investigation into heterotopia in embodied performance by way of analyzing works that use an uncanny guide as an interloper, insistence through language, and the peculiar space it sustains through an impossible relationship. Tim Ingold, writing about Alfred North Whitehead's concept of "with-ness," defines it as such: "Where 'of-ness' makes the other to which one attends into its object, and ticks it off, 'with-ness' saves the other from objectification by bringing it alongside as an accomplice. It turns othering into togetherness, interaction into correspondence."<sup>169</sup> The works of this chapter locate space for correspondence between the real and the unreal, human and more than human.

I first invoked Gertrude Stein's assertion that a play cannot be an acquaintance, as the need to be in sync with the play emotionally is impossible. In this chapter, I have examined works that offer an alternative to crafting landscapes. In this case, it is the deployment of a landscape as an uncanny guide, namely 600 Highwaymen's digital voice, Benjamin Patterson's map, Patterson's traffic light, and even his own speaking body. The results are a surprising act of not only making acquaintance with this uncanny authority figure, but a relationship that is productive, disruptive, and that lingers.

As Clavez writes, Patterson's work developed during his time in Paris is strongly influenced by the Situationists and the figure of the flaneur as a radical drifter.<sup>170</sup> Clavez distinguishes Patterson's approach from the Situationists by his interest in social justice. Placing our attention on the act of authoring a heterotopia, Patterson's work differs in that it does not

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<sup>169</sup> Tim Ingold, "On Human Correspondence," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19–20, <https://knowingfromtheinside.org/files/correspondences.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> Bertrand Clavez, "Patterson's Parisian Years: A Seminal Moment on Fertile Ground," in *Born in a State of FLUX/us*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012), 206.

drift through but rather *lingers within* socio-cultural sites of the city. A lingerer as a figure has a negative connotation: A slowpoke, a laggard, loiterer, dawdler, dilly-dallier, loaf. Lingerer conjures chronic lateness. To linger, however, evokes something more romantic and relational: It means to stay a little while longer in a place you do not want to leave. It is interesting that in French, the word *lingerer* translates essentially to “one who drags,” while “lingering” in French relates to persisting and enduring, whether it be a lingering cough or a lingering image, word, memory, or philosophical idea in one’s mind and body.

This chapter illuminates a dramatic figure in the role of heterotopian performative. An affiliate of the French literary figures who traverse the city, namely the *flâneur* and the drifter of the *dérive*, Patterson performs a figure through his scores what I propose might be called the *traineur*, one who lingers within the city within their own constructed map. Linging is at the heart of the heterotopian performative; lingering is subversive, even dangerous to the established order. Linging has the power to perform decay, entropy, and ruin. It is in the realm of melancholy; it is to hold fast, to refuse to get on with it. To author rest, then, confounds both yearnings for progress toward a more perfect future and yearnings for a return to more perfect beginnings.

Harold Schweizer, in his book *On Linging and Literature*, aligns lingering with the figure of the idler, for whom, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, solitude is an essential condition.<sup>171</sup> Heterotopian lingering, however, is in relationship, as the labor of lingering cannot be sustained alone. Where the idler lingers and reflects on his own self, the *traineur* takes on a role, a performance, and brings in others as accomplices.

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<sup>171</sup> Harold Schweizer, quoting Walter Benjamin describing Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *On Linging and Literature* (Routledge, 2021), 3.

The heterotopia in performance offers a means of following an uncanny map of one's own devising and resting within it, allowing the possibility for deploying both strategies and tactics. These works *do* heterotopia by making schema/schemes that are equal parts maps (made through exhaustion and decay) and invitations to tactically *rest* with the absent, the lost, the dead, the not-yet. This collusion lingers where they are not invited, labors to stay longer than allowed, and corrodes by the sustained presence within the discourse of the site by which order has been made.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**THESE BODIES GROWN IN ABSENCE:**  
**AUTHORING HETEROTOPIAS BY HOLLOW-ING**

etiolated (adj.): grown in absence of sunlight

etiolation (n): the act, process, or result of growing a plant in darkness.

—from the introduction to *Performativity and Performance*<sup>172</sup>

**Introduction**

The project of this study is to investigate, establish, and affirm *heterotopia* as a meta-literary device and to make an inquiry into its application in performance. Drawing on my reading of Foucault’s extracted passage by Jorge Luis Borges,<sup>173</sup> I identify a heterotopia as a literary device is an unexpected and non-serious *interloper* in texts it has not been invited into, who, through a *labor* of lingering with the reader, quietly decays the ground of the discourse in which it lies, opening up and sustaining an ephemeral site of absence that is both within and separate from the socio-cultural discourse. How might one both construct and also enter a “text”? How does one do so in a non-serious way, as an interloper into an established discourse? What

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<sup>172</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.

<sup>173</sup> Michel Foucault highlights this passage by Borges in his preface to *The Order of Things*. See the Introduction to this study for a more in-depth reading of the passage in the context of Borges’ essay.

ways may one perform a labor of lingering? Moreover, what phenomenon emerges within this emptied space?

This chapter examines a modality for lingering by what I am calling *dematerialization*: physical acts of insistent or repeated wearing away or covering of bodies both human and non-human, living and nonliving, along discursive sites of order.<sup>174</sup> I observe a phenomenon that emerges as the completion of the world is undertaken by a presence grown out of absence, that I term a *hollow*, a figure of absence who has a material and rhetorical force, a relationship of holding, and who lingers and resonates beyond the boundaries of the time of performance through archival video and photographs. As I am discussing strategies and phenomena for which I do not readily have available terminology, I use catachresis to draw from a passage by J.L. Austin to establish a means of talking about these works.<sup>175</sup> I examine video traces of performances by three American artists within two years of each other. These works are: an untitled performance by LaToya Ruby Frazier recorded in December 2010; a performance of an “event book” by Alison Knowles with her twin daughter Hannah Higgins, performed and

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<sup>174</sup> The term dematerialization was introduced within art theory in 1967 in the essay “The Dematerialization of Art” by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler. The authors describe a future where the aesthetic object ceases to materially exist, becoming entirely conceptual. I am applying this term to the action of wearing away this material through acts of insistence.

<sup>175</sup> Enikő Bollobás lays out an exhaustive review of “catachresis” as deployed in literature in her article, “America and American Studies: From Metaphor to Catachresis.” Drawing from this article, I am using catachresis as Foucault conceptualizes the term in his book *Death and the Labyrinth*. Here, Foucault presents a spatial understanding of catachresis in his analysis of the French poet and novelist Raymond Rousel. Rousel, Foucault writes, explores the vast empty void of the word. Rousel “doesn’t want to duplicate the reality of another world, but, in the spontaneous duality of language, he wants to discover an unexpected space, and to cover it with things never said before.” See: Bollobás, Enikő. “America and American Studies: From Metaphor to Catachresis.” *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2018). See also: Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Rousel* (Doubleday, 1986), 16.

recorded in 2011; and an immersive, large-scale installation called *the event of a thread*, by Ann Hamilton, in December 2012 and January 2013.

### **“Clothing the Ideal” and The Uninvited Guest**

The Symbolist movement of the late nineteenth century called on poets, artists, and playwrights to “clothe the Ideal,”<sup>176</sup> to make the invisible and unknown present in art, including performance. Many works are unsettling and frightful. In the late 1800s, during the period in which Maurice Maeterlinck was writing his Symbolist plays and his collection of essays on the supernatural, there was a brief craze for “materialization,” in which supposed mediums created, made visible, or otherwise conjured matter, sometimes referred to as “ectoplasm.” In this chapter, I consider works that perform what I term *dematerialization*, an act of lingering at the contact point between action and covering. This labor of lingering systematically wears away the elements of a discourse around order and a participant (including their own selves) subjecthood within it, such that they encounter a posthumanist figure of absence, and hold and are held by it. I refer to these figures as *hollows*, and the sites of holding *peculiar*s. The surprising result is that the artists highlighted place the bodies, whether their own or participants, into a state of becoming.

Absence has been studied on stage as an aesthetic, and absence and hollow-ness has been identified and examined in the history of theatrical performance, especially in modernist and postmodern American theatre, notably in Marc Robinson’s *The American Play*<sup>177</sup> and Elinor Fuch’s *The Death of Character*. I am interested in these works for their distinct engagement with

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<sup>176</sup> Jean Moréas, “The Symbolist Manifesto” (*Le Figaro*, September 18, 1886).

<sup>177</sup> Marc Robinson, *The American Play: 1787-2000* (Yale University Press, 2009).

absence beyond aesthetics. I examine these works as heterotopias, paying attention to ways the artists perform as interlopers, the means by which they linger (dematerialization), and the ways they entangle themselves and the audience into a relationship with absence.

### **Etiolation and Hollows**

Elinor Fuchs writes that the concept of theatrical Presence “has two fundamental components: the unique self-completion of the world of the spectacle, and the circle of heightened awareness flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the world.”<sup>178</sup> I will consider performance works wherein the completion of the world is undertaken by bodies moved by absence, and circles of heightened awareness flow from absence to spectator and back. I will first locate the heterotopian speech acts (that is, acts upon speech, which I term dematerialization) that give presence to absence within a singular paragraph of text as read/spoken by Austin as part of his lecture series *How to Do Things with Words*. From there I attempt to approach three works of performance/installation and locate the artists’ strategies for encountering these bodies as hollows, figures made from and moved by absence, present and instantiated in the moment of being witnessed and received.

In his series of lectures, *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin subverts or decenters his own authorial power through his speech act “to exclude” that makes present the non-living spaces and actants (peculiar, hollow, and void) in his speech. These dual spaces and actants are valuable in deepening our understanding of the perpetual creation in postmodern art, of boundaries established in order to see-saw and play between the seen and the unseen, and the

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<sup>178</sup> Elinor Fuchs, “Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-Thinking Theatre After Derrida,” *Performing Arts Journal* 9, no. 2/3 (1985): 163.

simultaneous erasure of boundaries between author, audience, and art. All of this is helpful in considering ways artists (un)do or unstick language from the page and give presence to a symbiotic relationship (as opposed to a parasitic one) between audience and a space.

Over the course of his series of twelve lectures, given at Oxford between 1951 and 1954 and then at Harvard in 1955, J.L. Austin examines what he calls performative utterances. In this series, Austin famously offers one singular paragraph, just one or two minutes of lecture time, to the discussion of performative utterances given by an actor on stage, or in a poem, or in a soliloquy. Consider, on its own, the small, oft-invoked passage. In it, Austin says,

As utterances, our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect all utterances. And these . . . we are deliberately at present excluding. A performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiologies of language.

All of this we are excluding from consideration.<sup>179</sup>

This paragraph's smallness affords it a certain power, especially when lifting it from its context and its surrounding referents. The passage is not unlike what George Brecht conceived of in his Event Scores, which Fluxus artist Knowles used as a medium for lifting actions out of their temporal spaces and contexts and approaching them as repeatable performance events. This is evidenced in Knowles' "Child Art Piece" or in "#2 Proposition," which reads, simply, "Make a salad." By centering a minimal action, Fluxus artists transferred the focus and aesthetic attention one gives to a painting or sculpture to an otherwise ordinary event. Reading a

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<sup>179</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 22.

paragraph is a similarly repeatable event, one open to chance, interpretation, and discovery.

We may encounter reading of Austin's paragraph as an event to be performed. And as such, we can recognize patterns, layers of meaning, and relationships we might not otherwise see. We can look at what Austin is *doing* in this event. Let us begin with recognizing Austin's own speech act, which is to exclude. As a speech act, what does it mean to exclude? What are the consequences? To exclude differs from omission, which would be leaving something out all together. Excluding ("I exclude them/her/you") places something or someone in context with (that is, outside of) the discussion, and its consequence is two-fold: First, excluding spatializes the discourse. It separates and places a barrier, a wall, a thin fabric between two sides, this side and the other. It locates the excluded in exile, and thus it makes mappable something that might otherwise be abstract.

The result of spatializing one thing is that everything else in the discourse gets spatialized in its wake. While in the context of his twelve lectures, this paragraph links to its established definitions: Austin elsewhere repeatedly defines "void" as an adjective meaning given in bad faith, null, without effect, and not implemented. "Hollow" is "professed" and "unconsummated." Within the paragraph alone, we find repetition: "Deliberately excluded" is invoked twice; "way" echoes four times. This way of reading opens the possibility that these words may be encountered not only as descriptors, but as places, even actants. "Void," then, becomes a dual-natured entity and place, and might be read as the void, or absence, or chaos, or chora. A peculiar, when read in its British noun form, illuminates "a church or chapel which sits in a particular diocese, but falls outside of the jurisdiction."<sup>180</sup> This understanding of a peculiar,

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<sup>180</sup> Merriam Webster, "peculiar," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peculiar>.

sacred and exempt from jurisdiction, is the non-place of performance in which we might encounter hollows.

The second consequence to excluding, or covering, is that it gives both presence and power to the unseen, the realm of the void, the abyss, or absence, to move and to speak. This is important to recognize because to exclude as a creative act does not erase or leave out. Instead, it expands out the discourse, and it gives the other something to push against to be seen. It empowers. To exclude this “doctrine of the etiolation of language” in his lecture means Austin must say its components aloud. And so they mingle in his lecture with every other word. By excluding them Austin does something that can only happen in performance: Austin conjures the peculiar, the hollow, and the void. His spoken language is a meeting place that harkens to Foucault’s writing on the heterotopia as a site for impossible gatherings. “Where could they ever meet,” Foucault asks, “except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language?”<sup>181</sup>

Performance occupies this space of destruction and creation, as well as emergence and disappearance. With their certain kind of ill, all performative utterances, from Austin’s purview, might be understood in relationship to heterotopias, which “desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.”<sup>182</sup> Certain performances, however, seek out this hollowing, intentionally not making the ground not sacred or hallowed, but hollowed. In this desiccated

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<sup>181</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi–xvii.

<sup>182</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

space, the “peculiar way, hollow, or void” is no longer a list of adjectives but rather meeting places, where performance might encounter and linger with absence.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, in their introduction to *Performativity and Performance*, understand Austin’s etiolation as related to decay, softening, sickness, and, most importantly, queerness. For this chapter I am reading this unclarified “doctrine” as something that can apply to the very paragraph in which it is contained. As Sedgwick and Parker note but do not expand upon, etiolation is “the act, process, or result of growing a plant in darkness.”<sup>183</sup> It is that darkness, the unseen, the void, that these performance artists encounter something growing, something recognizable but nameless. And this darkness is where I will encounter the work of these four artists to see exactly what they are doing with words, with language, and with speech. Through the purposeful “etiolation of language,” we can appreciate their erasure of the boundaries of parts of speech to engage with the “void” and “the hollow” not as adjectives indicating failure or pain or even death but rather a dual-natured entity and place. This figure-site is akin to the figure and place of Chaos, the “hollow dark” in *Paradise Lost*. Chaos is “a dark/ Illimitable Ocean,” the paradoxical ruler of anarchy, submissive but also subversive, and “the womb of nature and perhaps her Grave.”<sup>184</sup>

The nature of performance is a kind of act upon speech, capable of subverting power structures by rending language from its contexts and citations, in the same moment relinquishing authorial control, and in the process giving presence to the dual-natured void it touches and is touched by. It is this non-place of language that these artists each create performances where absence can touch and be touched, move with, and embrace. As we do not have a word for this

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<sup>183</sup> Sedgwick and Parker, *Performativity and Performance*, 4.

<sup>184</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Books, 2019), 60.

dramatic figure, I will apply strategic catachresis to draw from Austin’s exclusionary statement (“in a peculiar way, hollow or void”) and hallows (meaning saints), to term them *hollows*. These are figures constituted of absence, a phenomenon made possible by the heterotopian performative action of doing away with the site of order, cultivating for this etiolation (growth in darkness), what I term acts of *dematerialization*.

Hollows connect to Foucault’s final passage in *The Order of Things*, when he cryptically predicts the end of the modern episteme, the one in which man is an invention. His final line of this chapter and the book as a whole reads, “One can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>185</sup> The actions of these works—insistent dematerialization—may be likened to the small waves splashing again and again without end onto the shore, over this drawn face, at the edge of the sea. Perhaps the hollows are what is encountered when the void of the ocean gently meets and fills in the hollow lines physically etched in the sand, in the process of being erased. As an example, consider Ana Mendieta’s *silhueta series*, which is a collection of more than two hundred images that document the artist’s earth-body sculptures made between 1973 and 1980. In many of her images, Mendieta’s own corporeal body is in the frame, at once emerging from and disappearing into the landscape. In others, the artist is absent; an imprint of her body holds the form as it encounters natural elements and forces, including earth, air, fire, and water. Strikingly, many of the individual images in the series are untitled. As such, when many images from the series are grouped together, it is as though one is viewing the same act of placemaking and the subsequent

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<sup>185</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

emergence of a figure repeated, again and again.<sup>186</sup> Through the hundreds of images, Mendieta practices insistence, holding space for a hollow.

### **“LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levis”**

LaToya Ruby Frazier is an American artist, photographer, and activist whose work resists “historical erasure and historical amnesia.”<sup>187</sup> Applying a Black feminist lens, Frazier’s work illuminates the struggles of her community, environmental racism, and social inequality. Her ethnographic work, *The Notion of Family*, is an intimate photo series that entangles the bodies of her grandmother, her mother, and herself with the history and decay of her hometown, Braddock, Pennsylvania, a former steel town whose poor citizens continue to suffer health effects of the steel mills following deindustrialization. Her work has been exhibited in major institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim Museum. She received a MacArthur Fellowship in 2015.

In 2010, then-mayor John Fetterman invited denim company Levis to use Frazier’s hometown of Braddock as the backdrop for a major advertising campaign, providing a gritty aesthetic of the working class that Levis could attach to its jeans. In response, Frazier created and performed an untitled performance outside the site of a pop-up photography event in SoHo in New York City. The performance at the sidewalk was recorded in a documentary video, with footage of Frazier speaking in voiceover and occasionally on screen prior to the performance throughout.

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<sup>186</sup> Ana Mendieta, *Silhueta Works in Mexico*. <https://www.icaboston.org/art/ana-mendieta/silhueta-works-mexico/>.

<sup>187</sup> LaToya Ruby Frazier, “Monuments of Solidarity,” interview, Museum of Modern Art, 2024, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5574>.

The video, titled “LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levis,” begins with Frazier stretching and warming up. She is dressed as an interloper, wearing head-to-toe denim befitting a worker’s clothing, including heavy-duty gloves. As she stretches and practices movements she will soon apply in her performance, we listen as Frazier narrates the history of Braddock and the problem of the advertising campaign using Braddock’s working-class aesthetic to sell jeans.

On the way to the pop-up, Frazier stops at one of the Levi’s advertisements positioned alongside the street, and there she establishes herself as not only a mirror of a worker, but a mirror of an image within the advertising campaign. She stands beside a black-and-white print advertisement that shows a Black male model standing in what appears to be an open, barren landscape. The landscape in the advertisement depicts something like a field, with an old gate and a small, blurry, wild-looking tree. In the ambiguous outdoor space of the photograph, the Black man is dressed in all denim. Like Frazier, the man wears large gloves. The man carries a white baby in a carrier across his chest. The man is smiling and looking just off out of frame to his left. All that distinguishes the ambiguous place as somewhere specific in the poster is the text, “Braddock, PA,” printed in small, handwritten script along the bottom left corner. Above the man and the baby, in large, white, stylized lettering, reads “EVERYBODY’S WORK IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT.”

In the film, a car driving down the street is reflected in the advertisement’s plastic cover, such that the car’s ghostly presence moves along the surface of the landscape behind the man. Frazier stands beside the large framed advertisement as the image of the man in the advertisement seems, somehow, to gaze at her. As this encounter occurs, we hear Frazier say,

It’s really insidious when you put a Black man in a photograph, and then you slap on top of it, “Everybody’s work is equally important.” Especially when you know the history of

the steel mills in Braddock. They didn't wanna employ us. They barely employed us.

Levis went with the idea that Braddock is the new frontier. And to call Braddock the new frontier, that's like cowboys and Indians. This brings up a lot of things that resonate in the darker side of American history.<sup>188</sup>

Frazier's interloper is about to enter the discourse through a non-serious way, much like conceptual artist Lorraine O'Grady<sup>189</sup> and Adrian Piper<sup>190</sup> deployed subversive character personas before her.

### **Insistence at the Sidewalk**

Frazier's untitled performance piece outside Levi's pop-up workshop in SoHo has a perceived visual super-objective: to destroy the clothing on her own performative body through a systematic and rhythmic wearing away at the site of the sidewalk.<sup>191</sup> In the video, Frazier, decked head to toe in denim, wears the material of the company (Levis) that has come to brand her hometown for their campaign. As participants in a Levi's Pop-Up watch through a window, she forcefully, slowly, and systematically begins to destroy her jeans against the sidewalk while

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<sup>188</sup> LaToya Ruby Frazier, "LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levi's." Art21, YouTube, <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/latoya-ruby-frazier-takes-on-levis/>.

<sup>189</sup> See Lorraine O'Grady's "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire." O'Grady, who was a writer and art critic before becoming an artist, attended art galleries as her persona Noire, fashioned as a crowned Miss Black Middle Class. She wore a dress made of eighty pairs of white gloves, a crown, a sash, and white gloves on her hands. As part of her performance in the gallery, O'Grady performed whipping herself while in the persona of Noire. Lorraine O'Grady, *Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire)*, 1980-1983 and 1990, MoMa online collections, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/178342>.

<sup>190</sup> See Adrian Piper's "Mythic Being." Piper wove her interloper into both ordinary life (while riding on the subway) and within printed discourse. Adrian Piper, "Mythic Being, 1972-1975," Thomas Erben Gallery, <https://www.thomaserben.com/exhibitions/adrian-piper-the-mythic-being-1972-1975/>.

<sup>191</sup> Frazier, "LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levi's."

wearing them. She takes on the shape and motion of a machine in a mill, moving back and forth, back and forth. The sartorial signifiers of manual labor—protective equipment for her legs, protective gloves for her hands, big black work boots, a denim hat covering her hair—smother her female form. As she wears away the denim, we hear the tough material fall apart to a rhythm like a metronome. The denim is activated as both a second skin for the body and a location for ghosts in relation to the explicit body—ghosts of her family, of oppression, toxins, poverty, racism, sickness, and death. These are ghosts that haunt her body as memories and a kind of legacy, invisible but always present, made visual by Levi’s ad campaign. By decentering her gender, in performance her body is able to perform as machine, wearing away the foundations that hold the denim together.

In this seemingly simple narrative, employing language and movement, Frazier crafts her body as discursive object, encountering questions of power, agency, and submission. Video captures, edits, and frames Frazier’s performance. Frazier approaches what Rebecca Schneider calls the “explicit body” in an active way. As Schneider writes, the term “explicit” comes from the Latin word meaning “to unfold.”<sup>192</sup> Frazier’s unfolding of her explicit body in performance harkens to the unfolding of a list, which disrupts the narrative thread, as discussed in this study’s introduction. “Unfolding the body, as if pulling back velvet curtains to expose a stage, the performance artists in this book peel back layers of signification that surround their bodies like ghosts at a grave,” Schneider writes. “Peeling at signification, bringing ghosts to visibility, they are interested to expose not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves.”<sup>193</sup> By foregrounding the “curtain” of her clothing, Frazier shifts focus

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<sup>192</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

<sup>193</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, 2.

on the explicit body, giving performance space to both those who are gone but also, radically, those who are marked as ghosts by the cultural narrative but refuse to be erased.

“The explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality,” continues Schneider.<sup>194</sup> For Frazier in this work, clothing delineates the body from everything else in the universe. Her use of insistent movement and culminating in an absence of movement activates clothing to a kind of *mis en scene*. Her clothing is costume, a discursive site, and a disguise. In performance, she wears away the social marking, physical parts, and other signatures that mark her and mark the discourse itself.

Frazier’s insistence at the dual sites of the sidewalk and the denim against one another wears away the discourse that has been written upon both by Levi’s campaign. Her labor mirrors and makes strange the “Everybody’s work is equally important” slogan, and her insistent laboring at the intersections of the “land” (the cement sidewalk), the denim uniform, and her body clashes with the “work” in the slogan. Her actions do not pervert the campaign but rather reveal the perversion of the campaign itself and how the use of the word “work” is corrupted. Frazier’s laboring insists on her bodily presence within the discourse of the slogan, undoing the objectification of Braddock into a symbol.

“While everybody’s work is equally important, our top employer, Braddock UPMC hospital, abandoned our town and fired over six hundred people,” says Frazier in cutaways, underscored by the continuous and rhythmic erosion of the denim. “So not only do we not have healthcare, we don’t have jobs. But we do have a Levi’s ad campaign that says ‘Go forth.’ And I

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<sup>194</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, 2.

would like to know, go forth where?”<sup>195</sup> In response to this manufactured call to “go forth,” in this untitled performance, Frazier lingers.

The chosen site of the performance is a sidewalk, which is by its nature a liminal space, with an indistinct beginning and end. The sidewalk has been called a “parasite heterotopia,” using Foucault’s spatial definition, to refer to a site “appropriated by a tactical use of a regulated place, which both reflects and contests a dominant ordering on its own territory.”<sup>196</sup> Frazier sees her work as tactical, speaking back to assumptions of her town’s emptiness. In a 2016 interview, Frazier said, “People call Braddock a ghost town. But I grew up there. People live there. We are not ghosts.”<sup>197</sup> By occupying the SoHo sidewalk positioned outside the pop-up *as* the figure in the advertisement, her living, breathing body disrupts the narrative of her community as ghosts. The non-place of the sidewalk allows her to extend the site of Braddock across state lines, to re-signify this small site in New York City, at this moment and time, as Braddock.

When Frazier ceases her self-erosion, she stands and faces the window, the figure made of absence seems to be at the surface of her skin, like a kind of living armor or a sort of possession. Frazier, unflinching, holds a gaze at the end of the performance. This gaze is powerful and is used across her photographic projects.<sup>198</sup> Where Stein, to quote Elinor Fuchs, used landscape to describe a specific phenomenology of spectatorship, “a settled-back scanning

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<sup>195</sup> Frazier, “LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levi’s.” *Art21*, <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/latoya-ruby-frazier-takes-on-levis/>.

<sup>196</sup> Dominique Roux, Valerie Guillard, and Vivien Blanchet, “Of Counter Spaces of Provisioning: Reframing the Sidewalk as a Parasite Heterotopia,” *Marketing Theory* 18, no. 2 (2018): 218.

<sup>197</sup> LaToya Ruby Frazier, “LaToya Ruby Frazier,” by Teju Cole, *Aperture*, no. 223 (July 2016): 126–35.

<sup>198</sup> See MoMa’s online piece “LaToya Ruby Frazier’s Steady Gaze” to read artists’ responses to Frazier’s self-portraits. Rebecca Bengal, Zoe Leonard, Zora J. Murff, May 8, 2024, <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/1077>.

or noting,” Frazier expands the possibilities of landscape theatre by holding the gaze from the inside. The ostensible “viewer” (attendees of the Levi’ pop-up on the opposite side of the window) are those being watched. From the position of viewing the video, I take on the role of accomplice, gazing with Frazier, and in this moment, the hollow. The clothing Frazier has activated and awoken holds her within it, sending her subjecthood into a state of becoming. The hollowed clothing holds her at a site of empowering and spatialized melancholia as defined by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz writes,

I have proposed a different understanding of melancholia that does not see it as a pathology or a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names.<sup>199</sup>

Frazier’s performance foregrounds her clothing as the focus as it is worn to shreds. This removes her body as the object of the gaze, gendered, sexual or otherwise.

Frazier is doubly marked by race and gender. The handful of “audience” members or witnesses to Frazier’s performance are marked less by their race and more by their proximity, safe behind the barrier of the window and building, talking to each other but silent. Frazier frontloads the video with her rhetorical voice. Frazier’s piece is untitled, a choice that heightens the sense of the artist evading discursive framing.

In an interview with Dawoud Bey published in her book *The Notion of Family*, Frazier describes how her early mentor, Kathe Kowalski, gave students an assignment to find a photograph in which Barthes’s notion of the studium and the punctum were identifiable. First

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<sup>199</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.

coined by Roland Barthes, the studium describes elements in a photograph that draw a viewer in. The punctum of a photograph, Barthes writes, is a detail that “pierces” through the studium and reaches the viewer. Barthes writes, the punctum is “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”<sup>200</sup>

In response to the assignment, Frazier brought Gordon Park’s photograph of Ella Watson, *American Gothic*, 1942, to class. “For me the ‘studium’ was a dignified Black woman,” Frazier says. “The ‘punctum’ was her subordinate janitorial low-wage position and invisibility in our society. It was this understanding that made me aware of how I could speak through a photograph.”<sup>201</sup> In her untitled performance at the Levi’s pop-up, Frazier is the photograph made flesh. The image the participants in the pop-up see gives a false studium. The punctum, or the moment of emotional response, comes with the act of becoming visible at the intersections of the sidewalk, the performance, and her own body.

David Markus cites Fred Moten when he describes Frazier’s work in relationship to the punctum: “To be touched by the ‘piercing historicity’ of Frazier’s work is not only to see, to feel, and hence, to notice, observe, think; it is also to hear a call to solidarity, and to be thereby summoned.”<sup>202</sup> Hollowing is an embodied act of physically piercing historicity at the site of place and time. In her untitled performance, Frazier embodies the photography within the site proper. Her interloper and her sustained physical presence punctures the understood narrative of her as a ghost. Her stillness at the window holds a powerful rest.

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<sup>200</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1980), 26.

<sup>201</sup> LaToya Ruby Frazier, interview by Dawoud Bey, in *LaToya Ruby Frazier, The Notion of Family* (New York: Aperture, 2016), 149–50.

<sup>202</sup> David Markus, “Radical Revisions of the *Punctum*: Roland Barthes After Fred Moten and LaToya Ruby Frazier,” *Afterimage* (2023) 50 (1): 15–23.

Frazier's piece has neither a title nor written directions for others to repeat. Her spoken voice, however, is heard throughout, underscoring her action on screen. "What I feel an urgency to do at this moment is to really . . . do something. Not as the artist . . . but as the citizen of Braddock, Pennsylvania. . . . Do something about what they've done to my community."<sup>203</sup> Her monologue is punctuated by stretches of quiet, allowing focus on her preparation; walking; the visceral, nausea-inducing sounds and motions of her body wearing itself away; and of the final, silent standing before the monolithic power represented by this tone-deaf denim company's pop-up event.

Frazier has noted that absence and shadows have a material force within her work. "For me, 'absence is presence' is the only way I know how to say it," she says. "The way that the shadows show up in all of my work. The stark contrast between the highlights, midtones, and shadows. The shadows actually become the foreground; they become the protagonist. The shadow is the character."<sup>204</sup> This untitled performance piece foregrounds this absence and brings the sensorial elements of touch and the relational elements of being held and supported by a hollow.

Frazier places her body in physical danger to a degree. Frazier is outside, not in the safety of a theatre, and danger lives inside her, in the lupus she lives with and as a systematic oppression difficult to physically engage. Frazier is separated from a perceived "audience" by large thick windows. Without the camera filming and the photographer snapping pictures, it might not be immediately apparent that this is a performance. Frazier applies what David Eng terms "historical catachresis," which "works to dislodge a particular version of history as the

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<sup>203</sup> Frazier, "LaToya Ruby Frazier Takes on Levis."

<sup>204</sup> LaToya Ruby Frazier, in "LaToya Ruby Frazier, Fred Moten, and Dawn Lundy Martin," *BOMB*, no. 143 (April 1, 2018): 89–96.

‘way it really was’ by denying the possibility of a singular historical context in which the past has transpired and reemerges in the present as a reified object of investigation.”<sup>205</sup> As an interloper, Frazier approaches a dramaturgical event through the lens of her personal performance philosophies and goals.

### *Loose Pages*

Alison Knowles is an American artist and original co-founder of Fluxus, known for her performance event scores, installations, and sound works. Her work includes tactile sound works made with paper and beans as well as one of the first digitally created poems, titled *The House of Dust*. Her works has been exhibited around the world, including at the Guggenheim.

The central action in Alison Knowles’ *Loose Pages*, first created as a sculptural paper object, is to transform her daughter into a book. In a video recording of a performance of the piece in 2011, the first thing we see Knowles do is place her daughter, Hannah, onto a pedestal and position her as both a daughter to be dressed and an art object to be seen.<sup>206</sup> Here, for the next fifteen minutes, Hannah will stand, eyes to the distance, as focused as a young woman waiting to be sacrificed. Stage left of the pedestal is a table. On it, sits a stack of large pieces of paper, crafted by papermaker Coco Gordon, that harken to parchment, prepared skin, of something or someone very large. These papers are hollow, and inside they contain dried beans.

The performance is small, and for the duration of it, Knowles is hollowing. In the final image, captured in a photograph, both mother and daughter have become shadow. The sculpture-

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<sup>205</sup> David L. Eng, “The End(s) of Race.” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1493.

<sup>206</sup> Alison Knowles and Hannah Higgins, “Loose Pages (1983).” Video of performance of *Loose Pages* during “Something Else—A Fluxus Semicentenary,” at SOMArts Cultural Center in San Francisco. The piece was performed on Saturday, September 17, 2011. <https://vimeo.com/233042589>.

daughter appears as something not fully rendered, building blocks of a being. The monstrous quality of the heterotopian performative of insistence and relationship makes both subjects into becomings.

In this video recording, Knowles, dressed in dark pants and a loose white shirt, walks across a stage before a small, seated audience. She shakes dried beans inside the pieces of this skin-like paper/papery skin, in front of her daughter/sculpture. She moves efficiently, matter-of-factly, shaking the beans once or twice into the microphone without flourish, as though the sound were leaving the pockets and landing on her daughter's body, flicked like holy water. She lifts a large, yellowed page, and reads from it, intoning a message that begins with:

Loose Pages exist in an edition of ten.

Made by Alison Knowles and Coco Gordon.

At Watermark Press, in 1982 . . . <sup>207</sup>

This is both the text of the page and of the performance. Unlike an event score, the text on this page does not instruct but rather declares what it is and what it is made from. Knowles holds up a large reddish-brown page, shaped like an open-ended pillowcase the length of her daughter's right leg, to the microphone, and folds it to touch itself and make sound. It is as though the page is speaking. All of this reads as preparation for a ritual. It is the initial transformation of paper to page.

And the event begins. One at a time, Knowles pulls specially made pages of flax and cotton, and begins to cover her daughter, to dress her, with these pages. The shapes vary from bags to booties. With each piece added Knowles erases more of her daughter and as the absence grows, a gap or a ghosting compels the mind to fill in. With the first covering over her right arm,

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<sup>207</sup> Spoken text in *Loose Pages*, unpublished.

which keeps it aloft, Hannah seems to be waving, her arm broken but bandaged. With the second arm slipped inside and covered in paper she is suddenly something winged about to take flight. Knowles repositions her arms like a sculptor. She trades out one paper page for another. She adjusts how the pages bend. Knowles covers her daughter's legs, even the bottoms of her feet. She brings her daughter's hands into her body's center. Finally, Knowles slips a black paper bag over her daughter's head and face, and the last remaining vestige of observable Hannah-ness seems to disappear into the stage's black backdrop, eliciting a feeling of terror, as if one was witnessing a beheading or the girl's disappearance. All but her torso is gone. Just as swiftly, the figure of the disappeared Hannah is replaced by that of a new presence: a strange knight wearing a black helmet, carrying a shield, being readied for battle.

Knowles place a chair on the stage, which she slides this being's foot onto, then leaves again, returning with another chair, sliding out her other foot onto it. She climbs up onto the pedestal, stands behind the figure, her own body mostly occluded. Here, with Knowles holding the new being at the waist, together they bow, receiving the sound of applause. Knowles has stated that, "For me, a piece is not really living unless it's presented."<sup>208</sup> It is at this moment that, even watching this through a screen, one can sense something has been brought to life and something else (her daughter) is somewhere else. There has been a kind of exchange. Knowles has stated that the event of this piece was to transform a person into a book, for the body's spine to be the spine for the page. Knowles writes on her website that her daughter "is dressed in the

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<sup>208</sup> Alison Knowles, interviewed by Alex Greenberger in *ART News*. "Her Ordinary Materials." <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/her-ordinary-materials-fluxus-artist-alison-knowles-on-her-carnegie-museum-show-6599/>.

pages which sound as the body moves.”<sup>209</sup> But whose body is this? I would offer that this body dressed in pages is a hollow.

By placing *Loose Pages* on a stage, Knowles invokes theatrical expectations. She does not address the audience at all. Watching video of the performance is both stirring and frustrating, introducing expectations of some kind of dramatic catharsis. I felt hungry for transformation and resisted the urge to turn off the video. At the end of the performance (and the end of the video recording), when the two (Knowles and this hollow) bowed and the audience applauded, I experienced an emotional catharsis. Suddenly, Knowles’ daughter is gone, and in (literally occupying the absence) is something else, something new here and also very old or outside of time. A void opens up a space that calls on a multiplicity of images, among them a mother wrapping her child for burial, and Abraham sacrificing his son. When spoken, the title itself (*Loose Pages*) puns lose and loss. As Knowles “reads” her daughter, the process echoes the act of reading a text or performing a play. It is a body you erase as you go.

Knowles was a founding member of Fluxus and the author/composer of numerous event scores, most famous perhaps being her 1962 event score “Proposition #1,” which, as self-contained didascalia, calls on the performer to, simply, “Make a salad.”<sup>210</sup> In performing that score, Knowles prepares and serves a massive salad for many people, chopping and then mixing through tossing the components into the air on a large tarp. In the 1980s, she pivoted away from event scores to “performance books” and “book sculptures,” of which *Loose Pages* was her first.

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<sup>209</sup> Alison Knowles, personal website,

<https://www.aknowles.com/loose.html#:~:text=Loose%20Pages%20is%20a%20performance,sound%20as%20the%20body%20moves.>

<sup>210</sup> Alison Knowles, “Event Scores,” <https://www.aknowles.com/eventscore.html>.

By encountering her daughter as a kind of text onto which Knowles wraps, covers, and connects, she offers the possibility that it is not words that transform and make worlds, but the page. In performing *Loose Pages*, Knowles makes visible the notion that identity is not only a matter of context but a performative utterance, one that can be made, to use Austin's words, peculiar, a void, a hollow. It also, perhaps, might open space for a discussion of experimental, avant-garde work as not empty, but connected to, touching and being touched by, the fullness of the void.

Event scores place a frame around everyday actions, detaching them from their context and changing our perspective. Knowles most famously accomplished this in *Make a Salad*, in which she prepped and served a massive salad to audiences of up to hundreds of people. *Make a Salad* performs domesticity and gender as spectacle in its elevation of preparing and feeding. The salad is real, it is really tossed on a giant tarp, really served in bowls, and really eaten. *Loose Pages* is strange and distinct from these works, first because it manifests a transformation—Hannah Higgins becomes “a figure,”<sup>211</sup> and because it is the *performance* of motherhood while also somehow being motherhood, the gestures of dressing one's daughter, who is really her daughter, until she is not. Where labor continues beyond the frame, where eating continues beyond the frame, *Loose Pages* performs melancholy; it holds onto absence, quite literally, within its boundaries.

Knowles nurtures small ecosystems using this etiolation, beings grown in darkness. Nicole L. Woods suggests that Knowles' oeuvre “institutes a politics of interaction,” a means in which “to think through a kind of participatory ecology, or a generative aesthetic ecosystem in

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<sup>211</sup> On Knowles' website, Alison Knowles describes *Loose Pages*, noting that she often performs the piece with her other twin daughter, Jessica. She writes, “A performer, usually my daughter Jessica Higgins, is dressed in the pages which sound as the body moves. Large flax feet sound as the figure exits the performance.”

<https://www.acknowledges.com/loose.html>.

which past, present, and future publics are called on to perform a work in perpetuity.”<sup>212</sup> When viewing the trace of the performance, it is evident that the act of insistent dematerialization hollows and holds this space of interaction—this *meeting* place, to recall Doreen Masseys’ terminology—at the crossroads of time, place, and decay.

The shape/being manifested in *Loose Pages* resonates with Ana Mendieta’s land art project and the corporeal being who might reside in the absence created in Mendieta’s works. Where Mendieta’s work is rooted in her experience of exile and longing for a sense of place, Knowles does not root her work in her own personal history, but in a kind of deep, embodied reading. In this way, Knowles brings in the audience as shared readers of her daughter’s disappearance into the page.

The moment Knowles has erased her daughter’s body from view, the event has changed. She and the Hollow take one step down. Finally, Knowles places her hand on the Hollow’s back, and together they bow. The shared bow confounds ideas of a puppet and a puppeteer. The applause receives the pair as performers, together. The Hollow is present, this figure of absence is with Knowles, and they have performed and been received. There is something quietly wondrous about the applause of the audience in response to the bow, receiving Knowles and the Hollow as performers in their minute journey down a single step. Another work by Lorraine O’Grady, “Miscegenated Family Album (A Mother’s Kiss),” achieves something similar by way of a diptych. In one image, O’Grady presents an old family photo of the artist’s mother kissing her sister’s cheek. Her sister, an infant in the image, gazes toward the camera. Positioned below this photograph is a second image. This second image is of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti in

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<sup>212</sup> Nicole L. Woods, “Alison Knowles: In Context,” talk at “by Alison Knowles: A Symposium,” at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, uploaded November 4, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InRJEtES-X0&ab\\_channel=BerkeleyArtMuseum%26PacificFilmArchive](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InRJEtES-X0&ab_channel=BerkeleyArtMuseum%26PacificFilmArchive).

profile, mirroring O'Grady's mother's face. Nefertiti in the image is kissing someone whose face has been erased save for their lips and their chin. The absent figure receiving the kiss mirrors Devonia in the photograph above. This is enough to recognize the moment of a kiss while holding the disappearance.<sup>213</sup> Both images mirror each other, allowing O'Grady's mother and her sister in this moment of both care and disappearance to enter into (or be inserted into) the "family" of Nefertiti and her sister, and for Nefertiti and her sister to linger within hers.

### *the event of a thread*

Ann Hamilton is a deeply prolific artist whose works can be experienced both in the moment of sensation or endlessly and thoughtfully unpacked. They are dense with the intermingling of metaphors and analogy (many operating often within a singular object, gesture, or image, inviting a multiplicity of readings), the community engaged, and the unpredictable, unplanned actions that result. It can seem like a daunting task to discuss a particular component of her work, as there is just *so much happening*. These are not just immersive artistic landscapes but also self-sustaining ecosystems. To quote Deleuze and Guattari quoting Virginia Woolf, Hamilton's work "saturate[s] every atom."<sup>214</sup> Like Woolf, Hamilton recognizes that "the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea."<sup>16</sup> Hamilton offers a means for the sea, another depiction of the void, to speak, and to be encountered by.

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<sup>213</sup> Lorraine O'Grady, "Miscegenated Family Album (A Mother's Kiss)," T: Candace and Devonia; B: Nefertiti and daughter, 1980/1994, Cibachrome Prints, Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York, NY. This image is part of a series by O'Grady that features images of her older sister, Devonia, who had passed away.

<sup>214</sup> Woolf's full statement reads, "The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes." See: Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, (A Harvest Book, 1973), 136. See also: Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. "Percept, Affect, and Concept," trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, in *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1996.

From December 5, 2012 through January 6, 2013, in Manhattan's Park Avenue Armory, participants of all ages were invited to engage with a posthumanist relationship by ways of forty-two wooden swings, each hanging from seventy-foot-long ropes. Through a system of ropes and pulleys, participants' acts of swinging caused a massive, white cloth above them to undulate.

In Hamilton's curated archival video of the event, the massive white cloth spans the width of the armory and splits the space in two halves.<sup>215</sup> As the camera's gaze begins at the ceiling and moves downward to first reveal the fabric, it looks in a way like a gathering of ghosts. Equally spaced points across the top are attached to strong wires or ropes, and as the participants swing, they pull. The effect is something like the lines of an ever-rippling EKG. Beneath the curtain, people swing. Some swing alone, others in pairs. The swings are wooden and wide; the enormously long ropes give the effect of being attached to the sky itself. The length of time and space covered in a single swing creates a sort of quiet and romantic drama, evoking Pierre-Auguste Cot's *Springtime*. The movement of the swings and the cloth together creates a kind of symbiotic dance, and the sense of those on the swings are being "held" by the vast cloth being. If a hole is by nature parasitic, and parasitic means it cannot exist without another, the dance itself requires both. The swingers cannot dance alone.

In *the event of a thread*, three individuals sit at a table and erase ink from pages of books. Eraser shaving accumulate beside them. Focused in an insistent act of exclusion, the three "guardians" lift out and set outside the discourse of the pages.

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<sup>215</sup> Ann Hamilton, the event of a thread, video on Ann Hamilton Studio website, <https://www.annhamiltonstudio.com/projects/armory.html>.

Hamilton is interested in locating ways for landscapes to speak. In *THIS ONE THING*, she called on the audience to listen to the silence of falling pages. In *TOWER*, she designed a “vocal cord for the landscape,” by erecting a medieval-style tower in the middle of a beautiful landscape and invited a choir to sing inside. If Knowles finds the peculiar in the empty pockets of the page, in *the event of a thread* Hamilton locates this “church outside of jurisdiction” within the cavernous drill hall at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

*The event of a thread* might be seen as a culmination of Hamilton’s earlier experiments or studies in exclusion and absence, where the seen and unseen are part of a functioning and healthy ecosystem. The centerpiece of all of this is the gigantic, forty-foot-long swath of fabric that hangs from the ceiling to the floor. The fabric ripples like the vocal cords of a god. Connected to the fabric are long ropes with swings. As the people ride on the swings, their motion moves the ropes which move the fabric. They are weaving from the ground up. The fabric, Hamilton’s hollow, seems to be puppeteering the people at the end of the swings, like marionettes.

An interdisciplinary conceptual artist, Hamilton has created more than sixty installations working across media including video, sculpture, architecture, written word, textile, and human performance. The scale of her works ranges from small photographs to an installation that fills a warehouse the size of a city block. Noted for a dense accumulation of materials, she often poetically responds to the architectural presence and social history of the sites in which she creates. A MacArthur and a Guggenheim fellow, she uses weaving metaphorically and sometimes also literally.

In a 2017 talk, Hamilton stated, “My first hand is a sewing hand. And it’s a needle poking down through a cloth, carrying a thread through the surface. And what’s always hypnotic to me is the thread dipping down connects the close at hand to the far away. Because it connects what

you can see and touch in your lap to the space underneath that you cannot see, to what is the invisible below. . . . We see saw always between the visible and the invisible. And what's so amazing about sewing . . . is that two things that were once separate are now joined, and so something has been transformed.”

Foucault describes heterotopias as disturbing, connects it to an uneasiness that triggers laughter, and the “profound distress” that comes from the loss of language. However, for those who do not exist within its power structures, the void, this space of performance, uncannily sacred. In *the event of a thread*, Hamilton brings together objects, sensations, sounds, and gestures into a space where they otherwise would not make sense. For others who do not exist within its power structures, the void, this space of performance, uncannily sacred, uncannily theatre. Because objects have the same substance as text and vice versa, calling on Foucault's heterotopia in relation to literature opens more discussion than his writing on heterotopic space. In Hamilton's installations, there is this same act of more-than or beyond juxtaposition. And yet it does not feel like a frightening disorder.

In the hollow of *the event of a thread*, objects are in and of themselves, lifted from their citational context and placed here. In *indigo blue*, a mountain of blue work clothes, each folded and laid out like onto a bed in the morning, layer upon layer, becomes a creature. As the “guardian” wears away the words (and the page behind them), the mountain behind her seems to visualize the accumulation of language lifted, peeled away, unmoored, and gathered. Describing her piece *indigo blue*, in which a performer uses a small eraser and their own saliva to slowly

and methodically erase pieces of the page itself, what Hamilton calls “un-reading,” wherein destruction makes room “for another story.”<sup>216</sup>

What is Hamilton, as the artist, doing by activating these ecosystems? The environments provide a context for art to emerge.<sup>217</sup> As Hamilton is able to allow her materials to fluidly transform their meanings (as text, as bodies, as transformation, etc.). Absence is part of these ecosystems, and as with every other component, the ecosystem cannot survive without it. The anxiety of the unknown and awareness of emotions out of sync beyond a curtain is a key element of Gertrude Stein’s experience of nervousness in the theater. Emily Dickinson hints at the abyss beyond the curtain, describing a pain “so utter” that it both “swallows substance up” and then “covers” the resulting abyss such that one might cross over it safely.<sup>218</sup> But in her installations, it is Hamilton, not pain, who covers over. While for Dickinson’s poem *Memory* steps around, across and upon, for Hamilton there is something on the other side also moving, also speaking. The cover moves from both sides, ours and the unseen. weaves together a cover to place over the abyss. Her work communes with the spaces it’s in (as in the train station at the site of the Twin Towers, or the house in Venice in *myein*), creating sites that are akin to holy sites and also laboratories for profound discovery.

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<sup>216</sup> Ann Hamilton, “‘Un-reading’: Ann Hamilton erases texts to make room for other stories,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/un-reading-ann-hamilton-erases-texts-to-make-room-for-other-stories/>.

<sup>217</sup> Ann Hamilton, “FRESH TALK: How can makers change the world?” April 25, 2017, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHXczpSeIyg&ab\\_channel=NationalMuseumofWomenintheArts](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHXczpSeIyg&ab_channel=NationalMuseumofWomenintheArts).

<sup>218</sup> Emily Dickinson, “599” in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Back Bay Books, 1976), 294–295. The full text of the poem reads, “There is a pain—so utter/It swallows substance up—/Then covers the Abyss with Trance—/So Memory can step/Around—across—upon it—/As one within a Swoon—/Goes safely—where an open eye—/Would drop Him—Bone by Bone—.”

The performance space echoes the Aristotelian understanding of performance is an imitation of an action. In Hamilton's installations, the space is neither wholly holy nor secular, and this understanding that this is a performance helps foster a sense of safety within it. While many of Hamilton's works have been shown in galleries, her art and performance installations often infiltrate and linger within "real" places. Hamilton accomplishes an act of dislocation by re-locating "bodies" within historical spaces, such as the new World Trade Center stop on the MTA in New York City. *The event of a thread* is something like an exquisitely embroidered tapestry on a mammoth scale. It weaves together many of Hamilton's interests. It locates a sense of becoming, a sense of something unfinished and on its way—stillness and motion in one. It incorporates "readers," SITI Company actors directed for the installation by Anne Bogart. It has elements of a scripted play, a work of art, and a public park. A large-scale commission, the installation comprises the fifty-five thousand-square-foot Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

The massive drapery-like theatre curtains, freed from that context, ripple and wave, like silent vocal cords in *the event of a thread*, or dance and swing in filament. The disembodied pieces weave together to make, cover, or reveal a new body, a landscape that speaks. Further, the disembodied text, lifted from its context, allows it to be material and without referent. Hamilton's use of repeating objects in her work (horse hair, for example, as well as draped moving fabric and honey) and recurring "slow time" events, especially accumulation, acquire a kind of referent through repetition.

From video captured of the event, one witnesses: Billowing white fabric seventy-feet long, draped from the ceiling, splitting the warehouse down its center, creating an illusion of a stage on each side. The shapes created in the piece trigger endless interpretations, like a dream.

The shape of the wide swath of white fabric evokes a snowy mountain. The top of the fabric reads like an EKG. On each side of the fabric hang impossibly long wooden swings, wide enough to seat two adults. Upon a long table, pigeons in wooden crates. When the swings are in motion, they, through something like eighteen massive marionette strings, lift and move the fabric, and light and shadow ripples down like water. When adults and children swing on the swings, pushed by others, the movement creates ambient sound of telephone bells to ring and also causes the fabric to move, puppeteering gods or ghosts through play. This giant being haunts the space. It dances. Some of the visitors lay underneath the billowing fabrics, gazing up as though watching clouds. The swings seem to be hooked to the sky. The swings are long and high; their styling is of another, more romantic, time. At two ends of the warehouse sit two long wooden tables. Atop one is a stack of wooden crates containing pigeons. Sitting at this table, a pair of readers address the birds with text of a concordance on scrolls.<sup>219</sup>

Near the end of each day, when there is only the light from the windows, making large rectangular streaks across the range of the now fewer swinging swings, which now move more slowly, more thoughtfully. At the end of the day, a bell rings, ceaselessly, and the pigeons are released. Their flight creates massive silhouettes on the fabric as they fly upward to black framed boxes at the top of the space. Before the audience arrives, there is only the sound of cars outside and the pigeons in their cages. In an interview, Hamilton spoke of a childhood memory of sewing with her grandmother, and in *the event of a thread*, the energy of this feminine art of making is made colossal. Through her architectural design and movement, she transforms fabric into performers, dancing and blessing the swinging below. The effect is that of a church, a peculiar.

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<sup>219</sup> Ann Hamilton, Ann Hamilton Studio, Video, 12:15, <https://www.annhamiltonstudio.com/projects/armory.html>.

## Comparing and Contrasting the Three Works

Hollows may be encountered through insistent acts of dematerialization. We don't apprehend absence. Rather, we are apprehended by it. Make ourselves accomplices, apprehended by absence. Describing heterotopias in *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes, "The quality of monstrosity here does not affect any real body, nor does it produce modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination; it does not lurk in the depths of any strange power. It would not even be present at all in this classification had it not insinuated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks *separating* all these entities from one another."<sup>220</sup> The act of interloper and the insistent act of dematerialization does the work of creating conduits through which hollows may be encountered.

Hamilton uses language both within and outside her work in ways that disrupt narratives of who is legitimate enough to analyze and comment on art and performance. In her digital space Hamilton posts relatively brief texts as online PDF, ready for easy download and distribution. This speaks to the challenge of being both the artist/writer and being received as a scholar of your own work. Hamilton does not quote herself as the artist, but she writes in the figure of AH. Her studio website includes "Project Descriptions," which are written in third person and signed by "AH," allowing Hamilton to describe her own work (and herself) outside of herself.<sup>221</sup> She moves, as an interloper, into the field of viewer, publicist, scholar, or critic. These acts of double authorship resist attempts at reading Hamilton's installations without her uncanny presence.

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<sup>220</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

<sup>221</sup> Ann Hamilton, *tropos* Project Description, [https://www.annhamiltonstudio.com/images/projects/tropos/Project\\_descriptions\\_tropos.pdf](https://www.annhamiltonstudio.com/images/projects/tropos/Project_descriptions_tropos.pdf).

This chapter has provided three examples of heterotopia as deployed in performance. Using a methodology of *dematerialization*, these works apply physical insistence to hollow out “bodies.” A key takeaway from this studying these works of LaToya Ruby Frazier, Alison Knowles, and Ann Hamilton through their application of material insistence is that heterotopian performatives make a historical intervention and hold it, in the process making space for the phenomenon of the enigmatic encounters with a *hollow*.<sup>222</sup> I have considered works through video recording, beginning with Frazier's untitled piece outside a Levi's pop-up event, in which she physically erodes the denim on her body against the sidewalk (and in doing so erodes the sidewalk with the denim); when she approaches and stands at the large window between herself and those at the pop-up event standing inside and above looking out at her, in the moment of confrontation a hollow seems to take the denim's place as her second skin, or living armor. In *Loose Pages*, Knowles performatively erases the specifics of her daughter's body, and through a relational engagement (walking with her down the stairs and bowing together to receive applause), another presence, a “hollow” takes her place. In my observation, Alison Knowles wears away her own identity as mother in the act of wearing away the subjecthood of her daughter into a moving, breathing book. Finally, in Hamilton's *the event of a thread*, parchment is liberated from its text.

Each of the three artists uses a wide range of modalities in their work that includes photography, material objects, and in this case, textiles. Approached together, these works reveal theatrical elements, namely costume, character, a stage, and dialogue, which strategically deploy

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<sup>222</sup> See Kara Walker's performance installation *A Subtlety: Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014) for a work that deploys physical decay and erosion to manifest a posthumanist being using sugar and time, within the historic place and time of the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, shortly before it was destroyed.

<https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/kara-walker-a-subtlety-or-the-marvelous-sugar-baby-short/>.

what J.L. Austin called “certain kinds of ill,”<sup>223</sup> which I read as the intentional decay and ruination of certain orders of thinking. Knowles and Hamilton are both white women of adjacent generations, the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers, respectively, and both share a privilege of presence that allows both to be present with absence without context. Frazier is a Black woman born at the beginning of the Millennial generation, and she chooses to foreground the intersections of systems of oppression, namely race, class, and gender, onto her body and home.

Each of the three pieces deploy fabric that operates as a garment with which to clothe the ideal in relationship with it. Frazier’s untitled piece suggests the heterotopia in performance can have a rhetorical and political presence and force, and it is capable of the work of de-signifying a corrupted space-time and resignifying it as sacred. As previously discussed, Gertrude Stein distinguished between insistence and remembering. Fetishizing memory keeps it at a distance and allows the site to regrow. The labor is to stay in the act of insistence, to maintain this stricture. A heterotopian performative does not remember, it insists.

The encounters with hollows each reveal a surprising quality of holding, being embraced, and carried. When Frazier’s performance on and with the sidewalk is complete, she stands, turns, and steps close to the window, unabashedly, rhetorically, insistently seen by two people ostensibly attending the pop-up event, looking out from the inside. Frazier seems to be almost held by the hollowed fabric, cocooned. The site of the sidewalk is more than a sidewalk; it is a sacred site of encountering and of being held.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 21.

<sup>224</sup> See Betye Saar’s “Black Girl’s Window,” for an example of a piece that invokes an experience of posthumanist touch across a barrier. Betye Saar, “Black Girl’s Window.” *Now Dig This! Art in Black Los Angeles, 1960–*

The three artists approach their acts of marking in different ways. Hamilton's *the event of a thread is titled*, and she floods the discourse of the performance with description and text, using a newspaper as a discursive site, erasing letters from a page, paper bags carrying unseen spoken text read from a book. Her physical body, however, resists codification in the video as she attends but is not seen swinging, reading, or erasing. Frazier and Knowles's performances also resist codification. Frazier resists through her choice to not title the performance and in her choice to not give her interloper a name. Neither of these pieces is documented in official scores for replication.

All three artists construct uncanny "costumes" that serve as both a trace and a map. Hamilton also activates and produces a trace in the massive fabric and the books with absence. Frazier immortalizes her performance in four cyanotypes from images taken by Liz Magic Eraser, together titled "If Everybody's Work is Equally Important? (II)." In her 2024 exhibition, "Monuments of Solidarity," at New York City's Museum of Modern Art, the performance outside the Levi's popup is shown on a screen. Someone walking through would only hear the sounds of Frazier systematically wearing away the sidewalk and the denim if they put on headphones. Where another artist may have chosen to flood the space with the percussive sounds of this hollow-ing, Frazier limits the experience of listening to a small number of participants who make a choice to hear it.

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1980 Digital Archive. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2016. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/now-dig-this/art/black-girls-window/>.

## Conclusion

In Maurice Maeterlinck's 1890 Symbolist play, *The Intruder*, a family surrounded by four doorways is essentially trapped within an acutely disquieting moment of space and time—their home on the night they wait to see if the mother character will survive childbirth. The characters and the play are filled with palpable dread of the unknown and unseen on the other side of those doors, particularly the title figure, unseen but present Death. As with the Symbolists, the works of this chapter are also drawn to the unknowable void beyond or below human knowledge. However, in these works, a surprising relationship is sustained with this absence, and in that relationship there is, instead of dread and terror, a surprising tenderness, a phenomenon of holding and of being held.

Maeterlinck, who was influenced by the mystic, proposed a theatre in which actors would be “replaced by a shadow, a reflection, projections . . . or by a being who would have all the appearances of life without being so.”<sup>225</sup> Where the Symbolists sought primordial, mythic, and pure emotions of mystery, terror, by clothing “the Ideal in a tangible form,” heterotopian performatives labor toward lingering in spaces where it is possible to encounter and be encountered by absence. This absence born of hollowing seems to be of both what Ana Mendieta describes as, “the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning, the time from within the earth looks upon us”<sup>226</sup> and at the same time what Foucault terms the “mute, yet ready-to-speak, and secretly impregnated with a potential discourse—of the *not-known*.”<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Maurice Maeterlinck, “Small Talk: The Theatre (Excerpts)” in *The Maeterlinck Reader: Plays, Poems, Short Fiction, Aphorisms, and Essays*, ed. and trans. David Willinger and Daniel Gerould (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 298.

<sup>226</sup> Ana Mendieta, “A Selection of Statements and Notes” in *A Sulfur Anthology*, ed. Clayton Eshleman (Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 323.

<sup>227</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 323.

Heterotopian performatives, through an interloper, insistence, and collusion, are able to sustain a space with hollows. Instead of dreading this absence, running from it, or attempting to aestheticize it, heterotopian performatives invite the audience to linger with them.

This relationship is only understood as parasitic when viewed from one side. When both the seen and the unseen are present, we can recognize this relationship as one that is not parasitic, but symbiotic. However, there is something monstrous to a hollow, akin to the uncanny guide discussed in Chapter One. In his article “Foucault and the Enigma of the Monster,” Luciano Nuzzo writes that the “monster” constitutes a core element of thought in Foucault’s work. “The monster,” Nuzzo writes, “is the materialization of a space of experience in which thought tests its own limits.” Nuzzo continues,

Classical metaphysical thought will seek to neutralize the threat of the monster by placing it outside space, i.e. by denying and excluding it. But despite its exclusion and marginalization, the monster continues to interrogate thought. . . . It lives in the unbridgeable gap between knowledge and world. It is found where thought is incapable of corresponding to the world. . . . For that very reason the liminal space it occupies, and of which it is the sign, is . . . an epistemological space, in which the categories and distinctions used by thought are put into crisis.<sup>228</sup>

While Nuzzo argues that the monstrous could not be represented, I propose that heterotopian performatives are able to bore spaces into socio-cultural sites of order- and sense-making and invite audiences into peculiars, sites both inside and separate from established rules of order. Here, in a peculiar, the monstrous is encounterable in the form of hollows. Through their acts of

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<sup>228</sup> Luciano Nuzzo, “Foucault and the Enigma of the Monster,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 26, no. 1 (2013): 56.

dematerialization and acts of exclusion and separation, these works paradoxically map out and sustain an epistemological space of crisis in which there is a sense of communion and care.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WE ENTER HELL THROUGH OPEN MOUTHS: AUTHORING HETEROTOPIAS WITH VIRAGOS

#### Introduction

As outlined in the introduction and two prior chapters, this study affirms certain performance works as authoring heterotopias, in which a non-serious interloper enters into a text, lingers, and crumbles the discourse of order from the inside out, performing communal place-making in the process. Continuing with the conceit that heterotopias may be applied in performance in many ways, I will consider a collusion between the playwright and the audience with a non-serious female hero. This *virago* is a heterotopian figure able to move through and linger within the discourse of the play that she is both a part of and excluded from. As I examine *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy,<sup>229</sup> I will use as a recurring image the famous mythical virago, Dull Gret, leading women to storm Hell.

In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, Una Chaudhuri uses “geopathic dramaturgy” to read modernist plays’ “characterization of place as a problem.”<sup>230</sup> Chaudhuri explains that in modernist works, such as *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* and *Death of a*

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<sup>229</sup> For my analysis of *Top Girls*, I am primarily using the text in the 1982 Methuen edition. For my analysis of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, I am using the 1969 Samuel French edition.

<sup>230</sup> Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, xii. In a similar fashion to Foucault’s use of “heterotopia,” Chaudhuri also draws “geopathology” from language related to the body.

*Salesman*, “Simple *departure* becomes [every character’s] overriding mission and desire.”<sup>231</sup> In this chapter, I use a heterotopian lens to expand on Chaudhuri’s notion of geopathology by examining two plays, *Top Girls* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, through the imaginative image of the virago, specifically Dull Gret, as depicted by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. In these works, place is not a problem for characters to ache for departure from, but instead a discursive site for the trio of playwright, a heterotopian figure, and audience to *enter* and *explore*, as a derelict body or structure.

By deploying heterotopian performatives, these plays achieve, like Dull Gret, acts of “cracking,” which, in the vernacular of urban exploration, refers to “opening and entering a place that no explorer has ever seen.”<sup>232</sup> A strategy for entering these places without being caught is called “hi-viz” (short for highly visible camouflage), where urban explorers wear a functional disguise, such as a fluorescent yellow vest, used to make urban explorers both more visible and more invisible, thus better able to move through abandoned systems and structures.<sup>233</sup> These plays both practice hi-viz in their imitations of derelict structures and also through their viragos who are able to move through them without being absorbed into them.

### **Introducing the Virago**

Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s 1563 masterpiece, *Dull Gret* (translated into English as “Mad Meg”), depicts a peasant woman from Flemish folklore, “who emerged from hell not only

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<sup>231</sup> Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 56.

<sup>232</sup> “Urban exploration: a glossary!” Verso books, September 16, 2024.

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/1715-urban-exploration-a-glossary?srsId=AfmBOooOPjmTk0mqEMOQdfo-bLF5CGk3oMaAMynu1V66qi68hCgI3JMk>

<sup>233</sup> “Urban explorers: a glossary!”

victorious but laden with loot.”<sup>234</sup> In Brueghel’s large-scale painting, a woman in armor and a plain and worn dress wields a sword in one hand and carries bags over her other arm filled with dishes, a frying pan, and food. She makes her way across a vast and surreal hellscape. Not far away from her appears to be a nightmarish entryway into a tunnel and also a nightmarish open mouth. Above the monstrous mouth, one eye is visible, as is an enormous pug nose.<sup>235</sup>

Art history scholar Robert L. Bonn writes, “When all is said and done, we are left with a big question. Was Mad Meg the *victim* of a suffocating, hellish world? Or was she the triumphant, defiant *winner* who beat the system, retaliating against it by stealing goods she thought were rightfully hers?”<sup>236</sup> In depicting “a scene of horror, replete with grotesques, one that has virtually no redemptive images within it, *Mad Meg* reaches into the dark side of our collective life, finding an aesthetic order in the desolation.”<sup>237</sup> The figure of *Mad Meg* or *Dulle Griet* invites a reading of entering a decaying and ruined site, and reckoning with their constructed and sustained order. Madness makes one cast off and separate from the established order. It is a kind of armor that allows one to move through spaces without being stopped. Madness marks one as non-serious. Like the “high-vis” of the yellow vest urban explorers wear, madness for Dull Gret is a kind of camouflage in plain sight.

This chapter explores how the viragos of the plays, Angie and Sarah, respectively, channel Dull Gret’s entrance into Hell by way of a “big mouth”<sup>238</sup> and what phenomena are revealed in the sites of lingering they sustain. Two distinguishing features of Dull Gret within the

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<sup>234</sup> Robert L. Bonn, *Painting Life: The Art of Pieter Bruegel, the Elder* (Chaucer Press Books, 2006), 55.

<sup>235</sup> Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Dulle Griet*, 1562, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, oil on wood painting.

<sup>236</sup> Bonn, *Painting Life*, 55.

<sup>237</sup> Bonn, *Painting Life*, 54.

<sup>238</sup> *Top Girls*, 34.

painting will support my analysis. First is the element of Dull Gret as *virago*, a female and therefore non-serious hero. The second distinguishing element is her defining action, as she enters into a hellish landscape and does so via an open mouth, commingling body and place.

*Mad Meg*, both a name and a title, is protective armor and camouflage. Dull Gret, carrying pots and pans as weapons and wearing her heavy peasant dress, is wild-eyed and has access to the mouth of hell, which she will pillage. She is able to move through and into this site because she is achieving a form of camouflage used in Urban Exploration called “high vis,” or “overt camouflage.” Urban Exploration (sometimes shortened to UE or urbex) is the exploration of man-made structures, usually abandoned ruins. Urban explorers sometimes “use transparency as opposed to stealth, often utilizing a costume, to look as if you belong in a place/doing a certain activity.”<sup>239</sup>

Caryl Churchill’s 1982 play *Top Girls* was awarded the “Best Play” Obie in 1983 and is included on several lists for “Best Plays of All Time.” Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was awarded an Obie for “Distinguished Play” in 1964 and is regarded by some as her masterpiece. Central to both plays is the multiple performances of interloper into genres and structures into which they are not welcome. In *Top Girls*, Churchill imitates and lingers within the dual structure and body is the well-made play. In *Funnyhouse*, Kennedy’s character Sarah enters the space improperly as an unmarked interloper, first as an unnamed character, then is named Negro, and finally Sarah (Negro). With a heterotopian lens, I locate repeated clues that to consider the play’s subversive imitation and exploration within Edith Sitwell’s 1919 avant-garde piece, *Façade*. *Top Girls* and *Funnyhouse* are frequently described as “explorations” of complex themes, with playwright in the role of puppet master creating all meaning in *Top Girls* and

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<sup>239</sup> Bradley L. Garrett, *Explore Everything: Place-Hacking the City* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 269.

playwright/performer in the role of confessional, tragic figure in *Funnyhouse*. Centering heterotopia aids in recognizing ways these playwrights rupture and sustain a site within the very discourse in which they are embedded.

*Top Girls*' character Angie is the sixteen-year-old adopted daughter who is, in fact, the biological daughter of her aunt Marlene. In *Funnyhouse*, Sarah is a New York City university student and the daughter of a white woman and a Black man. Where the figures of Angie in *Top Girls* and Sarah in *Funnyhouse* have been examined as isolated loners, figures of she-tragedy, and victims of the burgeoning neo-liberal Thatcher feminism, reading these works through a lens of heterotopia offers a sense of *with-ness* between the audience, the playwright, and these two characters, who I term *viragos*. By using landscape theory to de-center character in reading the 1964 play *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, sidestepping the psychological analysis of its heroine, which has been the cornerstone scholarship of the play since its premiere. In this way, we can better approach Kennedy's status as a researcher, as a Black woman, an "outsider within," and reframe the play not as a shock to white audiences but as a method of study, observation, and discernment of the events and forces of racism and violence that informed her experience of the year of the play's writing, 1961.

In what follows, I examine two plays that are both firmly established within the experimental theatre archive of the twentieth century. By approaching both through the lens of heterotopia, that is by way of an interloper in a discourse, a means of lingering, and an act of communal place-making, I want to consider an impossible fellowship of these three figures, the absent playwright, the fictional *virago*, and the audience. These plays, I propose practice radical *with-ness*, drawing on the term as defined by social anthropologist Tim Ingold. Ingold writes, "Where 'of-ness' makes the other to which one attends into its object, and ticks it off, 'with-ness'

saves the other from objectification by bringing it alongside as an accomplice.” With-ness brings the other “alongside as a fellow-traveller.”<sup>240</sup> This strategy of with-ness allows the three travelers to move through the ruined landscape together and to not be subsumed by it.

### *Top Girls (1982)*

Director and scholar Sharon Ammen identifies what she sees as an “absent utopia” in *Top Girls*, diagnosing Churchill’s 1982 play as cynical and that it “explores the negative consequences of a system that copies the worst traits of male hierarchy by establishing a female hierarchy, and thus fails to offer the feminist Utopian vision defined as ‘women’s refusal to internalize patriarchy.’”<sup>241</sup> In this section, I will complicate what Ammen sees as a perceived absence by resituating the play not in terms of the feminist Utopian vision but heterotopia. By doing so, we might approach the play as not a failed attempt to extract women from patriarchy, but rather an agency-filled attempt to puncture the surface/skin of patriarchy, enter it and navigate its insides as a ruin, a hollowed-out body and place.

In her study on feminist playwriting practices, Dimple Godiwala writes that *Top Girls* makes an intervention into discourse through its form, a mimicry of the mechanics of the male-coded well-made play.<sup>242</sup> I will build on Godiwala’s assessment by approaching the play as a heterotopian interloper. First, let us establish the play itself is a virago, drawing on the definition of a body made from the body of a man. Virago is a polysemous term whose dual meanings are

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<sup>240</sup> Tim Ingold, “On Human Correspondence,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, <https://knowingfromtheinside.org/files/correspondences.pdf>, 19–20.

<sup>241</sup> Sharon Ammen, quoting Jean Pfaelzer in “Feminist Vision and Audience Response: Tracing the Absent Utopia in Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls*,” *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1996): 86–102.

<sup>242</sup> Dimple Godiwala, *Breaking the Bounds: British Feminist Dramatists Writing in the Mainstream since c. 1980* (Peter Lang Group, 2003).

useful for approaching *Top Girls*. The fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate Bible) translates the Hebrew word for “woman” to a new word, *virago*, made from a man’s flesh. This word marks Eve as she, to quote Adam, “Now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman [*virago*], because she was taken out of man.”<sup>243</sup> A Middle English poem called *Cursor Mundi* echoes this sentiment: “When she was brought before Adam, Virago was the name he gave to her; Therefore she is called Virago, For she was made out of the man.”<sup>244</sup> This word, *virago*, illuminates the *flesh and bones* that constitute this landscape, and the means by which Dull Gret enters into hell through “a big mouth.”<sup>245</sup>

*Top Girls* is a play filled with female characters and concerns, and with its cast of all female characters, it succeeds at the Bechdel test. However, its bones are that of a masculine structure. Churchill, as playwright, positions herself as an *interloper*, navigating a space (the masculine discourse of playwriting) in which she is not invited and does not “belong.” Churchill invites the audience *with* her as colluders, not as a confessional site, nor as a rhetorical mouthpiece to espouse her political views, nor as merely posing questions, but as an active site for the impossible fellowship of playwright, audience, and *virago* to practice what Pauline Oliveros called deep listening. This deep listening (or quantum listening) calls on a practice. Quantum listening, Pauline Oliveros writes, “is listening to more than one reality simultaneously.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Swift Edgar and Angela M. Kinney, *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims translation*. (Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>244</sup> Richard Morris, Hugo Carl Wilhelm Haenisch, Heinrich Hupe, and Max Kaluza, *Cursor Mundi (The Cursor of the World): A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century in Four Versions* (Early English Text Society, 1874).

<sup>245</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*, 34.

<sup>246</sup> “Deep listening” was developed by experimental composer Pauline Oliveros to distinguish between hearing and listening. For more, see Oliveros’s manifesto, “Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice),”

*Top Girls* premiered at the beginning of the Thatcher administration, and it mirrors a historical moment in which women were forging a new feminist order. However, it is the site on which that order is possible that is a problem, and this is explored through the structure of the play itself. There are no male characters nor male actors on stage, yet the air is thick with something distinctly masculine, along with the ghosts of the unseen, absent men. *Top Girls* is stylized and groundbreaking, particularly in its use of forward slashes and the “out of order” scenes. It seems to begin with a dream, in which Marlene has dinner with a gathering of famous literary and historical women, followed by scenes in the present at the temp agency, followed by leaps to the past. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that *Top Girls* intentionally hits all the necessary points to count as a token of the type “play.” An opening expresses the play’s exposition and themes. Angie’s choice as the inciting incident sets in motion the rising action. A reveal/reversal occurs just past the halfway point (when it is revealed that Marlene is in fact Angie’s mother) that transforms how a character sees herself and her relationships to others. What follows from there is falling action and denouement. While, at first glance, *Top Girls* may seem like it boasts a non-linear, experimental structure, what is intentionally disturbing about it is its uncanniness. The *bones* of the play—that is, what makes it recognizable *as a play*, are all present and accountable. In *Top Girls*, Churchill constructs a theatrical landscape whose *structure* apes and mimics the male form of a proper play.

Churchill spoke of this uncanniness in an interview in 1987:

I do remember before I wrote *Top Girls* thinking about women barristers—how they were in a minority and had to imitate men to succeed—and I was thinking of them as

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SoundArtArchive, December 1999, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/736945/19af465bc3fcf3c8d5249713cd586b28.pdf>.

different from me. And then I thought, ‘Wait a minute, my whole concept of what plays might be is from plays written by men. I don’t have to put on a wig, speak in a special voice, but how far do I assume things that have been defined by men?’ There isn’t a simple answer to that.<sup>247</sup>

Churchill gives voice in this statement to the disquieting awareness that a female playwright does not know what she knows and what has been assumed for her by men. It is critical to recognize not the strangeness of *Top Girl*’s dramatic structure, but its dramatic structure’s uncanny familiarity. The patriarchal structure of the well-made play is in its bones. Based on this, we might be tempted to ask: If play structures can have genders, is it possible to successfully tell the story of a woman using a male form? However, this is the wrong question. The play is not an argument for making an essentialist female play structure. It is also not breaking the male play structure to make a variation. Instead, let us consider: What does telling a woman’s story using a form in which she does not belong *do* to the discourse itself?

“Non-linear” reifies linear as the standard, only depicting what it is not. As such, the notion of linearity ghosts discussions of the play’s structure, as the unseen male characters do in the narrative. Joyce’s unseen boyfriend left long ago. The male colleague who was up for the same position as Marlene is absent, but is talked about behind his back. Later, we learn from the man’s wife that he had a heart attack. There are no male characters in the play; their absence, along with this being “a man’s world,” creates a strange dissonance, a hollowness, as though the landscape of the place is a hollowed-out ribcage, abandoned ruins. There are no men present on

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<sup>247</sup> Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, “Caryl Churchill,” *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (Beech Tree Books, 1987), 76.

stage, so man's world is understood as akin to the bones that are used to construct Eve. This is a man's body. This is an absent man's world.

### **The Dream**

The opening act of *Top Girls* has been established in scholarship and dramaturgy as a presentation of the character Marlene's dream.<sup>248</sup> This dream reading approach positions the first scene's gathering as a one-woman show with multiple voices. However, by locating Marlene here at this table, as part of this dinner, Churchill communicates to the audience an eerie possibility that, along with the others, the playwright has made Marlene *also* a fictional, mythical character, the fictional main character of a fictional play. Churchill thus ascribes Marlene's existence as mythic, tragic, and iconic, and positions her as not the arbiter of the other women's actions. It is not difficult to imagine this gathering from another character's perspective, or to imagine a previous gathering to celebrate another woman's success.

### **Mapping the Surface**

The action of *Top Girls'* opening scene's score is first to apply insistence along surfaces of the world. This is achieved through the fluid and overlapping monologues of the women who have gathered to eat, drink, and celebrate Marlene. This process maps out the surface as Benjamin Patterson maps out Paris in Chapter One. As Patterson sustains an impossible rest, Dull Gret disrupts the flow and punctures it, sustaining with Pope Joan a site for lingering and dissolution. In this way, this of insistence and lingering opens up a threshold, a way in (like Dull

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<sup>248</sup> A production at the Southbank Theatre in Australia went so far as to add a prelude in which Marlene, at her desk, drifts off to sleep before the dinner party scene begins. Campion Decent, "Top Girls 'Down Under,'" *Australasian Drama Studies*, no. 68 (April 2016): 38.

Gret in the painting enters into Hell by way of an open mouth). Here, Dull Gret's and Pope Joan's words are able to meet, creating space for an impossible collision of conflicting approaches to this problem of patriarchy as a place.

Reckoning with the structure of *Top Girls* as a virago expands its reading as both a structure and a body. Consider an overlooked exchange that takes place in the final moments of the famous "Dinner Party Scene" within Churchill's 1982 score. Reaching this exchange, however, requires mapping out the surface, puncturing the surface, and then lingering within the rupture.

First, to achieve this mapping, each of the characters in the beginning pages of *Top Girls* express themselves through their relationship to movement along the surfaces of the world. Marlene invokes walking in her first line ("Well, it's a step."<sup>249</sup>) Isabella must travel. Nijo walks all day as a priest. Pope Joan runs to the alley, and her newborn baby slides away from her, down the street. The experience of women contains these six layers—Dull Gret's journey into hell, Patient Griselda's obeying because that is who she is and what she does, Nijo's obedience and babies and walking and absence, Isabella's need to get away and go toward, to be journeying. Pope Joan needs to study and understand. They are painting a portrait through "insistence," to use Gertrude Stein's word. Like a long-form improv team doing an invocation opening, the gathering of female characters conjure images, repeated and complicated by each other and their stories. The insistent use of "walking" draws a line around the discourse of interest, bringing attention to the surface of things. It is through this insistent mapping that a surface is created that may be punctured by the collision of Dull Gret and Pope Joan.

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<sup>249</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*, 3.

By using “score” here I align the opening act with a musical composition and an event score, as this exchange pivots on a forward slash, a device Churchill pioneered as an indicator for the following line of dialogue to begin, and which is now a “standard” in contemporary playwriting practices.<sup>250</sup> I am operating from the premise that these slashes are intentionally placed by the playwright and not for aesthetics or even mere musicality. While often in contemporary devised work, slash marks are recorded from rehearsals by a stage manager for publishing purposes or later production, this is not the case for *Top Girls*. Famously, lines of dialogue in the first scene appear to wildly overlap, giving the impression that the attendees are not listening but waiting for their turn to speak, or, even more dully, that they are constructs of Marlene’s subconscious and mirror her secret feelings and anxieties. The result of this reading creates a cacophonous sound for the sake of a cacophonous sound, positioning the characters in the dinner scene as self-involved and narcissistic women, expressions of Marlene’s anxiety, or musical instruments made flesh on stage. The playwright slashes the long first scene like a machete almost one hundred times on the page. This returns us to Stein’s question-markless question, “Is it repetition, or is it insistence.”<sup>251</sup>

The places each woman starts speaking make it clear that they are not “interrupting” each other, nor are they trying to steal focus. Consider the Latin text Pope Joan struggles to recall near the end of the first scene in response to Nijo’s story of fighting back. Upon closer reading we find that what Pope Joan is intoning is a passage from the poet Lucretius’ philosophical epic, *De Rerum Natura*. Near the end of the long opening scene to *Top Girls*, Pope Joan attempts to recall

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<sup>250</sup> Nick Hern, “Caryl Churchill, by the people who know her best,” by Mark Lawson, in *The Guardian*, October 3, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/oct/03/caryl-churchill-collaborators-interview>.

<sup>251</sup> Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” 166.

the Lucretius's words. The moment of note is the point in which Joan's statement launches Dull Gret into her singular monologue that begins, "We come into hell through a big mouth."<sup>252</sup>

In response to Lady Nijo's rising rage, fury, and sadness, Pope Joan begins a recitation of the opening lines of the second book of another Latin text, *De Rerum Natura*, sometimes translated as *On the Nature of the Universe*. This is a long poem that passionately calls on a philosophical response to suffering. Pope Joan begins this recitation (which she eventually struggles to remember) in response to Lady Nijo's repetition of her line, "I hit him with a stick."<sup>253</sup> The central *conflict* is brought to bear in Pope Joan's response to Nijo's pain and suffering through her attempt to recite a philosophical ode like a Catholic prayer, and Dull Gret's response to the philosophical problem posed by Pope Joan:

POPE JOAN: ". . . sibi naturam latrare nisi utqui

Corpore seiunctus dolor absit/"

*Trans.:* "Nature cries for this:

And only this, that pain from out the body

Shall be removed away/. . ." <sup>254</sup>

Pope Joan is a Catholic pope, dressed in clothing indicating her status. As such, in performance the Latin she intones sounds to the audience as obtuse theology, a prayer, or even gibberish. The combination of sound and imagery harkens to Hugo Ball's Dadaist text, "Karawane," and his paper or cardboard vestige.<sup>255</sup> Pope Joan's monologue is, fundamentally, non-serious.

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<sup>252</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*, 34.

<sup>253</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*, 33.

<sup>254</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*. The character Pope Joan is quoting Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, *On the Nature of the Universe*, Book II (translation added), 33.

<sup>255</sup> Hugo Ball, "Karawane," in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck, Erich Reiss (Champ Libre, 1980), 53.

Yet this is a moment in the play that calls on a deeper level of reading and engagement with the text beyond passively listening as an audience. When Pope Joan reaches this pivotal line that translates to “Nature cries for this:/And only this,/ that pain from out the body/ Shall be removed away,”<sup>256</sup> she verbalizes a quandary only able to be expressed when buried under a dead language. The Latin word spoken in Pope Joan’s recitation, *dolor*, is typically translated as pain, but the word *dolor* refers to mental anguish or grief, which is helpful for considering the difficulty or even impossibility of extracting grief, trauma, and anguish from a body, particularly when that body is womanhood and its histories. These words not only establish the heart of the problem, but they directly launch Dull Gret’s speaking as a *response*, speaking her story for the first time. Dull Greg’s language is, as opposed to philosophical, is action-based. In response to the impossible task of extracting pain out and away from the body, Dull Gret recounts going *in*: “We come into Hell through a big mouth. Hell’s black and red. It’s like the village where I come from.”<sup>257</sup>

Joan still has ten more lines of verse to recite as Dull Grett continues; Pope Joan’s words slowly fade away as she reaches her end. This simultaneous speaking further distances the listening audience from comprehending the words as separate. And yet, paradoxically, the spoken words could not be closer to one another, touching and mingling and cross-pollinating. For pain to be extracted *out* of and away from the body requires, paradoxically, closeness, touch, and communion, as well as the courage to move, to wander, to be lost, and to do things wrong. The play is not an argument for making an essentialist female play structure. It is also not breaking the male play structure to make a variation (as in, it is not reflecting a false notion that

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<sup>256</sup> *Lucretius*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford University Press 2008), Book II, lines 17–19.

<sup>257</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls*, 34.

women are variants of men). *Top Girls* calls for a different way of listening, reading, and doing. By recognizing that the dinner party scene is not a cacophonous henhouse nor simply a virtuosic musical score, but indeed an honest, embodied gathering to grapple with a seemingly impossible problem, we can begin to appreciate *Top Girls* and its multi-phonic approach to problem-solving.

### **Angie as the Virago in the Virago**

A second application of *virago*, that of a female hero, is used to de-center Marlene as the main character and center Angie as the interloper of the play, able to traverse through the hellscape where others may not. While Marlene may ostensibly be the play's protagonist, she is not the hero. In this play, made from the bones of other plays, Angie is also not the hero, but the virago.

Merriam-Webster defines virago as:

1. A loud, overbearing woman: TERMAGANT
2. A woman of great stature, strength, and courage<sup>258</sup>

Other dictionaries include “masculine” before strength as well as “female warrior.” With that in mind, Marlene may be seen as a virago, noting her success in a “man’s world.” However, her upward movement in her career only creates distance between those around her, most especially her biological daughter. She is fixed at one point, which moves up and down, a part of the landscape. As far as locating someone to model a new kind of feminism after, Marlene, driven by ideology and a self-involved feminism, must recognize the hell she has both given herself over to and that she perpetuates. The negative connotation of virago operates in Angie’s role. The connotation places her as an outsider, uninvited, as unsuccessful as a woman. Because of

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<sup>258</sup> Definition of “virago” in Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virago>.

this, she is able to walk, to move, to wander through the ideological wasteland without being consumed.

In the opening scene, Dull Gret does not fit into the flowing composition of the “dream” gathering for celebratory drinks, neither socially nor rhythmically. Characters invite her into the flow with questions, which she sometimes but not always answers. Her statements are not connected to the slash marks the way every other character’s is. So while she does not “disrupt” in the sense of overlapping, her dialogue disrupts the established rhythm of the conversation. Dull Gret speaks in clipped phrasing. Prior to her monologue near the end of the scene, the entirety of Dull Gret’s spoken dialogue consists of: Pig, potatoes, soup, Can we have some more bread?, Walking is good, Marlene, Ah boat, In a field yah, ten, Balls!, Cake, Bastard. When the scene is approached with Dull Gret symbolizing a certain kind of woman, she is positioned as the comic relief, a joke. A 2009 publication of *Top Girls* includes a summary of the play written by Bill Naismith. For Dull Gret’s description, Naismith writes, “She is more preoccupied with the table and the meal than any of the other guests, being a stranger to sophisticated surroundings.”<sup>259</sup>

Both Angie and Dull Gret leap without thinking, following their impulses. It is important to recognize and reframe Angie as not a tragic victim but as the arbiter of her own fate. If what is needed for feminism to not merely ape the patriarchy in heels, then the cold and distant philosophy of feminism must embrace chaos. If this story were a tragedy, Angie would be the *hero*. Here, she is the *virago*, the non-serious woman, the joke. When we meet Angie, she is literally outside, in nature, in the wild. A future in this world for her is empty. Angie’s world is thick with prophesy against her. When Marlene, Angie’s biological mother, watching Angie

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<sup>259</sup> Bill Naismith, *Top Girls* (Methuen Drama, 2009), 19.

sleep in her office, prophesizes, “She’s not going to make it,”<sup>260</sup> she reveals her own blindness in failing to see that the *destination* Angie is trying to make it to is with her. To Marlene, however, her presence is disturbing.

The hidden hero of *Top Girls* is Angie. Angie takes a journey—she breaks the rules—she seeks out Marlene, breaking Marlene’s constructed reality made of Thatcherite second-wave feminist ideology. Angie’s heroic journey toward selfhood is smothered by the absence of expectations and a dramatic structure that reproduces the masculine dramatic arc. Angie is the virago, the hero comes to disrupt and clog the flow of feminist patriarchy by her sheer failure to succeed yet insistence on existing. She is not clever. Biologically, she has no connection to womanhood—she is sixteen and has yet to have her period. She is no one’s daughter (her biological mother does not want her, and she does not experience a mother-daughter connection with Joyce.)

To be inside ideology is to be consumed by it, to be made into a part of its landscape, like the rocks or trees. But from her first moments, Angie is established as an outsider. When we first meet her, she is hiding, outside, in the bushes. She is not cut out for this world. But it is because of her outsider nature that she is able to move through it and not be subsumed by it. By constructing the play as a virago of a “classic” structure, Churchill is able to make visible components that don’t add up.

Marlene is the first to speak in the play, and she carries the most economic, financial, and career-related power of any other character, yet none of her actions propel the action of the play forward. Marlene is a part of the landscape. It is Angie who propels the action forward. Angie twice breaks the understood structure of the world: In the present, she has left home without

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<sup>260</sup> Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (Methuen, 1982), 86.

permission, alone, for London. In the past, she had written to Marlene with a lie so that Marlene would visit for Christmas. It is Angie who awakes at the end and wanders into the living room unannounced. Marlene asks if she had a bad dream. “What happened in it? Well, you’re awake now, aren’t you, pet?” It is Angie who speaks the final line of the play: “Frightening.”<sup>261</sup>

It is no accident that the actress initially playing Dull Gret is double cast as Angie.<sup>262</sup> In the 1982 production of *Top Girls* at the Royal Court Theatre, Carole Hayman portrayed Dull Gret and Angie. As Dull Gret, the actress had long, unbrushed, and stringy brown hair with bangs. She wore a metal helmet. She carried a basket over her arm.<sup>263</sup> While Dull Gret’s origin is that of a parody of a certain sort of woman (specifically a virago, a mannish woman) by situating Angie as the virago of the play, we can recognize the immense courage of Angie is that of Dull Gret.

### ***Funnyhouse of a Negro (1964)***

In this section, I first consider the historical moment in which *Funnyhouse* was first received and the lingering discourse surrounding it, namely a discourse of revealing the hidden spaces of a confessional, suffering woman. By approaching the play through Kennedy’s deployment of interlopers and lingering, I consider what may be revealed as to the approach of the playwright-as-researcher. This reading considers three passages: First, the opening stage

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<sup>261</sup> Churchill, *Top Girls* (Methuen, 1982) 113.

<sup>262</sup> Double casting for characters is included with the cast list in the 1982 script. Later publications do not include this. The 2018 Methuen student edition of *Top Girls* includes an interview with the play’s original director, Max Stafford-Clark, who says that Churchill first suggested double casting and that “Dull Gret goes with Angie.” *Top Girls* (Methuen, 2018), 9.

<sup>263</sup> Description based on photograph from the 1982 production at the Royal Court Theatre, credited to Catherine Ashmore.

directions; second, Sarah's improper and outsider entrance into the space; and third, through the repeated invocation of imitations of Edith Sitwell.

### **Lingering Discourse of *Funnyhouse***

On January 14, 1964, in the East End Theatre on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Kennedy's first play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, premiered. The one-act play takes place in a dream-like space, in which a student, Sarah, in a state of heightened anxiety, encounters objects as they emerge from behind a curtain as well as figures such as Queen Victoria and Patrice Lumumba, who are also Sarah's other selves. The play takes place within what Sarah calls her funnyhouse. The play ends when Sarah seems to commit suicide by hanging.

Scholars writing in landscape dramaturgy have investigated *Funnyhouse* in more complex terms. Elinor Fuchs, for example, reads *Funnyhouse* as a descendant of the Symbolist movement, a postmodern mystery play.<sup>264</sup> Marc Robinson reads Kennedy's work alongside Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. Robinson writes,

The interiority of Kennedy's theater seems to confirm Bachelard's insistence that writers 'know the house' before attempting 'to know the universe'—for, as [Bachelard] writes, the house is our 'first cosmos' and without attending to the effects on us of its architecture, all our speculations about the outside world of experience and ideas will be mere abstractions, lacking any origin.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> See Elinor Fuchs, "Adrienne Kennedy and the First Avant-Garde," in *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*, ed. Paul K. Bryant-Jackson and Lois More Overbeck (University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 76–84.

<sup>265</sup> Marc Robinson, discussing *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by way of Bachelard. See: Marc Robinson, *The Other American Drama*, 116. See also: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Beacon Press, 1969), 5.

Key to this place-centered approach is an attention to investigation. “For all the disjointed action and rootless imagery,” Robinson writes, “*Funnyhouse* is held together by the logic of self-interrogation, by Sarah’s determination to plumb her own depths—to retrieve, name, and decode her secrets.”<sup>266</sup> An attention to with-ness as defined by Tim Ingold illuminates ways Kennedy takes the audience *with* Sarah and *with* the playwright into this place, like urban explorers.

However, reading of *Funnyhouse* as an observation of Sarah and of her inner life, was established in the first written receptions of the play, and this reading lingers. On January 2, 1964, the morning after the premiere of Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse*, *The New York Times* published its review, penned by the paper’s chief drama critic, Howard Taubman. In the review, Taubman laid the groundwork for how *Funnyhouse* would go on to be assessed and received for the next fifty-plus years: Kennedy’s play, writes Taubman, depicts “the hallucinated horrors that torment the last hours of a Negro girl.”<sup>267</sup> He continues, “Nothing much happens except that the nightmares of the girl, Sarah, are partly visualized, and the figures that haunt her days and nights take form and give expression to her secret resentment and guilt.” Kennedy’s great accomplishment, according to Taubman, is to enter the “unknown territory” of the inner mind of a Black girl. “In her intensity she reflects what it is to be a sensitive Negro.” He describes Sarah as “a Negro who cannot bear the burden of being a Negro and who is too proud to accept the patronage of the white world.”<sup>268</sup> Taubman, a white and male figure of power in 1964, assigned what he determined to be the character’s inner life after one viewing, without engaging in any way with the playwright about a play the likes of which no one had ever seen.

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<sup>266</sup> Robinson, *The Other American Drama*, 130.

<sup>267</sup> Howard Taubman, “The Theater: *Funnyhouse of a Negro*,” *The New York Times*, January 15, 1964, 25.

<sup>268</sup> Taubman, “The Theater: *Funnyhouse of a Negro*.”

Taubman's construction of the play's accomplishment of depicting the "unknown territory" of the inner life of a Black girl echoes the lingering notion of the "she-tragedy." Nearing the end of the seventeenth century in England, a popular trend within melodrama emerged that "elevated" female characters to the role of protagonist. These plays, called she-tragedies, offered a so-called peek behind the curtain into the previously hidden interiority of women, presenting to a curious audience a representational "private female sphere" on stage, which was invariably filled with suffering, despair, and ended, typically, in suicide.<sup>269</sup> These plays are generally valued as culturally and historically important because they *revealed* the "lives of women." The realm of theatre criticism and analysis is, like the social sciences, burdened by this constructed illusion of objectivity, especially when the theatre critic is a white man. The representational "peek behind the curtain" approach that positions women's inner lives as mysterious and under observation lingers within analysis of plays featuring a female protagonist.

Kennedy uses the stage as a "dream" space, one in which she examines symbols, not merely presents them or expresses an individual tortured by them. A recurring academic descriptor for the world of *Funnyhouse* is "nightmare." A search through the University of Georgia's online library of "Adrienne Kennedy" with "nightmare," for example, brings up eight hundred and ten results. Philip C. Kolin, in his biography of Kennedy, *Understanding Adrienne Kennedy*, writes that "Her plays are highly experimental, surrealistic nightmares."<sup>270</sup> A nightmare is something one is trapped in as a passive victim. It is in some way a non-serious dream. A *dream* has the capacity to be a space of imagination, processing, and creating or

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<sup>269</sup>Jean I. Marsden, "Falling Women: She-Tragedy and Sexual Spectacle," in *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660–1720* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 100–131.

<sup>270</sup> Philip C Kolin, *Understanding Adrienne Kennedy* (University of South Carolina Press, 2005), xi.

transforming ideas. “Dream” is also the word Kennedy uses in essays and interviews to describe her plays. “I see my writing as a growth of images,” Kennedy stated in a 1977 interview. “I [play] around with the images for a long period of time to try to get to the most powerful dreams.”<sup>271</sup> Kennedy, in addition, uses the word “dream-like” multiple times within *Funnyhouse*’s stage directions, whereas “nightmare,” again, is nowhere to be found. How might we approach the play if we move our framework away from “nightmare” and toward “dream,” as a mindscape in which the playwright may bring together times, places, and people to make meaning?

There are more fruitful means of analyzing Kennedy’s works beyond centering the human. As Bettie St. Pierre writes in her analysis of the positivist elements in qualitative research: “Our task . . . is to problematize the individual, the self, the human being of humanism rather than to perpetuate it; “to cultivate an attention to the conditions under which things become evident . . . and therefore seemingly fixed, necessary, and unchangeable.”<sup>272</sup> Landscape theory offers ways to discuss plays that, as Fuchs writes, “forestall[s] the immediate (and crippling) leap to character and normative psychology that underwrites much dramatic criticism.”<sup>273</sup> We might better support Kennedy’s stated mission in writing plays, which she touched on in 1977, saying, “It’s really about figuring out the *why* of things—that is, if that is even possible.”<sup>274</sup>

Kennedy has called her plays “autobiographical,” but they are not memoirs. For example, in *Funnyhouse*, the main character, Sarah, states, “I am an English major, as my mother was

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<sup>271</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, “A Growth of Images,” interview by Lisa Lehman, *The Drama Review* 21, no. 4 (1977), 44.

<sup>272</sup> E.A. St. Pierre, “Refusing Human Being in Humanist Qualitative Inquiry,” in *Qualitative inquiry and the Global Crisis*, ed. N.K. Denzin and M.D. Giardina (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>273</sup> Elinor Fuchs, “EF’s Visit to a Small Planet,” 5.

<sup>274</sup> Kennedy, “A Growth of Images,” 44.

when she went to school in Atlanta.”<sup>275</sup> This is not factually the case for Kennedy, who has stated that she *wanted* to be an English major like her mother before her. However, according to Kennedy, Ohio State’s English department excluded Black students from entering and majoring, and would not allow these students in for another fifteen years.<sup>276</sup> She thus majored in education and was “very unhappy.” In an interview when she was fifty years old, when asked what in her youth had marked her, she named that time at Ohio State. “Yes,” she said, “my anger is still very much a part of me.”<sup>277</sup>

Kennedy, as a playwright, situates the audience *with* her. This approach detaches the audience from perceiving performances as observation chambers and instead privileges strategies through which the playwright is investigating, calling on the audience to join in with her in search of “the why of things.”<sup>278</sup>

### ***Funnyhouse*’s Uncanny Curtain**

The opening stage directions of *Funnyhouse* position the importance of the *curtain* as well as movement of a person and an object moving, in relationship to the curtain, in space. It is worthwhile to consider the entire opening stage directions:

BEGINNING: Before the closed Curtain a Woman dressed in a white nightgown walks across the Stage carrying before her a bald head. She moves as one in a trance and is mumbling something inaudible to herself. Her hair is wild, straight, and black and falls to

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<sup>275</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 8.

<sup>276</sup> Adrienne Kennedy Interview, Uploaded January 27, 2015.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3aWvyWWPIw&ab\\_channel=CanaanKennedy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3aWvyWWPIw&ab_channel=CanaanKennedy)

<sup>277</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, “A MELUS Interview: Adrienne Kennedy,” interview by Wolfgang Binder, MELUS 12, no. 3 (1985): 107.

<sup>278</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, “A Growth of Images,” 42.

her waist. As she moves, she gives the effect of one in a dream. . . . Before she has barely vanished, the CURTAIN opens. It is a white satin Curtain of a cheap material and a ghostly white, a material that brings to mind the interior of a cheap casket, parts of it are frayed and look as if it has been gnawed by rats.<sup>279</sup>

As an opening stage direction, positioning the action in *front* of the closed curtain functions for more than aesthetics or setting a mood. This stage direction establishes where this play is taking place—in the public sphere. And as there is a space *in front of* the curtain, there is a space *behind* the curtain. The description of the curtain also does the work of establishing a surface or a skin across the world, in the same way that the insistent description of traveling along the surface does in the opening pages of *Top Girls*. Kennedy achieves this by lingering at the description of the curtain, capitalizing Curtain such that it has a presence as a figure. Moreover, in a visceral description, she bestows it a violent past: “It is a white satin Curtain of a cheap material and a ghostly white, a material that brings to mind the interior of a cheap casket, parts of it are frayed and look as if it has been gnawed by rats.”<sup>280</sup> The Curtain recalls Gertrude Stein’s writing on nervousness and syncopation, with the curtain itself creating the anxiety of the known and the unknown. A coffin is a site of eternal rest, and the curtain, mirroring the inside of a cheap coffin, positions us within an uneasy site in which to linger.

### **Cracking the *Funnyhouse***

As mentioned, Chaudhuri reads Modernist plays as marked by their relationship to yearning to leave home, wherein “simple *departure* becomes [every characters’] overriding

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<sup>279</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 5.

<sup>280</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 5.

mission and desire.”<sup>281</sup> Geopathology is helpful in reading works by playwrights who read America and its ideology in terms of place. Chaudhuri discusses ways Black playwrights have used “doubling” as a means of encountering both America and history on stage. For example, Suzan-Lori Parks’, Chaudhuri writes, locates America “in a grave” in *The America Play* and *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* by way of its setting as “A Great Hole of History.” This echoes *Funnyhouse*’s opening stage directions that situate the curtain as the material of a cheap coffin. Both *The Colored Museum* and *Funnyhouse*, in their titles, to “a decidedly unhomelike construction of America, as a realm of images distorted by ideology (museum) or technology (funnyhouse).”<sup>282</sup> By using doubling, Kennedy spatializes the internalization of white supremacy and colonial ideology within the body and psyche as a navigable house of mirrors.

A heterotopian lens reveals a figure in *Funnyhouse* who willfully *enters into* a problem place, resituating Sarah as not a victim, but a virago. As a work of representational theatre, *Funnyhouse* bridges a space between modernism and postmodernism, and it is infused with geopathology. For example, Sarah, the central character, has an affinity with Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, one of Kennedy’s inspirations. Here, I am applying Foucault’s *first* conception of heterotopia, as a means of entering, navigating, and reading discourses from the inside.

Rather than peek behind the curtain at a suffering hidden figure, Kennedy’s early stage directions make it clear that it is the figure of Sarah, who is also “The Negro,” who *enters* through the wall or curtain to the unseen space, and we travel with her. The uncanny collusion is between the playwright (Kennedy), the audience, and a fictional figure, that of a female hero, a

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<sup>281</sup> Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 56.

<sup>282</sup> Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 122.

virago. It is, of course, an impossible collusion; for it to happen requires the audience to enter a state of becoming fictional. The stage direction for Sarah's entrance *into* the world of the play begins with an interloper who is not *of* this space, but it is a space in which she may be legible and be received. The name of this figure is only "A CHARACTER," who enters through a white square wall. She is not only nameless, but faceless, with red blood "on the part that would be her face." The stage directions read,

*(Now the LIGHT is focused on a single white square wall that is to the Left of the Stage, that is suspended and stands alone, of about five feet in dimension and width. It stands with the narrow part facing the audience. A CHARACTER steps through. She is a faceless, dark character with a hangman's rope about her neck and red blood on the part that would be her face. She is the NEGRO. The most noticeable aspect of her looks is her wild kinky hair. It is a ragged head with a patch of hair missing from the crown which the NEGRO carries in her hand. She is dressed in black. She steps slowly through the wall, stands still before it and begins her monologue:)*<sup>283</sup>

Having entered into the funnyhouse through a site that seems improper (the white square implies a window), the figure is now legible and no longer faceless. She has a name, "Sarah," and is able to speak.

Sarah is not revealed on the stage, she does not enter from off-stage. She *steps through, slowly*, "through the wall."<sup>284</sup> She is the only figure in this piece who is described first and foremost as "A CHARACTER." In the final moments of the play, one of the walls collapses and

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<sup>283</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 7.

<sup>284</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 7.

Sarah's father's hand "rushes upon her." The stage direction reads, "THE LIGHT GOES BLACK and we see her hanging in the room."<sup>285</sup>

At this point, her identity returns to the unnamed figure, reversing the order she entered through. Stage directions indicate that as she stands still as the walls fall she is no longer Sarah, but returns to "the NEGRO." Raymond, ostensibly Sarah's boyfriend, observes "her hanging figure." He continues to say, "She always a funny little liar."<sup>286</sup> Considering the work as a heterotopia helps to illuminate this moment of our interloper and virago (and us with her) departing the derelict site.

Like Dull Gret, Sarah is an interloper, a character who enters into a hell. She is a virago. Wearing a hangman's noose around her neck and "red blood on the part that would be her face," she is dressed for the role she is playing and also evokes an image of a warrior entering battle. Sarah, like Angie (and Dull Gret), positions herself as a failed female subject. Angie is a failed female teenager; Sarah positions herself as a failed Black woman and failed white woman. Both are failed daughters. This outsider status allows Sarah to move through this discursive landscape and not be subsumed by it. Adrienne Kennedy holds the audience with her at this site, present with the absence here on the other side of the curtain, the inside of the coffin.

### **Imitation and Poaching: *Funnyhouse* in conversation with Edith Sitwell's *Façade***

Words, actions, and gestures follow the established model of "insistence" as drawn from Gertrude Stein. In *Funnyhouse*, Kennedy leans into the anxiety, syncopation, and nervousness brought on by the physical curtain and the presence of the unknown. Kennedy deploys insistence

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<sup>285</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 24.

<sup>286</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 24.

of selves, wherein Sarah, Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria, and Jesus, speak a shared text, holding the space and making it navigable as it decays around her and us, the audience. In this section, I use the heterotopian model to consider a small act of insistence that is often overlooked. This is the repeated invocation of an imitation of Edith Sitwell.

There are two overlooked moments within the speech act of Sarah and one of Sarah's "selves," Patrice Lumumba. The first occurs immediately following CHARACTER's improper entrance into the space through what seems to be reminiscent of a window. Once within this space, this faceless unnamed figure is now the NEGRO. This figure's first speech invokes the act of filling a space with imitation;

NEGRO: As for myself I long to become even a more pallid Negro than I am now: pallid like Negros on the covers of American Negro magazines; soulless, educated and irreligious. I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity. . . . I am graduated from a city college and have occasional work in libraries, but mostly spend my days preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper. I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Edith Sitwell.<sup>287</sup>

Her speech continues for some time. After this first speech by the character identified as Negro comes a second transformation of the same figure, now named in the script as "Sarah (Negro)."<sup>288</sup> This transformation happens in concert with her speaking as well as the action of entering the space through the white square/wall by Duchess, Queen Victoria, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba, each identified as "one of her selves" in the cast list.

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<sup>287</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 8.

<sup>288</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 9. This character is listed as Negro-Sarah in the cast list preceding the play.

This invocation of imitations of Sitwell's poetry happens a second time, creating an effect of doubling or a mirror. Patrice Lumumba, one of Sarah's selves, speaks a mirror of Sarah's first two speeches. The components are virtually identical, but are spoken using more terse and violent language. Further establishing this mirroring, two of Sarah's other selves, the Duchess and Victoria, both pick up mirrors and look at themselves. As with Sarah's first speech (when she speaks as the character "Negro") in this monologue, Patrice Lumumba is "The unidentified Man."<sup>289</sup> He says, "I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Sitwell."<sup>290</sup> Patrice Lumumba expresses the monologue as not a repetition but an insistence of her act. Patrice Lumumba says,

MAN (Patrice Lumumba): But mostly I spend my vile days preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper. I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Sitwell. It is my vile dream to live in rooms with European antiques . . . <sup>291</sup>

How might Edith Sitwell fit into the play beyond being a reference to a poet? What does Kennedy mean by "imitation"? I will examine these statements not in terms of these two characters imitating an author's *style* (Edith Sitwell's), but imitating the realm of Sitwell's poetry, the experimental poetry-music-performance piece, *Façade: An Entertainment*.

### **Imitation as Subversion: Reading *Funnyhouse* with Edith Sitwell's *Façade***

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<sup>289</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 15.

<sup>290</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 15.

<sup>291</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 15.

*Funnyhouse*'s first director, Michael Kahn, stated in an interview in *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theater of Adrienne Kennedy*, "Every word with Adrienne counts."<sup>292</sup> With this in mind, let us consider Kennedy's repeated invocation of imitation within the play.

After the "figure," who is named only CHARACTER, climbs through the window-like wooden square and enters into the space, she is, for the duration of her first monologue, named the Negro. In her second speech, immediately following it, she is Sarah (Negro). "I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Edith Sitwell."<sup>293</sup> Following this monologue, characters who are her Selves enter the stage "through the wall," including Queen Victoria and Patrice Lumumba. The stage directions describe Patrice Lumumba as follows: "A black man. His head appears to be split in two with blood and tissue in his eyes. He carries an ebony mask."<sup>294</sup> Four scenes later, the man, who is both Patrice Lumumba and one of Sarah's selves, returns out of the darkness. He speaks in the form of a monologue or speech, as Sarah does; the effects of his words almost match Sarah's, but the phrasing is harsher and more brusque.

This repeated sentiment (filling white pages with imitations of Sitwell) has been understood to be a reflection of Sarah's artistic or socially performative goals or as an indication that the character yearns to be an eccentric white British poet. Ben Brantley, for example, writing in 1995, writes that Sarah's "ambition, we learn, is to write like Edith Sitwell."<sup>295</sup> Paul Carter Harrison identifies these imitations as attempts to insulate Sarah from the Black community.<sup>296</sup> In *The Christian Science Monitor*'s review of *Funnyhouse*'s 1964 premiere, Louis Chapin wrote

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<sup>292</sup> Michael Kahn, interviewed in *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theater of Adrienne Kennedy*.

<sup>293</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 8.

<sup>294</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 9.

<sup>295</sup> Ben Brantley, "THEATER REVIEW; Glimpsing Solitude In Worlds Black and White." *The New York Times*, September 25, 1995.

<sup>296</sup> Paul Carter Harrison, "The Crisis of Black Theatre Identity," *African American Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 567–78.

of the passage but inserted an ellipse at the point of the imitation of Sitwell: “Billie Allen in a quite exquisite performance as Sarah, responded to all these with a certain tortured grace. Eloquent is her admission, as an English major, that she is a ‘poet . . . writing white page after white page: I am a fortress against the recognition of myself.’”<sup>297</sup> The notion across articles about *Funnyhouse* is shown in David Krasner’s article on *Funnyhouse*, when he writes, “This is not so much a rejection of Sarah’s race as it is an effort to emulate a fellow poet who . . . took eccentricity seriously. Sarah, another eccentric, identifies with Sitwell’s eccentricities regardless of race.”<sup>298</sup>

Imitate is, of course, another polysemous word, and generally means to copy. Kennedy invoked this use of imitation when she described Tennessee Williams’s influence on her early work, including her first play, *Pale Blue Flowers*. “It took ten years to stop imitating him,” she writes in her 1987 memoir, *People Who Led to My Plays*, “to stop using his form and to stop stealing his themes, which were not mine.”<sup>299</sup>

Mimesis, derived from the Greek word meaning “to imitate,” is central to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, which is “an imitation of an action that is serious, and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself.”<sup>300</sup> A heterotopian performative is an interloper. As such, unlike the tragedy, is non-serious. It is also a site that is without magnitude, an emptied and hollowed place. As Sarah and Patrice Lumumba invoke poetry, let us consider, instead, Samuel Coleridge’s writing on the subject. Coleridge defined poetry as an imitative art. “The

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<sup>297</sup> Louis Chapin, “*Funnyhouse of a Negro*.” *The Christian Science Monitor* (January 17, 1964): 2.

<sup>298</sup> David Krasner, 2019. “Expectation, Melancholy, and Loss: *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *Dutchman* in the Year 1964.” *Theatre Journal* 71, no. 1: 49.

<sup>299</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, *The People Who Led to My Plays* (New York: NY Theatre Communications Group, 1996).

<sup>300</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 2320.

composition of a poem is among the imitative arts,” he writes. “And that imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or the different throughout a base radically the same.”<sup>301</sup> Homi K. Bhabha writes that mimicry has a subversive and destabilizing potential. Mimicry, Bhabha writes, is “a double vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority,” a dangerous process that threatens the colonizer’s perception in that, through imitation, “the observer becomes the observed.”<sup>302</sup> Sarah and Patrice Lumumba’s insistent act of imitation of Sitwell (“filling white page after white page”<sup>303</sup>) performs this subversive imitation, this interfusion of the “radically the same” in surprisingly ways.

Approaching imitation through a heterotopian lens, what does it mean to imitate *work* by Sitwell, and linger within it? Consider Edith Sitwell’s only performance-based work, *Façade: An Entertainment*.<sup>304</sup> Sitwell was a British Modernist poet, a wealthy eccentric, and a friend of Gertrude Stein’s. *Façade: An Entertainment*, was performed by Sitwell off and on beginning in 1922 to as late as 1950 at the Aldeburgh Festival,<sup>305</sup> and is considered a key work of the British avant-garde movement. It is a collection of about twenty or so poems, which are recited by Sitwell. Importantly, Sitwell is seated behind a painted curtain during the performance, hidden from the audience. She recites her poems through a large open circle, which is cut out in a way to resemble a massive mouth of a figure painted on the curtain. Also hidden behind the curtain with Sitwell is a small orchestra, who play music that matches the tone and rhythm of the poems.

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<sup>301</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria with his Aesthetical Essays*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 58.

<sup>302</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (1984): 129.

<sup>303</sup> Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 15.

<sup>304</sup> Edith Sitwell, *Façade* (London: Duckworth, 1987).

<sup>305</sup> Uncredited, “From Our Music Critic: Aldeburgh Festival” *Times*, 24 June 1950, p. 2. *The Times* Digital Archive.

Sitwell's *Façade* is, in a way, also a one-woman show with other performers. As with *Funnyhouse*, which runs forty-five minutes and is twenty pages long, the size of *Façade* is small. *Façade* is composed of twenty poems, which Sitwell wrote as a kind of virtuosic challenge to herself in rhythm and sound. Each poem's rhythm matches a particular musical style popular to the time, 1922, including a waltz and tarantella. *Funnyhouse*'s first run was for fewer than fifty performances, yet it was attended by many notable playwrights and actors and has been deeply influential for many experimental playwrights. *Façade* was also performed only a handful of times across a twenty-five-year period, yet it is considered a significant work of British avant-garde and was attended by the likes of Noel Coward and Virginia Woolf, both of whom incorporated inspiration from the piece into their own works.<sup>306</sup>

By giving the performance of her poetry a title, charging money for tickets, and presenting it on a theatrical stage with a gesture toward a set and a start and end time, Sitwell destabilized the established expectations for both a theatrical performance and a poetry reading. In performance, Sitwell and a small orchestra were positioned behind a painted stage curtain, unseen by the audience. Sitwell recited each poem through a large megaphone, matching her rhythm to the music, which William Walton composed in collaboration with Sitwell and matched the popular music of the time. Sitwell recited the poetry through a hole cut out in the curtain that was, on the other side, made to look like a massive circular mouth. Between the seated audience and this curtain was an empty stage. The first public performance of *Façade* took place on June

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<sup>306</sup> Noel Coward's 1923 musical review, *London Calling!*, features a character named Hernia Whittlebot, parodying Edith Sitwell, who recites poorly written poetry over strange music and is subsequently shooed off stage. In 1925 he also published a book of poetry under the name Hernia Whittlebot, and performed "as" Hernia on the radio. For more on Sitwell as a celebrity figure, see Faye Hammill's article, "Noël Coward and the Sitwells: Enmity, Celebrity, Popularity." *Journal of Modern Literature* 39, no. 1 (2015): 129–48.

12, 1923, at 3:15 p.m. in the Aeolian Hall on Bond Street in London. Reviews were dismissive and accused Edith and her brothers of an elaborate joke at the expense of the audience.<sup>307</sup>

*Façade* also ascribes the curtain with a dramatic presence. The curtain that blocked the audience's view of Sitwell and the musicians was painted in its initial rendering to depict a massive painting of a strange face, along with the word "Facade." According to a reviewer from *Vanity* at the time, the first version of the painted curtain, by Frank Dobson, keenly depicts a a long face. The image painted on the curtain also harkens to an African mask: The skin of the painted face is brown like carved wood. The eyes are white and pupil-less, and its hair appears woolly. The face or mask painted on the curtain has a long nose, a long chin, and a massive circular hole for a mouth. The image of the floating head is below an arch, flanked by two Greek pillars. The gender of the bodiless face/mask is unclear. The word FACADE is painted in capital letters such that it appears to be cascading down the curtain, below the face. There is a potted plant. Beneath the column on the right is second, smaller face that appears more obviously akin to an African mask.

This image on *Façade*'s curtain went through a number of incarnations. The final curtain was commissioned in 1946, twenty-six years after the first performance. This curtain was designed by John Piper, an artist who designed sets for operas and stained-glass windows for cathedrals. He was known for his work as an official war artist, painting destroyed and bombed-out churches and cathedrals during World War II.<sup>308</sup> Where the first curtain harkened to a carnival's entrance or a strange mask, *this* curtain by Piper evokes a complete landscape of a

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<sup>307</sup> Gerald Cumberland, "Façade: A New Entertainment." *Vogue* (1923), 36.

<sup>308</sup> For more on John Piper's life and work, see the documentary *An Empty Stage. An Empty Stage*, directed Rupert Dixon (2014; Goldmark Gallery), YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPEW0D2GJJ0&ab\\_channel=GoldmarkGallery](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPEW0D2GJJ0&ab_channel=GoldmarkGallery).

dream-like, mythical England, with a castle and steeple in the distance and the moon above. Floating in the sky is the large visage of a bearded man, who seems to emerge from the clouds. This face is reminiscent of the carvings of “green men” or foliate head on the sides of English churches, the kind of god-like pagan faces that would have vines growing from their mouths and eyes. While Piper’s curtain retains the huge circular hole through which Sitwell set up her Sengerphone, the figure depicted on the curtain creates a sense of its own *presence*, emerging from a landscape and out of Sitwell’s language.<sup>309</sup>

Recurring images, imagery and objects within *Funnyhouse* are also found in *Façade*. These include the presence of Queen Victoria in both, as well as racialized imagery and tropes.<sup>310</sup> The imagery of *Funnyhouse* is manifest through language as well as design and objects on stage. *Funnyhouse* was adapted as an audio play for BBC Radio and broadcast on December 29, 1964 with its original actress, Billie Allen, in the role of Sarah.<sup>311</sup> Without the striking imagery of masks, hair, and costumes, the attention of listeners would be on the insistence across the spoken dialogue. Of relevance to *Funnyhouse* is the racially charged component in Sitwell’s poems that make up *Façade*. *Funnyhouse* holds these objects up to scrutiny as uncanny, whereas for Sitwell, the racial epithets in her poems are texture and flourishes of colonial identity. Throughout *Façade*, Marsha Bryant writes, “Sitwell employs images of Africans and Asians for comic effects, unsettling English propriety, and imperial unity while simultaneously reinforcing

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<sup>309</sup> Piper’s curtain was used as the image for the cover for Walton’s record of the *Façade* music.

<sup>310</sup> The opening poem recited by Sitwell in *Façade* is titled “Hornpipe.” In it, Queen Victoria is invoked first as a ship’s name and then as the ruler Queen Victoria. The poem is thick with racist imagery, including a Black “Lady Venus,” described as a “shady lady.” Queen Victoria describes the Venus figure as a “minx” and “hot as any hottentot.” Edith Sitwell, *Façade* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 19.

<sup>311</sup> *Funnyhouse of a Negro* listing, BBC Programme Index, <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/496df7ad297740a6b16c8110f3508020>.

racial stereotypes.”<sup>312</sup> Moreover, “while a few poems employ race to question social norms, the sequence as a whole tends to reinscribe racial stereotypes of the time.”<sup>313</sup> As part of a press release for her performance at the Museum of Modern Art in 1948, Sitwell wrote, “The poems in *Façade* are abstract patterns . . . . The poems tell no story, convey no moral. Some have a violent exhilaration.”<sup>314</sup> While it may be devoid of a narrative, Sitwell’s language aligns blackness and darkness to represent negativity. Images of mythologized and exoticized African women run throughout Sitwell’s poems, presented in racially charged epithets, including hottentots and shady ladies.<sup>315</sup> The “abstract pattern” of Sitwell’s *Façade* performs an episteme; as a heterotopian interloper, *Funnyhouse* lingers within this abstract pattern of thinking and desiccates it from the inside out.

### ***Funnyhouse* and Patrice Lumumba**

*Funnyhouse of a Negro* is a play in which we can see characters enter the “empty space” of the stage. The play also lingers within a “gap” in history, specifically the year Patrice Lumumba had been disappeared and suspected to have been murdered, yet no trace of his body could be found. It was during that year, in 1961, while living in West Africa, that Kennedy wrote

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<sup>312</sup> Marsha Bryant, “Sitwell Beyond the Semiotic: Gender, Race, and Empire in *Façade*,” in *The Many Facades of Edith Sitwell*, ed. Allan Pero and Gyllian Phillips, 94–120. (University Press of Florida, 2017), 95.

<sup>313</sup> Bryant, “Sitwell Beyond the Semiotic,” 96.

<sup>314</sup> Edith Sitwell, Museum of Modern Art press release for *Façade*, Museum of Modern Art digital archives, [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/1290/releases/MOMA\\_1949\\_0004\\_1949-01-14\\_490114-4.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/1290/releases/MOMA_1949_0004_1949-01-14_490114-4.pdf), 1948,

<sup>315</sup> Words related to “black” and Blackness occur in spoken dialogue, stage directions, and descriptions more than one hundred times in *Funnyhouse*. Across Edith Sitwell’s twenty poems in *Façade*, the author invokes black, darkness, and race more than fifty times.

this play. Pregnant and caring for her young son, she stayed at the Ambassador Hotel, still “terribly Victorian” in style, with African waiters speaking in British accents. At this high end hotel in Ghana at the end of 1960, “probably a month or a couple of months earlier,” Kennedy recalls, “only the British could eat there.”<sup>316</sup>

In the first month of the year Kennedy wrote *Funnyhouse* while living in Ghana, 1961, former Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and African nationalist, Patrice Lumumba, disappeared. It would be eleven months before the United Nations released its report stating that the government of Belgium was responsible for his death. It would be decades before a soldier would confess to destroying his body, and Belgium returned Lumumba’s remains—a single tooth—to his family.<sup>317</sup> *Funnyhouse* was written in that year, beginning in West Africa and then completed in Rome. The heterotopian site of *Funnyhouse* allows for an engagement with this absence of a lost year, a missing hero, and missing hope.<sup>318</sup> During that year, 1961, it was clear that several countries with colonial interests in the Congo could have assassinated Lumumba, among them Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States. The unseen suspects were both everywhere and nowhere, unseen, hidden. Thirty-nine years later, in 2000, the Belgian police commissioner confessed that he had dismembered Lumumba’s body and then

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<sup>316</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, “And I saw, I can do this. A 2014 Interview with Playwright Adrienne Kennedy,” by M. Lynn Weiss, *The Common Reader*, 2014, <https://commonreader.wustl.edu/c/and-i-saw-i-can-do-this/>.

<sup>317</sup> Ari Shapiro, Ashish Valentine, Jonaki Mehta, “Belgium returned a single tooth to the Congo this week. Here’s why,” *NPR*, July 1, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/21/1106280226/belgium-colonialism-democratic-republic-congo-lumumba-tooth>.

<sup>318</sup> Kennedy’s interest in 1961 in Ghana continued decades later in her play *She Talks to Beethoven*. Set in that place and year, a character waits for her husband—a poet, professor, and possible renegade—who has mysteriously disappeared.

dissolved the remains in acid. But that was long after the year in which Kennedy wrote *Funnyhouse*.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I turned my analysis to two established experimental plays to see what a heterotopian lens might illuminate that may have been missed over the succeeding decades. This chapter complicated the nature of interlopers and what it means to imitate, expanding the application beyond copying or mimesis. By deploying non-linguistic, non-representational elements of exclusion (the stage curtain, the wall, and the slash) and effectively operating with a *peculiar* space, the plays are able to encounter the *genre* they are within. They are in the present. It is not possible to imagine a *different* future, different structures, before we reckon and move through the structures in which we are currently bound. There are implications for playwriting studies. What is the role of the playwright? Where is the playwright in performance? Paradoxically, the playwright in her act of disappearance holds onto a stronger rhetorical presence. This chapter also expands the possibilities of the interloper and imitation through identifying the playwrights' uses of the forms themselves as imitations of two derelict structures and then lingering within them.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**CARE AND A THREE-PART BODY:**  
**AUTHORING HETEROTOPIAS AS TRIPTYCHS**

**Introduction**

Throughout the previous three chapters, I have developed heterotopia as a meta-literary device that may be examined within embodied performance, as an entanglement of figure (interloper), action (lingering), and uncanny world-building. On the page, a heterotopia is able to quietly enter a text through the guise of an amusing, non-serious, and uncanny interloper and, through the shared act of reading, it holds a space as it speaks back to and wears away the foundational assumptions that make the surrounding text possible. I have observed that a heterotopia in literature and performance requires an act of double-authoring: First, authoring a seemingly neutral and normative narrative that uses an established order of thinking, and second, authoring the passage that ruptures this narrative and sustains a site that is both within and separated from the first author's text. This second authorship requires labor, first of intrusion into the text and then of lingering. This labor cannot be sustained alone. I am continuing this study's inquiry into heterotopia applied in theatrical performance, asking: What narrative is simultaneously constructed and entered as an interloper? How does the interloper linger within that text? How are participants brought into a collusion of lingering? What phenomena emerge in the space sustained through this shared entanglement?

The past three chapters have illuminated more easily distinguished acts of entering into spaces as non-serious interlopers (such as Robert Filliou's peddler, Alison Knowles' "dressing"

her daughter as a book, and *Top Girls* positioned as an imitation of a well-made play). In this final chapter, I identify the interlopers as the form itself (“baby theatre”) within the narrative of theatre proper. By entering into this discourse in a non-serious way, this form is able to introduce and sustain a new scheme for playmaking, involving a three-part audience of performer, participant, and companion. I term this heterotopian scheme and posthumanist relationship a *triptych*. This is feasible through the disruptive and transformative presence of *care* within the discourse of theatre.

First, I will consider the aesthetic and cultural discourse surrounding and attached to Theatre for the Very Young, very young child, and motherhood. I then introduce the triptych theatre model, based on a linked, three-part audience, who perform performer, participant, and companion. I examine relational strategies of the triptych across three superimposed senses: as a three-part, linked audience; as a three-part linked threshold; and as a three-part, linked wax tablet on which to collectively write. I will examine how this act of linkage and performance relieves participants of their ascribed definitions and allows them to move as a three-part body.

### **Temporal Rest through Disruptive Care**

In previous chapters, I have positioned selected approaches in spatial relationship to artistic and theatrical movements these works are sometimes categorized within. For this final chapter, I look to Allan Kaprow, the credited originator of the Happenings artistic movement. In a transcribed interview, Kaprow recalled the origins of Happenings as his response to the limitations of the gallery space, namely the need to avoid “a caesura” of the gallery walls.

Kaprow says,

I complained immediately about the fact that there was a sense of mystery until your eye reached a wall. Then there was a dead end. At that point my disagreement with the gallery space began. I thought how much better it would be if you could just go out of doors and float an Environment into the rest of life so that such a caesura would not be there.<sup>319</sup>

By “a caesura,” Kaprow is referring to the sudden stop brought on by the presence of the gallery walls. His response to this physical and figurative wall was to leave the gallery, such that art might spill forth into “the rest of life.” In this final chapter, I would like to examine theatrical works that do not spill forth out into the world, but rather find access into the “rest” of the caesura and *linger*. The effect of this lingering, I suggest, is a manifestation of what Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg call “kinship imaginaries.”<sup>320</sup> In these works, the presence of *care* as an interloper in the theatre invites audience and performers’ identities and roles to be undone and reconfigured as a three-part audience. To support this analysis, along with landscape as my framework, I draw from disability theory, particularly Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s writing on the normate and deviance and Arseli Dokumaci’s critical disability theory of people as affordances.

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<sup>319</sup> Allan Kaprow, “A Statement,” in *Physical Theaters: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Keefe and Simon Murray (Routledge, 2007), 106.

<sup>320</sup> Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg, “Reverberations: Disability and the New Kinship Imaginary,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2011): 379–410.

## Access Intimacy, Care Intimacy, and the Triptych Audience

Beginning during the Covid-19 pandemic, care emerged as a focal point for research across disciplines, and continues now.<sup>321</sup>

In his lecture “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” Foucault identifies a theater’s “rectangle of the stage” as a spatial heterotopia site (that is, a counter-site able to hold multiple conflicting sites and times in one place).<sup>322</sup> However, while able to hold several incompatible spaces, the theater/theatre as a socio-cultural site requires the existence of those who are excluded as audience in order for it to maintain its borders. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson coins “normate” to situate the necessary, deviant, outsider. The normate, she writes, is “the veiled subject position of the cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries. The term designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings.”<sup>323</sup> Bodies marked as disabled are always already out of place in sites of order. Within a theater’s audience, certain populations are *already* viewed as interlopers, and their presence as audience is already culturally perceived as non-serious.

To experience a performance fully thus requires access. Writing from the positionality of a disabled person, Mia Mingus locates “access intimacy” as a phenomenon she has experienced and realizes she requires. It is “that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a

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<sup>321</sup> For an exploration of the thematics and temporalities of care and carework, see *Theatre Journal* special topics issue, “Care, Carework, and Performance,” ed. Laura Edmondson, February 2025.

<sup>322</sup> “Of Other Spaces,” 6.

<sup>323</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

purely access level.”<sup>324</sup> In 2020, Arseli Dokumaci proposed a disability theory that conceptualized Mingus’s notion of access intimacy at its “most fluid,” as what she calls care intimacy.<sup>325</sup> Examining the entanglement of relationships of care in fieldwork with people with chronic pain and mobility-related disabilities and their caregivers, Dokumaci coins “people as affordances” to describe every-day world-building, when “people can enable the emergence of, or directly become, affordances for one another, especially where no other affordances exist.”<sup>326</sup>

As an example of people as affordances, Dokumaci interviews a student in Turkey who is unable to walk to school due to the pain and inflammation in his feet and the lack of structural means of access, such as a wheelchair, public transportation, or smooth-surfaced roads. With no other means of access available, his father provides his body as an affordance for his son, carrying him across the uneven and dangerous path so that his son has access to his education.<sup>327</sup> This intervention and performance of affordance by the father creates what I see as a posthumanist entanglement of care.

Care thus functions as an interloper, an uninvited guest, in the theatrical space. It destabilizes and reimagines new ways of thinking about performance, spectatorship, and perspective. When applied in theatrical sites, access may be realized through people as affordances, reconfiguring the audience into what I term a *triptych*, a three-part fellowship composed of three linked roles: performer, participant, and companion. Through attention and

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<sup>324</sup> Mia Mingus, “Access Intimacy: The Missing Link,” 2011,

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>.

<sup>325</sup> Arseli Dokumaci, “People as Affordances: Building Disability Worlds through Care Intimacy,” *Current Anthropology*, 61, no. S21 (2020): S97.

<sup>326</sup> Dokumaci, “People as Affordances,” S97.

<sup>327</sup> Dokumaci, “People as Affordances,” S98.

relationship linked at its central member, this triptych audience is able to traverse beyond ordered thinking, sustaining and navigating a landscape of rest.

Through this triptych audience, performer and caregiver perform what Dokumaci's critical disability theory of affordances helps illuminate the intimate, transformative, and linked relationship that emerges for access to be possible in three selected works of what Tim Webb terms "sensory theatre," works of theatre for audiences deemed hard or impossible to reach.<sup>328</sup> I will conclude by reflecting on an effort to explore the triptych model through praxis.

### **Theatre for the Very Young**

Baby theatre, known as Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) in the United States and Theatre for Early Years (TEY) in Europe and elsewhere, is a mode of theatre-making that privileges the presence of a historically excluded group as members of its audience and centers this group's humanity. TVY refuses to play into teleological narratives on which both theatre and notions of human development are built. As a heterotopian performative, the triptych audience—of central audience member, companion, and performer—resists the flow of discourse through their linked act of attention. In this first section, I examine anxiety around order-making at three performance thresholds: the performance of motherhood in public spaces, the contested subject of who counts as a legitimate audience member in performance, and the notion that theatre for children must serve either an educational or entertainment function, that is the development of children into legitimate citizens.

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<sup>328</sup> Tim Webb, *Sensory Theatre: How to Make Interactive, Inclusive, Immersive Theatre for Diverse Audiences by a Founder of Oily Cart* (Routledge, 2023), e-book.

Audience is a contested site, particularly in performance. A theater is a site of rules and hierarchies, and this population has historically been marked in theatre spaces as unwelcome, disruptive, and unable to receive work meaningfully within established norms. The shortened name, Baby Theatre, heightens the form's reception as non-serious.

Popular discourse around TVY has been largely limited to discussions of entertainment or notions of child development. These conversations have the power to either affirm baby theatre's ontological legitimacy or to further prevent it from thriving in the United States. As a result, visibility politics centers the theatrical space as solely a site for interventions, which negate the lived experience of this audience. To unpack this, I will first examine the problematic ways in which baby theatre is often discussed in popular media and scholarship (mainly focusing on the United States) by using Sianne Ngai's analysis of minor aesthetics (interesting, cute, and zany) to investigate how we try to "solve" baby theatre by making it utilitarian, a novelty, a trend, or part of a large-scale avant-garde art project.

If any theatre-making methodology were to be categorized as an interloper, it would be TVY. While baby theatre has been practiced globally for the past forty years, there has yet to emerge a coherent framework for conceptualizing its power and potential as a site of not only artistic expression, but for the shared making of meaning. Part of the reason for this is the curious reluctance of the media, particularly in America, to write about it as anything more than a novelty. Production companies, saddled with justifying funding to grant makers and stakeholders, face similar problems in talking about baby theatre, often resorting to extolling its utilitarian educational benefits to the children rather than discussing it as an artform in itself.

Baby theatre is generally considered to have emerged as a phenomenon around 1978, when the London-based Theatre Kit began crafting shows for audiences under five years old,

after the artistic director witnessed her young niece frightened in the theatre.<sup>329</sup> Others in the United Kingdom began to develop this subset of children's theatre aimed at infants and toddlers up to four years old. Since that time, well over a hundred companies have created work around the globe, notably in Europe, but also throughout Asia, Australia, and the United States. International baby theatre festivals, such as Toronto's WeeFestival, are held annually. These works range widely in styles from dance to immersive sensorial journeys to abstract installations to adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Over time companies have become more focused in terms of both the ages of the young children (such as work for babies under one year of age) and to their specific modes of experience. Creators such as Oily Cart have developed works following the same audience for young audiences up to the age of nineteen years old who have complex needs such as autism, learning disabilities or sensorial limitations including blindness and deafness. To approach this practice more inclusively, Oily Cart's co-founder Tim Web collectively refers to this work as sensory theatre.

In Europe, interest and research into baby theatre is flourishing. The Small Size Network is an international arts organization founded in 2007 with the aim to widen the performing arts for early years (ages newborn to six) and to promote training, documentation, and partnership programs. (As of this writing, The Small Size network has ninety-one members across five continents and thirty-five countries.<sup>330</sup> The United States is, however, noticeably absent from this list.) In 2015, Belfast established the first BabyDay to celebrate infants and spotlight their need for the arts.<sup>331</sup> Beginning in 2005 at a symposium in Hamm, Germany, a collection of companies

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<sup>329</sup> Chris Speyer, "Every Child Has a Story to Tell if We Just Listen," *The Journal*, June 29, 2004.

<sup>330</sup> Small Size Network 2020 Brochure.

<sup>331</sup> Anna Newell, "To the Theatre Born: Why Babies Need the Arts," *The Guardian*, September 22, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/sep/22/theatre-babies-arts-babyday-belfast>.

set off with the goal to spend two years investigating new aesthetic forms of baby theatre. One company researched through dance, another through shadow and light, for example. Five more companies joined this project along the way. In this way, baby theatre was embraced as an opportunity to expand an understanding of what theatre is and what it can do. If initially the question about theatre for the very young [in Germany] was determined by debate, this has now given way to a nuanced aesthetic discussion.”<sup>332</sup> The United States remains at a point in which the legitimacy of baby theatre is up for debate.

Part of the importance of baby theatre is political, as a response to an incessant need to codify children as members of society. In 1989, for example, the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which included Article 31, that recognizes “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”<sup>333</sup> This convention followed multiple other statements by the United Nations since 1924 to this end. (The two countries that did not adopt the CRC were Somalia and the United States.) Critical scholarship on children’s theatre, beyond documenting processes for creating new works, has, Manon van de Water writes, been “virtually ignored by theatre scholars.” Lack of scholarship on it, she continues, “speaks to the marginalized status of children as generators and perceivers of art . . . and the general perception of the field as ‘kids’ work.”<sup>334</sup> For theatre for very young audiences or audiences with multiple and complex needs, lack of scholarship is even more pronounced.

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<sup>332</sup> Anna Richter, “Theatre for Very Young Audiences: Varied and Complex,” *The Theatre Times*, June 5, 2017.

<sup>333</sup> United Nations, *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 31, 1989.

<sup>334</sup> Manon Van de Water, *Theatre, Youth, and Culture: A Critical and Historical Exploration* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 2.

Baby theatre was born partly from a recognition that babies and toddlers are, for many reasons, not welcome in theatrical spaces, including children's theatre. This may be based in the perceived unpredictability of an infant or toddler in a public space. It may be because a young child sitting in an adult's lap does not count as an audience/consumer because they have not purchased a seat/ticket. Whatever the reason, this limitation of access created the need for a space in which this excluded population could have dynamic and engrossing theatrical experiences in safety and without fear.

Centering the infant as the audience has two consequences: First, theatre companies have learned to reengineer not only the types of presented material, but also the physical layout of their spaces in a multitude of ways: Safety is paramount; the fourth wall is unsettled or imaginatively removed all together; hard theatre lighting and loud theatrical music are absent; the audience size is diminished to usually no more than a dozen individuals, including babies and parents; and objects and set pieces are safe to touch. Running times are typically shortened to between twenty and forty-five minutes, though, as Oily Cart founder Tim Webb notes, day-long performances or even week-long immersive residencies for certain audiences have yielded “revelatory” effects.<sup>335</sup>

The secondary consequence of centering the infant is that for those writing, whether as coverage for a newspaper or theatre criticism, the baby becomes central to the play's *aesthetic*—a literal object that activates the play's motivating conceit. As the power of the stage in society has served as a means of examining complex ideas, in centering young toddlers and infants, these individuals themselves become conceptual objects of inquiry. Lastly, by positioning the “centering of the baby” as the main creative act, baby theatre can be (incorrectly) perceived as a

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<sup>335</sup> Webb, *Sensory Theatre*, e-book.

large-scale avant-garde project that displaces infants from their place outside the realm of theatre audience. This in turn positions infants as tools for making art and also relegates all baby theatre to simply part of a large-scale experiment.

A survey of articles, essays, and blog posts written over the past ten years reveals that baby theatre is consistently written about in the United States as something “new,” or “a flavor of the month,”<sup>336</sup> or a pseudo-genre that warrants beginning with healthy skepticism and an absence of trust. Headlines such as “Baby Theatre Comes of Age” ascribe infancy to a form that has been around for forty years. The predicament is similar to that faced by women in baseball, unable to establish legitimacy due to the lack of historical memory between generations of women players. Even though women were playing baseball in America beginning in the 1860s, writes Debra Shattuck, “Each new generation of players thought it was the first because it had no historical memory of preceding generations. . . . Contemporary media perpetuated this historical amnesia by touting each new women's team or player as a ‘novelty.’”<sup>337</sup> This perpetual erasure from history, for women ball players and for baby theatre makers and its audiences, robs the form of historical legacy, deprives there being any real point of critical consideration, relegates the form to a footnote in history, and robs the practitioners of the opportunity to make any lasting meaning from it. Further, it keeps those who discover this form isolated and without resources.

Ever present is an unspoken question of whether babies deserve to be members of an audience. One of the few collections of critical analysis of baby theatre was published in 2009 and includes two essays frequently cited texts on baby theatre. First, an essay by Gerd Taube that poses these questions: “Are (babies) ‘human beings’ or ‘human becomings’? . . . Are they

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<sup>336</sup> Rob Weinert-Kendt, “Baby Theatre Comes of Age,” *American Theatre Magazine* (September 2010): 42.

<sup>337</sup> Debra Shattuck, “Women's Baseball in the 1860s: Reestablishing a Historical Memory,” *Nine* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 1.

regarded as premature beings . . . as human beings on a certain level of development or as human beings with a special expertise?”<sup>338</sup> Animatedness is Ngai's term for the “politically charged affect of non-mainstream groups who are characterized as overly agitated while simultaneously imagined as pliant, as having too much affect and too little agency.”<sup>339</sup> In terms of baby theatre, this emerges when writers attempt to prove the humanity and passions of babies. These types of questions are prevalent in the ways that American media frames baby theatre as part of an ongoing cultural and ideological debate around the innate humanity of infants. This is usually expressed as an attempt by baby theatre to prove the humanity of infants and prepare them for entrance into and legibility within society. This kind of discussion often uses medicalized language focused on the utilitarian purpose of baby theatre related to psychological development, neurological development, or emotional/cognitive development. It can also be expressed through analyzing facial expressions, deeming wonder and awe or serious listening. In general, the writer speaks for the babies, writing from a privileged space to animate them. Engaging in an argument of infants' humanity proceeds from the premise that before a certain age one's humanity is uncertain.

Babies are situated as not disabled but what might be called “pre-abled.” In a popular Ted Talk video, titled “What Do Babies Think?” Alison Gopnik declares that developmental science “has completely overturned [the] picture” of babies as irrational, ego-centric beings and presents her evidence that babyhood is like “the R&D division of the human species.”<sup>340</sup> While data

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<sup>338</sup> Gerd Taube, writing in *Theatre for Early Years: Research in Performing Arts for Children from Birth to Three*, ed. Wolfgang Schneider (Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>339</sup> Sianne Ngai, “Animatedness” in *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 89–125.

<sup>340</sup> Alison Gopnik, “What Do Babies Think?” TED Talk, July 2011, [https://www.ted.com/talks/alison\\_gopnik\\_what\\_do\\_babies\\_think?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/alison_gopnik_what_do_babies_think?language=en) - t-22376.

collected in her study may be useful, Gopnik's argument furthers a damaging debate into infant and toddler's humanity.

### **Zaniness and Motherhood**

Motherhood is performative. I am not neutral and normative, I have my own neurodivergence that does not disappear at will or may be clicked off. When mainstream writing on baby theatre is not attempting to prove the humanity of infants, it is maintaining the opposing view, that of the absence of humanity or state of pre-human, writing about it through the late-Capitalistic minor aesthetics of the cute and the zany, which Sianne Ngai investigates in her book *Our Aesthetic Categories*. Aesthetic judgments, Ngai writes, "cannot stem from anything other than feeling." She writes,

Spontaneous feeling . . . signals the inextricable coupling of discursive judgement *to* the perception of form. It points to the seam—it *is* the seam—that joins a way of speaking—a way of facing or addressing others—to a way of seeing. This *compulsory* joining of evaluation to perception, or of discourse to form . . . is what makes the experience properly aesthetic.<sup>341</sup>

Zaniness, Ngai writes, is a comedic aesthetic, the aesthetic of the caregiver. Zaniness is marked by stress and an attempt to do many things well, and generally failing. Ngai reads characters in film and television (such as Lucy in *I Love Lucy*) as her examples, as well as the real-life performances of affective labor by nurses, customer service agents, and, of particular note for baby theatre, mothers. As an aesthetic, zaniness, Ngai writes, is gendered, marked by a

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<sup>341</sup> Sianne Ngai, in "Interview with Sianne Ngai," Kevin Brazil. *The White Review* (October 2020).

<https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-sianne-ngai/>.

suspension of agency, “essentially the experience of an agent confronted by—and endangered by—too many things coming at her at once.”<sup>342</sup> Zaniness may be extended beyond human performance and into aesthetics of space. In a more immediate and specific example, the domestic spaces of the home during the 2020 fall school semester during the Covid-19 pandemic was read as zany. Domestic (read: gendered) spaces, created and maintained by working mothers with children home doing virtual learning, wherein the “feminized domestic sphere,”<sup>343</sup> must switch between a space for school, for work (over Zoom, an additional world), for play, and finally, for familial interaction, never fully succeeding at any form. Mothers must also shift their zany performances to meet these needs, but also never fully succeed.

The failure to succeed is a core component of the zany aesthetic. Coverage of baby theatre performances often paint a brief fleeting picture of barely contained zaniness, a snapshot, quoting mothers, who are framed as not engaged as listeners or audience members, telling their children “no grabbing!” as well as noting babies sleeping, crying or spitting up, and presents this phenomenon as another in a long line of activities mothers drag their children to in an effort to do it all. The aesthetic of zaniness might be seen in the cultural performance of baby theatre itself. Part of the reason that baby theatre is difficult to write about is that it is currently burdened with the tasks of being all things, including a cultural engagement, pedagogical strategy, therapeutic treatment, and an immersive encounter. If a critical framework could anchor baby theatre, it may not have the ever-present task of proving its own validity.

Similarly, these articles also apply the aesthetic of “cute” onto babies as well as onto the form itself. Ngai distinguishes this aesthetic from zany as not of performance but of

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<sup>342</sup> Sianne Ngai, “Our Aesthetic Categories: An Interview with Sianne Ngai,” interview by Adam Jasper, *Cabinet* (Fall 2011).

<sup>343</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 3.

commodification. We find specifically things and objects cute, she writes, when they are weak and powerless. By ascribing this sentimentalizing aesthetic onto babies, these articles and blurbs further objectify infants, removing the subjecthood the form was first created to address. Articles refer vaguely to uncited research into theatre's effect on a baby's rapidly developing brain, touching on a part of the cuteness aesthetic Ngai says is "crucial that the object has some sort of imposed-upon aspect or mien—that is, that it bears the look of an object unusually responsive to and thus easily shaped or deformed by the subject's feeling or attitude toward it."<sup>344</sup> Babies, we are told, are not only squishy, but moldable.

The minor aesthetics of zany and cute can be positive or negative. Cute objects, for example, can quickly become disturbing, especially in relation to capital.<sup>345</sup> In the case of the discourse surrounding Theatre for the Very Young, there may be something in this negative judgement of babies as objects that stems from seeing babies as temporarily socially disabled, bringing up the discomfort felt by some audience members in response to people with disabilities as audience members in theatre. Perhaps this speaks to the urgency of framing babies as pre-subjects—This state is only temporary. This tone can be found quite pointedly in the headline of an article in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which states, with a hint of a sneer, "Theatre for babies. It's a thing."<sup>346</sup> The content of the piece describes a baby spitting up on "his date's leg," and includes the sub-headline, "The audience is invited to chew the scenery at this Fringe festival show. But attention spans might be a problem." The article approaches infants as it might

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<sup>344</sup> Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 65.

<sup>345</sup> Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 63-64.

<sup>346</sup> Chloe Walker, "Child's Play: Melbourne Fringe Goes Gaga over Theatre for Babies," *The Guardian* (September 21, 2017).

a domesticated animal. The tone also positions baby theatre as a comical trend, like weddings for dogs or psychics for cats, disposable and of its time.

Further marking infants as an audience with the cute aesthetic, pictures in these sorts of media often feature an infant sitting alone, looking up, in awe at something unseen. This image highlights their smallness, powerlessness, and isolation, creating a distance from the baby to the performer and from the baby to their parent. The image is counter to how baby theatre frequently operates, with an equally engaged parent and a connection with the infant and performer.

The zany space of being a caregiver performs in an endless time without a frame. There is no beginning or end. Baby theatre, on the other hand, has a beginning and end (like all theatrical pieces) and is often further framed by a period of time afterward for participants to further engage with the sensory materials. Responsibilities and tasks in a zany aesthetic (meetings, deadlines, homework, cooking) are disparate, ceaseless, and experienced as disconnected. Baby theatre can also be conceived and approached through what feminist physicist Karen Barad calls intra-action, “a dynamism of forces, which all designated ‘things’ are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably.”<sup>347</sup> With its minimalist components, baby theatre is an open space for more complex investigation. It is not a fixed point of rest, sustained for as long as the linked performance and the shared attention of its triptych audience. In short, baby theatre offers an affective aesthetic that engenders focused, deeper experience and the shared experience of “looking,” whereas the zany performer is in a survival mode of shallow thinking and isolation, exhausted and spread thin.

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<sup>347</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 141.

## Introducing the Triptych

In her analysis of Theatre for the Very Young, Agnes Desfosses describes the distinguishing phenomenon of a relational “triangular audience,” which consists of a performer, infant, and parent.<sup>348</sup> This is a powerful concept in that each of the three points is needed for a triangle to be a triangle. I will further spatialize and complicate Desfosses’ notion of the triangular audience by encountering the form, aesthetically and dramaturgically, as a *triptych*.

Originating in Christian art in the Middle Ages, a triptych is a singular image in three linked parts, traditionally painted on wooden panels, with the center panel sometimes larger and its two flanking panels of matching size. The effect can be that of three windows providing a view onto a singular scene or landscape. The word triptych comes from the Greek adjective *τρίπτυχον*, meaning “three-fold,” referring to its ability to be folded and transported to different sites. The hinges also enable the two images on the side to turn toward the center, maintaining their attention and action as *being with*. When applied as a metaphorical lens, this real object of a triptych can be encountered visually as an art object as well as imaginatively as three doorways or thresholds into a shared landscape. Counter to an aesthetics of cuteness or zaniness, the triptych frames an aesthetics of engagement, which, as Arnold Berleant writes, “emphasizes the holistic, contextual character of aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic engagement involves active participation in the appreciative process, sometimes by overt physical action but always by creative perceptual involvement.”<sup>349</sup> This image of the triptych recognizes the humanity of the

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<sup>348</sup> Agnes Desfosses, “Little Ones and Adults, Alive and Aware. Theatre Brings Together,” in *Theatre for Early Years: Research in Performing Arts for Children from Birth to Three*, ed. W. Schneider, trans. P. Harman (Frankfurt: Peter Lang), 99–104.

<sup>349</sup> Arnold Berleant, “What is Aesthetic Engagement?” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013).

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.0011.005/--what-is-aesthetic-engagement?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

three parts of the audience (parent, child, and performer) in the creation of the affective landscape of the play.

According to Foucault, a principle of the spatial heterotopia is that it “is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in, one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures.”<sup>350</sup> The three panels of a triptych may be viewed as three linked thresholds through which members of this three-part fellowship (performer, infant, and parent) enter, whether into, for example, a theater on the floor, into a tent, or into a pool. All others, watching from the outside of this triptych, may aesthetically appreciate the shape, the material, inspiration, craftsmanship, the devising or writing processes of the piece. However, the experience, this separation of the public and the private, is by its nature not accessible to someone who is not part of this three-fold audience. The world of the performance is a landscape, and landscapes, as Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. writes, are “built out of inclusions and exclusions.”<sup>351</sup> As a heterotopia, the triptych thus enters into and confounds the established implications of inclusive theatre, situating it as exclusive to those within this fellowship.

The triptych image has clear inside and outside, three doorways through which to “enter” in a performative role: *as* parent, *as oneself*, or *as* performer. Within the landscape of the play, each member of the three-part audience’s inner experience is shaped and guided by the score of the piece. The innovation of this form is that it centralizes practice by individuals in relation to one another rather than through socially ascribed identities. The three-part audience creates and

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<sup>350</sup> Foucault, “Other Spaces,” 7.

<sup>351</sup> Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., quoted by Una Chaudhuri in an epigraph in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 21.

sustains worlds through shared relationship and attention, only able to be experienced by this three-part collusion.<sup>352</sup>

This modality of theatre-making privileges the linked performative roles of its three-part audience: parent, participant, and performer. Regarding the subject of the *time*, it matters because very young children and babies, along with individuals with special needs including learning disabilities, deafness, and blindness, are historically excluded from sites of theatrical performance, a marker of culture, expression, and legitimacy as a citizen.

This triptych has three “doorways”: Performer, central audience member, and caregiver. In the space of baby theatre, the third performer in my list (caregiver) is called on to perform parent. This raises a question: What does “mother,” both a noun and a verb, mean? The endless zany aesthetic put upon motherhood is interrupted by the baby theatre performance, in which a woman who is a mother performs “mother” through to the end of the performance. Accepting the invitation to enter as a mother, to perform “mother” for the duration of the piece, is a kind of embodied speech act. As Judith Butler writes in the afterward to Shoshana Felman’s *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, “A speech act is reducible neither to the body nor to a conscious intention, but becomes the site where the two diverge and intertwine.”<sup>353</sup> For the period of the performance, a mother is a mother playing a mother. The failure of the zany becomes the failure inherent in all performatives. This also makes it impossible to write about the performance as an

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<sup>352</sup> Tim Webb, a co-founder of Oily Cart, points out fundamental exclusionary elements within the terms “spectator” (implying sight) and “audience” (implying hearing). Instead, Webb and his team use “participants,” as “all present need to participate in a piece of Sensory Theater.” I am using the word audience as a means of identifying the collective group. Tim Webb, *Sensory Theatre: How to Make Interactive, Inclusive, Immersive Theatre for Diverse Audiences by a Founder of Oily Cart* (New York; London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 51.

<sup>353</sup> Judith Butler, “Afterword,” in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* by Shoshana Felman (Stanford University Press, 1980), 122.

audience member while also as an observer in a meaningful way. One cannot be fully inside and outside the performance.

This trio resists the flow and force of discourse by this sustained linking together at their central audience member to an audience member in the caregiver or companion role and another in the performer role. As a heterotopian performative, a triptych audience radically reconfigures the relationship between audience and performer at sites of order around *time* and expectations of development, around the performance of care, and around the positionality of the performer.

In this next section, I examine three immersive plays through this triptych lens as triptych audience, triptych thresholds, and a triptych tablets. The three plays help to define and trouble the triptych image: *Scoop: A Kitchen Play for Moms and Babies* (the title's ending later amended to *for Carers and Babies*), a piece for parents and babies between two weeks and one year old; *COCO*, a socially distanced piece that was created and toured Northern Ireland in the summer of 2020; and *Splish Splash*, an immersive sensory work in water. Of the three plays I have selected to examine, one (*Scoop*) falls under the categories Theatre for the Very Young, and is geared toward infants and their caregivers. The second play, *COCO*, centers children with autism and complex learning disabilities who are ages five to eighteen. The third piece, *Splish Splash*, centers children up to age nineteen with complex needs including autism, deafness, and blindness. *Splish Splash* toured schools and hospitals in the United Kingdom from 2017 to 2019. Finally, I discuss observations of crafting a triptych work in performance.

Triptych works circumvent the ordered discourse of theatre and childhood. The triptych audience—of parent, child, and performer—move together following the attention and needs of its central member. I am approaching emotions through John Cage's concept of response ability, which he describes by way of definition, that "These responses to nature are

mine, and will not necessarily correspond with another's. Emotion takes place in the person who has it."<sup>354</sup> Just as Cage describes sounds that are "allowed to be themselves," all components of baby theatre, including the members of its audience, are as well. I approach affect through a Deleuzian model, described by Felicity J. Colman as "the change that occurs when bodies collide or come into contact," with this change being the transitory thought prior to an idea or perception.<sup>355</sup>

### ***Scoop: A Kitchen Play for Carers and Babies***

*Scoop: A Kitchen Play for Carers and Babies*, a work for parents and their infants ages two weeks to one year, was the first piece of baby theatre ever performed in South Africa. Magnet Theater premiered the piece as *Scoop: A Kitchen Play for Moms and Babies* in Cape Town in December 2015. The piece may be approached as a triptych in how it is entered, created, and encountered by its performative three-part audience as well as how it is viewed from the outside observer.

Before the play begins, six parents and their six infants and four members of Magnet Theater wait, chat, and play in a separate room, apart from the theater itself. When it is time, together they walk into the black theater space and make their way to the stage, on which a large white square tent has been pre-set. They move into the tent and sit, and the white cloth closes behind them. Suddenly they are in another world, the ground lined with white pillows, in a white, ethereal space large enough for six parents, six infants, and now, four performers. The members of Magnet Theater, in this world, now take on the performative role upon entering the space. The

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<sup>354</sup> John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings, 50th Anniversary Edition: 2nd ed.* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>355</sup> Felicity Colman, ed. Adrian Parr. *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 11.

parents and infants sit. We hear singing, and a landscape begins to form: Wooden spoons, bowls, keys, shakers, emerge, ordinary objects now delightful and strange. Sensations, light, rhythm, voices, song, and texture are here, part of the landscape. The space, strikingly spare and white in contrast to the outside darkness of the theatre, harkens to a blank page on which to compose a play. Ordinary objects, sound, and light enter like words inscribed in the moment on a page, or as the saints enter onto the stage in Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*.<sup>356</sup> Just as in Stein's libretto, the action of *Scoop* is the composition of the event. Like Stein's landscape plays, story and plot are subsumed by a constant present.

The original title of the play was *Scoop: A Kitchen Play for Moms and Babies* (The description on Magnet Theater's website still describes the space as fitting "six moms and babies at a time."<sup>357</sup>). The subtitle evolved, first to *A Kitchen Play for Parents and Babies* and then to *A Kitchen Play for Carers and Babies*.

A research study on fatherhood in South Africa took advantage of the opportunity to engage with the play. In the study, researchers examined the experience of fathers attending *Scoop* as the sole caregiver with their young babies.<sup>358</sup> This study cited research that found that more than 40 percent of children in South Africa lived only with their mother. As the only parent present in the performance of *Scoop*, the fathers in the study took on a more active role than they would otherwise, bonding and connecting with their babies, their own humanity connected with the humanity and subjecthood of their infants, through the shared act of listening and

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<sup>356</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. In *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1949), 440–480.

<sup>357</sup> Scoop description. <https://magnettheatre.co.za/productions/scoop-kitchen-play-for-moms-and-babies/>.

<sup>358</sup> Brenda Cowley et al. "I Know That It's Something That's Creating a Bond": Fathers' Experiences of Participating in Baby Theater with Their Infants in South Africa," *Psychiatry* (November 11, 2020).

encountering in the thirty-minute performance. In a performance documented online, those in the parent role are all fathers, illuminating the performative rather than ontological role of mother or parent.<sup>359</sup> The men, in the role of carer, hold their young infants to look closer. Throughout, the fathers hold their infants securely, allowing their very young children to engage fully. What is clear is a focused attention: The fathers actively focus actively with their babies, the babies on the sensations, and the performer for the baby. Each has a role in creating and sustaining the relationship and the space.

*Scoop*'s means of creation and development lies counter to the American model of new play development, which operates like a factory with auditors assessing quality, leading up to publication and leasing of the script to theaters. A cursory search finds no publications of scripts for baby theatre productions. This absence of reproducibility is perhaps a factor of what has led baby theatre to be viewed as stand-alone art installations or performance art, following Peggy Phelan's definition of performance, "that for a performance to exist, it must be observed and performed in one space and time, the here and now. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."<sup>360</sup> This ephemeral model may be part of what has kept baby theatre from sticking in American cultural memory, why baby theatre always seems new to makers in the United States, and leaves theatre makers isolated, always starting from scratch. However, as Phelan writes, "Performance's independence from mass reproduction . . . is its greatest strength."<sup>361</sup> By moving away from the capitalistic model of new

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<sup>359</sup> Magnet Theater's: *Scoop: Kitchen Play for Carers and Babies* (Documentary). September 26, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vQ5GV55DU>.

<sup>360</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.

<sup>361</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 149.

play development that privileges publication, we can see ways baby theatre has the power to break the rules. By transferring the play through performance, the play remains unmarked.

*Scoop* offers a possible answer to this dilemma. *Scoop* came into being when the company Replay Theater, of Northern Ireland, brought its own baby theatre play (*Tiny*) to Magnet Theater, spending two weeks in intensive incubation, teaching their play to Magnet's members. After this, Magnet Theater spent a month building from the incubation, evolving, transforming the piece, making it local, and bringing in everyday kitchen objects, creating *Scoop* in the process. *Scoop*'s director, playwright Koleka Putuma, describes the process of absorbing and transforming a Northern Irish play for their community, stating that Magnet,

sought to create indigenous and accessible work that could translate across different cultures and backgrounds, and more specifically work that was rooted in the South African context. . . . One of the ways was by employing physical instruments such as the voice and body to be the fundamental producer for the landscapes and scenarios depicted in the plays.

*Scoop*, like the other two plays discussed, is designed, like the foldable triptych of ancient art practices, to move and be moved. Putuma continues,

Another strategy was to create an aesthetically pleasing and portable backdrop design that would transport the audience away from their immediate context, i.e. the classroom, the clinic, the orphanage living room.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Koleka Putuma, "Interdisciplinary Arts for Babies and Young Children," post on *Theatre and Performing Arts for Young People* website. Posted May 4, 2016. <https://www.assitej-international.org/en/2016/05/inter-disciplinary-arts-for-babies-and-young-children/>.

## *COCO*

Triptych plays are well-equipped to creatively problem-solve during a global shutdown in which close contact, speaking to others in person, and large gatherings are potentially dangerous. *COCO*, written and performed by Belfast artist Mary McGurk and produced by Replay Theatre, was created in response to the COVID-19 shutdown. The piece traveled throughout Northern Ireland for three intensive weeks in the summer of 2020 to the driveways of homes of children ages five to eighteen, with profound or multiple learning disabilities or complex needs.

*COCO* is a traveling, immersive sensory theatre experience contained entirely within the back of a van. The performance begins when McGurk arrived (with the set designer) in a van. The van's back door opened to its tiny stage, which could only be seen when inside a connected tent, just big enough for a parent and child. This van as a vessel is not unlike the non-place of Foucault's heterotopic boat, touring to individual homes. "The boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place," Foucault writes, "that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea." The boat, he writes, been "the greatest reserve of the imagination."<sup>363</sup> Stepping inside the tent, the child and their parent encounter something like a magical cave, a lush hyper-real world of vibrant greens and blues and reds, a light from within, and a singular creature living within it (played by McGurk). Andrew Stanford, the director and composer for *COCO*, explains,

Now, when I say that it's in a van, I don't mean the set packs into a van and gets rebuilt at the next location, I mean the set *is* the van. Mary and Darren arrive at a house, set up a

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<sup>363</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

small, covered space for the family to view the show in comfort, swing open the van doors and the show is ready to go.<sup>364</sup>

Like a traditional triptych artwork, *COCO*'s stage, set, and immersive landscape is moveable, and it folds and unfolds for travel. The solo show is about a koala (played by McGurk) who lives in a eucalyptus forest, and it operates with McGurk, one child, and one parent. With the minimum required of parent, child, and performer, the triptych is not entirely unlike a minyan, a minimum required attendance in Jewish liturgy. Each participant - parent, child, and performer - is both an individual and whole as well as an essential performer of the play. The role of performer in a triptych need not be human, as is evident in Polyglot Theater's "giant weaving event," *Tangle*.<sup>365</sup>

Safety is a practical emphasis for theatre for audiences with complex needs (including infants). In *COCO*, an early pandemic play, the call for safety is woven into the fabric of the piece. A plastic partition separates McGurk and the parent and child; pre-recorded audio of McGurk's script and soundscape allowed McGurk to communicate with her facial expressions and to free the child of the discomfort of wearing a mask or shield while minimizing potential risk of infection. The piece begins when the participant and a parent enter a tent connected to the van and zip it up behind them. This leaves the daytime to the outside and collapses the world into a dark and cozy space, with its only light source from an internal window, suggesting a larger lush and colorful world beyond its frame. Behind the glass, a koala named COCO sits within the seemingly expansive lush woods. It is a landscape within a landscape.

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<sup>364</sup> Andrew Stanford, "*COCO*: An Innovative Response to a Challenging Situation," September 2, 2020. [https://www.replaytheatreco.org/post/\\_coco](https://www.replaytheatreco.org/post/_coco).

<sup>365</sup> Polyglot Theater, *Tangle*, Melbourne, Australia, 2011.

McGurk has entered through her own door of the van, taking on the role of performer. Without masks, and separated by the glass, McGurk is unable to speak. Instead, a quiet soundscape plays through speakers, telling Coco's story as the parent and child encounter Coco as a friend. The piece reflects the outside world of the pandemic in its attention to care and safety. At the same time, it constructs and sustains an idealized world in its space within a space. In the process, the three figures of the triptych re-signify corrupted time (of the pandemic) as sacred. In a time filled with the unknown as something terrifying and isolating, *COCO* introduces the possibility that when we move as a triptych, the unknown can be intimate, mysterious, and magical. Moreover, when acts of speaking can be dangerous for fear of spreading or catching the virus, there can be a chance for deep listening.

When the show is over and the van has gone, the family has been gifted a "resource pack" that contains sensorial items like the objects McGurk uses in the piece and a link to the pre-recorded audio played during the show. This enables an artifact or a remnant of the piece, allowing the audience to connect to the performance as a shared memory through the tactile engagement of the objects that before were only seen. As Phelan writes, "Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward."<sup>366</sup> The items in the pack, then, do not reproduce *COCO*, but transform the past into something one can connect to in a meaningful way.

### *Splish Splash*

*Splish Splash* was created and performed by Oily Cart Theater Company and co-produced by National Theatre Wales as part of the NHS70 Festival. Staged entirely in and under

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<sup>366</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 149.

water within hydrotherapy pools throughout Wales and the United Kingdom in 2018 and 2019, Oily Cart created a play flexible enough to respond to its central audience members; a version of *Splish Splash* was created for children with severe learning disabilities, another for children with autism, and a third for children who are deaf-blind. As the company puts it, Oily Cart makes “all sorts of theatre for all sorts of kids.”<sup>367</sup> I will focus on the version of the piece designed for children who are deaf-blind. Whereas in *Scoop*, performers bring the world or stage of the white tent with them, and in *COCO* the traveling van opens up to be the immersive stage, *Splish Splash* transforms hydrotherapy pools (spaces the children are familiar with as therapeutic, utilitarian sites) into immersive, theatrical landscapes.

In *Splish Splash*, each performance takes place in a pool, for an audience of two young people, up to age nineteen, at a time, their carers, four actors, and a musician. Each show “is tailored to the specific needs of each audience member.”<sup>368</sup> The performer’s role transforms as she listens to her audience. In *Splish Splash*, to apply the triptych frame, the parental role or “threshold” is entered by a teacher the child knows well. The role of performers are four members of Oily Cart, who have, for the purposes of this production, collaborated with multiple organizations to become better aware of the needs of the blind deaf community, and a musician. The play travels to special needs schools and to hospitals, where hydrotherapy pools are physically transformed by underwater lighting, clouds of bubbles drifting from below, curtains of spray, and live music played on floating instruments, with a sound that can be felt as much as

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<sup>367</sup> Webb, *Sensory Theatre*, ebook.

<sup>368</sup> Tim Webb, “Oily Cart’s Watery Wonderland Awakens the Senses,” interview by Colin Hambrook, Disability Arts Online, June 20, 2018, <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/oily-carts-watery-wonderland-awakens-senses/>.

heard. A sustained relationship between the child and carer is created and sustained for the time of the performance.

Theatre has historically privileged sight and sound. John Cage, attempting to define theatre in the most inclusive way possible, stated that “I would simply say that theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear. The two public senses are seeing and hearing; the senses of taste, touch, and odor are more proper to intimate, non-public situations.”<sup>369</sup> Ironically, Cage’s definition suggests that theatre is a public sphere, and that there are more proper, appropriate ways of experiencing theatre than others. This highlights the absence of a distinction between public and private spheres for many people with physical and cognitive disabilities.<sup>370</sup> The notion of the triptych provides a spatially accessible threshold through which the audience enters, marking the theatrical space as within the landscape, and effectively jumbling the constructs of public and private.

In one of the audience groups for *Splish Splash* its central audience members are blind and deaf, using haptic perception to “see.” This boldly resignifies the private and less “proper” space of the hydrotherapy tubs into a theatrical stage. The triptych play enters into the “text” of the pools, in schools and hospitals, used daily for therapy by physiotherapists. In an interview discussing *Splish Splash*, director Tim Webb describes how theatre can transform an everyday space. “We realized that the pools and their surroundings can be transformed into magical spaces where every sense is delighted,” Webb says, “and in which we can create close-up performances

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<sup>369</sup> John Cage, in “An Interview with John Cage,” *TDR* 10, no. 2: 50–51.

<sup>370</sup> For an application of Tobin Sieber’s writing on public/private access to theatre, see Kirsty Johnston, “Whose Awkward Moments? Affect, Disability, and Sex in The Book of Judith, Time to Put My Socks On, and The Glass Box.” In *Theatre of Affect*, edited by Erin Hurley (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2014).

that will engage young people, transcending the barriers that stand between them and others and the world around.”<sup>371</sup>

A site of therapy is entered into as a place of theatrical engagement. Here, a shared inquiry occurs, with performers standing *with* not writing *about*. When the performances are complete, Oily Cart members teach the teachers the form of *Splish Splash* and provide recordings of the music and outline of needed material objects to reproduce the play. As in the original production, only two or three students would be able to participate, freeing up the show from being a conceptual art piece that only reaches a handful of people.<sup>372</sup>

### **Performance-as-Research: *This Little Light***

The triptych model invites opportunities for application and further research. Following Borges’ heterotopia as a model, I executed a performance-as-research project to explore the possibilities of the triptych theatre. Titled *This Little Light*, the discursive text I wanted to enter was the learning song “Alouette.” This song is a kind of embodied taxonomy, and the premise of the song is simple: The singer (typically a child) takes on the role of someone cheerfully plucking feathers from a lark, one body part at a time, including parts, such as “your beak” and “your eyes” that do not have feathers: Je te plumerai la tête, la bec, les yeux, le cou, etc. Through my residency, I wrote/”found” a “lost” second verse of the song, and I was able to explore the possibilities of the play and also engage with parents and children in real time. One of these

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<sup>371</sup> Tim Webb, in “Oily Cart’s Water Wonderland Awakens the Senses,” June 12, 2018.

<https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/oily-carts-watery-wonderland-awakens-senses/>.

<sup>372</sup> Oily Cart, *Splish Splash* multi-sensory session notes, <https://oilycart.org.uk/resources/splish-splash-multi-sensory-session/>.

children was my own, which allowed me to investigate the boundaries of performer and parent in the theatrical space.

The timing of this new play residency was specific, strange, and historical: It was a year and a half into the pandemic, and government officials had recently declared that lockdown was at an end. It was time to “leave the bubble,” we were told. My sense was that without a place between inside the bubble and leaving it, the pandemic would slip into another casualty of cultural amnesia. The lingering anxiety of the unknown surrounding the pandemic was further heightened by the recent death of family member (my father-in-law), who had passed away a month before the residency began, after a long battle with cancer. A gallery is a very strange place, aggressively blank. From my experience within the site, I understand Kaprow’s impulse to fill it up or to flee. The gallery space is entirely white. A large sky light shines from a twenty-foot-high ceiling. I was accustomed to making theatre in theaters, which are famously haunted in multiple ways.<sup>373</sup> In the gallery, even the ghosts would not stay. There were two rooms; in the back room, I set up a tent big enough for five people to sit.

The site of interest was “Alouette,” a learning song that may have originated in Canada. The lyrics are a monologue, a threat, a promise, a declaration, to the bird that the speaker will rend its body piece by piece. With guidance from French professor Dr. Timothy Raser, I inserted a verse that was my own fiction, a catachresis of the other verses in the song. This verse introduced another figure—a heroic figure of a bird, specifically a swiftlet. Swiftlets make their homes in dark places like caves; they make their way in the dark through echolocation, listening and seeing as one act. These interloping verses depicted the clever Swiftlet searching, finding,

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<sup>373</sup> See Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

and illuminating the lost, torn pieces of the Lark and gathering them together, saving it. The hidden verse contained the lyrics, “Salangane, doué salangane/ Salangane, je t’illuminerai/ Je t’illuminerai la tête x2 / Et la tête, et la tête / Salangane! x 2 / A -a -a - ah.”<sup>374</sup> The two children in the audience would play the role of the Swiftlets. I would perform as a Savoyard, a French seventh-century traveling storyteller with my magic lantern. I cut out shapes of small birds on black paper and taped them to sticks. I typed out a lengthy monologue for myself to perform that would position the tent as the home I was visiting as a traveling storyteller. Together we would save the lark.

The small size of the audience was dictated by the pandemic, but the intimacy aided in exploring the notion of a triptych. There were two pairs: My husband and our son; and our friend with her daughter. I would play the role of performer, my husband the role of parent, and my three-year-old son would play the role of participant. The second group was Mollie, also three, and her mother, Mo. Before entering the building, the children tapped the keys of an out-of-tune toy piano sitting on the sidewalk. They entered the gallery and found the letters of their names in shaped pipe cleaners. They located a path, and together followed it, through a small hallway, into another space, where we found a tent, a table, and some flashlights. Soft music played. A lamp shined spacey blue lights throughout the room. The two children explored the space with their flashlights. After some time, I gestured to move to the tent. My plan was I would enter the tent as well, ensorcelling them with my epic and fabricated tale of the lark and the swiftlet. Mollie, however, hesitated at the entrance, disrupting the flow for what I had scripted and planned. Her mother stepped in and sat down, gesturing for Mollie to join her. I resisted the impulse to shepherd Mollie in or to pick her up and place her like a set piece. Instead, we lingered here,

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<sup>374</sup> Gabrielle Sinclair Compton, *This Little Light*, unpublished script, 2021.

outside, and Mollie at the threshold. It became apparent in that moment my need for control, my need to organize us into moments and places and points of the journey. Moreover, I had been attempting to make myself an aesthetic art object, of the storyteller and playwright. I was the object blocking entrance to this performance site. The heterotopia, however, is an invitation, one which you cannot force.

Instead of following my plan to go inside the tent, I chose to sit outside the threshold and linger there. I made a difficult decision to rest. Mollie crawled inside behind her mother. Mollie sat down, cross-legged, just beyond the threshold. She was facing me. I placed a woven basket before each child. Mollie's mother sat just behind her and to the side. I had put on quiet music at the start of the performance, and it was playing now.

I picked up the page with my printed text to read in character as the whimsical Savoyard I had planned for. It felt strange, improper, to read the words on this page. It felt strange to perform. It was as though they were written in a language I could not read. Instead, I remained cross-legged on the outside and, one by one, I silently picked up a piece of the detritus from the month's residency and placed it before the two children. These were cotton balls, feathers, wads of blue painters tape, plastic, string. As I did, the children wordlessly and carefully took each piece, one at a time, and assembled the pieces of detritus into their baskets. As they assembled, I tore the page of my empty script slowly, quietly into strips. I gently made two balls from the strips, which I placed before the children. As a performer, I felt a sense of sharing my list of materials as my heterotopian passage and asking them to hold it.

This labor of embodied listing suspended the narrative of my original authorship. The performance of assembling transformed the baskets into small nests, ruins of the homes for magical once-birds. It was quiet when I ran out of detritus to give, though the music was still

playing. I passed the two children and the two parents what I had left: The cut-out cardstock birds, taped to the ends of sticks. The blue light spilled through the threshold and onto the tent's back wall. The collision of paper bird and light created shadows behind the children and their parents along the wall. Mollie watched her own paper bird on its stick as her mother waved her own before the light and watched the shadow on the wall. After some time, Mollie noticed her mother's actions, saw the shadows, and for a time she and her mother, along with the shadows, moved together. From my position at the threshold, it was apparent they danced not with the Larks, but the Lark's absence, what I examined in Chapter Two as *hollows*. My role here was to linger, to hold the space, so that this surprising encounter might be sustained.

As the first author, I had constructed a grid in which we would save this imaginary bird of the song. I had made a way to stealthily slip new language into the old learning song and change not only the story, but the lesson. When I cut out the birds and taped them to the thin wooden dowels, my goal had been to rescue an imaginary creature from imagined cruelty of the past, which had been reproduced in song as a learning tool for established knowledge of the body. As the first author, at a historic period of great loss and anxiety of the unknown and invisible, I had urgently wanted to disrupt the song and the ideology of *Alouette* with an interloper. It was only in performance that I encountered the possibilities of my own second authorship in real time in my decision to set down my script and "rest." I lingered at the open doorway of the tent, blue light pouring over my shoulder, and I watched the hollow fly across the fabric wall, sustained by the attention of myself and of mother and daughter and play. I was, in this moment, a second author, following the map I had laid out and then rested within it, in the landscape the first author had constructed in her scheme. The triptych audience of companion, child, and performer made and sustained a ruin, a home for a hollow.

## Conclusion

Landscape, Una Chaudhuri notes, emerged historically from the world of painting and the notion of a landscape as something to look at rather than move through or dwell within. With this in mind, the works of this chapter have revealed they do landscape theatre improperly. They craft a landscape at a site of anxiety and dominant narratives around time and human development, and then they invite the audience to linger in it with them. This calls on those in the role of performer and companion not necessarily to think about their humanity, but rather to practice forgetting their subjecthood so that they may perform affordance for the central participant in their fellowship of a triptych audience. What distinguishes the works of this chapter is the practical need for *access intimacy* or *care intimacy*, that, when applied, re-situates performer, participant, and parent/companion as a three-part, triptych body.

This chapter has examined practices of interlopers, lingering, and place-making within a selection of works of what Oily Carter found Tim Webb calls sensory theatre. A heterotopian analysis offers triptych a means of describing this work that has the potential to be applicable for a wide range of audiences who may have been deemed unreachable, including participants who are limited in their ability to leave home or leave their bed due to chronic pain or participants with dementia. I have examined anxiety at the site of order-making in three sites: the performance of motherhood in public spaces, the contested subject of who counts as a legitimate audience member in performance, and the notion that theatre serves either an educational or entertainment function, that is the development of children into legitimate citizens.

The practices considered here (the parent/baby sustained relationship of shared looking and listening in the here and now in *Scoop*, the heterotopic space in *COCO*, and the shared act of

making meaning in *Splish Splash*) invest each member of these triptych audiences as subjects, rather than objects of aesthetic judgment. The triptych also illuminates a “three-fold” world of its players and the inaccessibility of an observer describing the work in print to capture the experience accurately. Paradoxically, the subjecthood of each participant is affirmed as they simultaneously also move together as a posthumanist, three-part body. This chapter has de-centered the very young child, infant, or child with disabilities as the lone aesthetic of Theatre for the Very Young or Theatre for Audiences with Complex Needs. It has re-centered the role as an essential and connected performer and audience member within the form of the imaginative triptych, circumventing traps of visibility when it comes to audiences with complex needs.

## CONCLUSION

As I write this conclusion, my thoughts turn to the 1969 novel, *La Disparition*, by French crossword-puzzle maker and author, Georges Perec.<sup>375</sup> This lipogramatic mystery, titled *A Void* for its English translation, authors and sustains a novel-length heterotopia and offers an example beyond Jorge Luis Borges' passage. The novel, ostensibly a mystery about a missing man in a world that has recently fallen to disorder after a time of political chaos, relentlessly sustains the absence of the letter E for nearly three-hundred pages. It is an extreme word game by a masterful puzzle-maker. The absence is apparent as a gimmick as you first notice how the author (Perec) works around his limitations in clever and sometimes distracting ways. What is disquieting about *A Void*, however, is that it is not only the book that is without the E, but the *world* of the book. What is unsettling is the creeping awareness, maybe a hundred or so pages in, that I (the reader) have forgotten that the E is gone, and I realize I have stopped looking for where it should be. I find myself enmeshed in a monstrous system. It is only near the final moments of the novel, when a character notices that a passage is without the letter, and, in horror, realizes he does not have the ability to speak it. I, the reader, am struck by the horror that I do not have the ability to read it.

It is frightening how easily we forget the prior system that once required an E for language. In the character's terrifying inability to vocalize or even think *E*, I was struck by a deep sense of dread as well as a question of what might have already disappeared (or been disappeared by others) for me, that I now can both no longer remember ever knowing, but also

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<sup>375</sup> Georges Perec, *A Void*, trans. Gilbert Adair (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 2005).

would not know how to speak if I could. I am writing this in March 2025, and I am afraid of what I will soon not know how to speak or think. Moreover, I am concerned as to how swiftly my mind will adapt to the absence. The works examined in this project offer more than a novel approach to performance. Through strategies of lingering, they offer a means of resistance to the flow of corrupted narratives. To use Doreen Massey's phrasing, Perec sustains a discursive meeting place on the page, for himself, for the reader, and for the absence; at once, this act of insistence constructs a scheme and demonstrates the decay and rot of a system in ruin and also holds a space for the reader to linger *with* his second authorship, within a peculiar. If hope might be historically constituted, the works highlighted in this study offer hope as needed today, as a practice of disruptive rest, collusions, and schemes.

## **Overview**

By opting to begin with an understudied text (Foucault's writing on heterotopia in the preface to *The Order of Things*) instead of Foucault's more well-known lecture on heterotopias in society, this project privileged *authorship* in developing heterotopia as an applicable literary device and a strategy in embodied performance. The project of this study became an effort to better understand certain hard-to-categorize works by way of the intentional performance of an interloper, a means of lingering together, and subversive place-making.

As conceptualized through reading Borges' passage with Foucault's analysis and my own, I define a heterotopia as an actionable literary device in which authors may stealthily disrupt their own text and the basis for thinking and order that holds that text, and themselves, together. The heterotopia a literary device has the presence of a figure (an interloper), an action (lingering with the reader through listing, which further suspends the narrative) and a subversive

site (a passage), all of which are both within and separate from the text in which the heterotopia lies. A heterotopian performatives, then, describe small but powerful strategies in which an interloper calls participants into a labor of lingering within a peculiar site both within and separate from their socio-cultural place and time, in the process hollowing the *a priori* assumptions that underpin patterns of thought, and sustaining participants together within a disruptive unmeasured caesura of rest, with-ness, and care.

Over four chapters, I have approached an eclectic selection of works through the lens of this literary device, including performance scores, body art, installation, scripted dramas, and sensory theatre. I have asked: How does one enter a socio-cultural “text” with one’s body? How does one do so in a way that is non-serious, as an interloper, and in plain sight? How does one perform a labor of lingering with the audience? Finally, for what phenomenon does this approach clear the way? I located four approaches to authoring heterotopian “schemes” in performance. These are: A relationship of place-making and rest with an uncanny guide; A relationship of touch and holding through hollow-ing; Improperly entering and moving through derelict socio-cultural sites with viragos; and moving as a triptych audience of performer, participant, and companion. I have been encountered strategies for deploying interlopers, for lingering in a text, and for the site it sustains, for which I have no available descriptor. As such, I have used catachresis, a strategy for straining words beyond their ascribed meaning and locating for them improper “secondary original[s].”<sup>376</sup> Improper terminology developed through this inquiry include peculiars, insistence, dematerialization, hollows, and hi-res.

This project emerged from lingering in two connected gaps. I encountered the first gap in Foucault’s writing on heterotopias, in *The Order of Things*, where Foucault details the effects of

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<sup>376</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, Press 1982), 255.

reading a passage “in Borges.” He identifies the passage as a heterotopia and details his theories for why it is disturbing to him as a reader. However, Foucault declines to investigate the nature of Borges’ authoring (beyond noting that such passages are “found so often in Borges”<sup>377</sup>), and his description of the passage on its own (as a collection of disparate ideas held together only by a list) was unsatisfying. In his second text on heterotopias, a lecture to a group of architects, Foucault describes heterotopias only in terms of sites that emerge in most if not all societies and serve a purpose within them. These heterotopias, including theaters, brothels, psychiatric institutions, boats, are described and organized based on their identifying features, but there is no discussion of authorship. This creates a cognitive dissonance—the sense of heterotopias as something authored (as Borges’ passage clearly is) and also something to be found in an almost clinical way, as a doctor might locate tissue that has grown “out of place” in the body (such as splenic tissue in a patient’s kidneys or grey matter clumping around a brain’s ventricles).

Jill Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance* invites a productive opening. Upon reading Dolan’s description and application of her term utopian performatives as a means of reading and analyzing moments in embodied and scripted work, I had the distinct feeling that Dolan had initiated a kind of exploratory mapping that opened up space for further investigation. I wanted to know: If a utopian performative were possible, what other places could be done? What would a heterotopian performative look like, and would that be dangerous territory to explore? How might one author a heterotopia like Borges’ passage but within sites as socio-cultural texts, complicated by bodies, relationships, and time?

By examining Borges’ essay (which Foucault does not do), I was able to observe more than Foucault’s initial limited analysis of the extracted passage. I observed that the passage is an

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<sup>377</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

interloper in the essay; the taxonomy of the passage imitates the others as a non-serious joke. I observed that this passage sustains a position out of place for the duration of its act of improper, non-serious, and fictional listing, in the process wearing away the assumptions that hold the text together as thinkable. Moreover, I noticed that the reader, in their act of reading, is a necessary accomplice for the heterotopia's scheme. As all lists do, this passage suspends the narrative of the essay, and does so in an uncanny way. Its additional interloper quality lends a sense of something or *someone* lingering in that suspension, holding the reader with them, in an authored absence.

### **SIX PRINCIPLES OF HETEROTOPIAN PERFORMATIVES**

Using Jill Dolan's formulation of the utopian performative as a kind of map, I have proposed that heterotopian performatives describe small but powerful strategies in which an interloper calls participants into a labor of lingering within a peculiar site, both within and separate from their socio-cultural place and time, in the process hollowing the *a priori* assumptions that underpin patterns of thought, and sustaining participants together within a disruptive unmeasured caesura of rest, with-ness, and care.

In Foucault's lecture, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," he outlines six principles for heterotopias found in society. Following Foucault's structure of six principles, I will now explicate what I observe as six principles of heterotopian performatives.

#### ***First principle. Heterotopian performatives take place and make new ecologies.***

In "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," Kenyan author and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes that the performance space of the artist "stands for openness,

while the performance space of the state stands “for confinement.”<sup>378</sup> The state, Thiong’o writes, perceives the entire nation as its performance site. Hence why “the struggle for performance space is integral to the struggle for democratic space and social justice.”<sup>379</sup> Heterotopian performatives are performances that subversively *take place* and transform it into a site unto itself, what I term a peculiar. Having entered into a discursive socio-cultural text by way of an interloper, a heterotopian performative is defined by its labor of lingering that holds place within the entered text. They thus all have a political and rhetorical force.

The heterotopia creates and sustains a real place outside the jurisdiction of its surrounding discourse, in collusion with the reader-participants. In Chapter One, I placed four works in conversation with Gertrude Stein’s notion of being out of sync and her use of landscape and insistence to remedy this problem. In response to the nervousness of being out of sync with the emotions of the actors and the unknown behind the curtain, Stein settles back, and she makes landscapes on the stage. These works—600 Highwaymen’s *A Thousand Ways (Part One): A Phone Call*, Benjamin Patterson’s untitled rest at Stein’s grave, his *A Very Lawful Dance*, and *First Symphony*, linger within it. They do this through deploying an uncanny guide, and an insistent (repeated to a multiplicity of effects) and impossible correspondence (of questions and commands) between uncanny guide and participant. This act of insistence both creates a map and wears away the sense and reference of the questions themselves and the participants’ fixed status as subjects.

In Chapter Two, I observed that the works of this chapter reveal that insistence is possible at the site of material bodies, fabric, and clothing, through what I term dematerialization. I placed

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<sup>378</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space,” *The Drama Review* 41, no. 3 (1997): 28.

<sup>379</sup> Thiong’o, “Enactments of Power,” 29.

this in context with the Symbolists' call to "clothe the ideal," and I investigated J.L. Austin's exclusionary paragraph that defines certain speech acts as etiolations. At the site of insistence, I was surprised to find a phenomenon of *hollows*, figures of absence that have a relationship with the audience-participants, one of holding and being held. As with the works of Chapter One, in these works the participant is called on to practice a posthumanist forgetting of their subjecthood in order for the site to be sustained. In Chapter Three, I examined interlopers deployed by playwrights Caryl Churchill and Adrienne Kennedy as what I term viragos. Chapter Four considered a mode of theatre making that is an interloper within the field, called sensory theatre or Theatre for the Very Young and Audiences with Complex Needs.

***Second principle. Heterotopian performatives invite participants to perform a labor of lingering.***

Social anthropologist Paul Connerton writes that, "The identity of place is always embedded in the histories which people tell of them, and, most fundamentally, in which those histories were originally constituted in processes of labor."<sup>380</sup> The authorship to create and sustain a heterotopia requires a labor of insistence and lingering, of relationship, and of attention. These labors fundamentally un-write the story of the site on which they are performed, sometimes leaving physical traces such as maps and clothing. I have observed strategies that make it possible to resist the urge to run, and instead choose to enter, linger, and rest, to hold fast together in the void. This allows participants to resist the flow of dominant narratives. Chapters One and Two focused on works that privilege *insistence*, at the site of correspondence and at the site of bodies and clothing. Chapters Three and Four illuminated attention to two strategies of

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<sup>380</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50.

with-ness, both within art—the virago Dull Gret and the linked, three-part triptych. This attention to with-ness instantiates a configuration of audience, artist, and place. The labor of unmarking, whether through insistence or by linked performative roles engenders an ability to sustain a rest, a non-place, and a relationship without being subsumed by what Peggy Phelan terms the trap of visibility that “summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.”<sup>381</sup>

The site, which is both within the system and apart from it, operates within its own improper system. The authorship at the heart of this placemaking distinguishes these sites from the heterotopias outlined in Foucault’s lecture, “Of Other Places; Utopias and Heterotopias.” As such, I have suggested *peculiar*s to identify this authored space of lingering.

***Third principle. Heterotopian performatives do not remember. Rather, they insist.***

Heterotopian performatives are not memorials, memory machines, nor affect machines. They are rather encountered within the cultural text and historic moment of one’s own present, as one encounters the passage within the text of Borges’ essay. They do not remember, they insist.

I observed that several of the performances in this study begin their authorship at sites that would already be marked as heterotopias, by Foucault or by other scholars later. Among these are a cemetery, a specialized school, a sidewalk, and a theatrical stage. It is striking that these works are able to enter into and linger as interlopers with *these* spatial, cultural, and temporal sites. Theatre for the Very Young, for example, mirrors and upsets theatre proper. Patterson and Filliou’s thirty-minute rest at Gertrude Stein’s tomb reveals the constructed narrative and fantasy of Pere Lachaise, which performs cemetery and performs eternal rest.

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<sup>381</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 6.

LaToya Ruby Frazier's performance of insistence at the sidewalk both *on* the grounds of the sidewalk in SoHo and *outside* Levi's pop-up event makes apparent the relations of power at the intersection of time and place.

***Fourth principle. Heterotopian performatives sustain a rhetorical presence.***

A decade after *The Order of Things* was published in French, Foucault discussed what he termed "the regime of truth" in an interview. He said,

Each society has its régime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.<sup>382</sup>

Heterotopian performatives gently and systematically dissolve the foundational premises that sustain a regime of truth. LaToya Ruby Frazier's untitled performance outside the Levi's pop-up is the most immediately apparent example of the heterotopia's potential for political and activist application, where her performance as interloper and her insistent wearing away paradoxically amplified her rhetorical presence. I also observed less obvious acts of rhetorical force. In Chapter Four, I observed that the audience moves as the interloper and it is based on a matter of practicality and care, opening up an opportunity for very young children and individuals who have been marked as impossible audiences, to take up a rhetorical presence within the scope of

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<sup>382</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1971–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 131.

theatre. The site of lingering was both temporal, and cognitive, detaching the context of urgent development and teleology from the experience of being a very young child.

Heterotopian performatives make possible the emergence or birth of a rhetorical site. In her dramaturgical essay, “EF’s Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play,” Elinor Fuchs lays out an approach to reading plays as worlds of their own, with their own particular values, including its own gravity, time, mood, mirrors, and societal structures. These are worlds at the boundary of fictional and nonfictional. What I notice among all of the worlds across these works are two things: First, that they are born in performance. There is no word I have found for the births of worlds beyond creation stories or creation myths. Teratology, the study of monstrous births, seems close. The second element is that these worlds are slippery. They are at the wall separate from and within society, and that wall is porous. Depending on your purview, heterotopian performatives are a marvel or they are a disquieting threat.

***Fifth principle. Heterotopian performatives entangle mythic bodies.***

Over the course of this study, I have encountered posthumanist figures by way of uncanny guides, hollows, viragos, and triptychs. Where landscape theater frequently situates the human as a posthumanist figure on stage, surprisingly, these works invite and call on participants to practice forgetting their subjecthood in order for the performance to be created and sustained. I observed that these works practice what Marla Carlson calls posthumanism’s “reevaluation of the humanist tradition” in an active pursuit of “displacing the human from the center of the ethical universe.”<sup>383</sup> In this practice of forgetting their subjecthood, the participants are able to

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<sup>383</sup> Marla Carlson, *Affect, Animals, and Autists: Feeling around the Edges of the Human in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 6.

enter surprisingly tender relationships of rest; of holding and being held; of with-ness; and of care. Across all of the works, I have observed that the practice of entanglement with and as posthumanist figures allows participants to experience a phenomenon of deep, haptic listening.

Heterotopian performatives invite participants to enter a posthumanist entanglement that is sustained for the duration of the performance. By accepting the invitation, we are choosing to be, to quote Judith Butler, “undone.” Through experiences of both grief and desire, Butler writes, “we are undone by each other.”<sup>384</sup> Butler continues, “I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must.”<sup>385</sup> Undoing occurs at the site of grief, of desire, and of intense suffering. But undoing in quiet and minuscule ways might also be a practice, one that draws us closer to one another in surprising ways. We are gripped and undone by relations we choose, whether it be through grief or desire. Each of the works of this study, as heterotopian performatives, sustain an invitation to choose relations with impossible beings, *as* impossible beings, and allow yourself to be gripped by them, to enter a site in which the “you” able to be thought and known, are undone.

***Sixth principle. Heterotopian performatives re-signify corrupted time and space as sacred.***

These modes of authorship by erosion and these sites of ruin and rest illuminate a surprising dimension of hope. In this conclusion, I have lingered at the implications of the heterotopia’s three registers: a place (a peculiar), a figure (an interloper), and an action (insistence). Taken together, a heterotopian performative engenders a *relationship*, one that is

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<sup>384</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004), 23.

<sup>385</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23.

impossible and also measurable, between artist, fictional space/character/and action, and audience. In the introduction to this project, I discussed Friedrich Hölderlin's notion of the tragic caesura. In Hölderlin's reading, in the moment of *Oedipus* and *Antigone* when Tiresias "steps into the path of fate," for the duration of the caesura, the hero forgets himself.<sup>386</sup> The projects examined in these four chapters have each called on participants to actively engage in "forgetting" their subjecthood or allowing it to subversively *rest*. As culturally the notion of "forgetting" one's humanity is tied to acts of cruelty, I was surprised to discover that these performances required and sustained surprising manifestations of some of the most positive qualities humans are capable of: subversive rest, holding, courage, and care.

As opposed to marking, these works perform the labor of lifting the signifier from the corrupted time and location and re-signifying, as Gabriel Tropic writes, "as sacred time"<sup>387</sup> and, additionally, as sacred place. In *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, the experience of the caesura is necessary for concluding a corrupted rhythm (in this case, the underlying assumptions that making thinking possible in the first section of the tragedies) in order for a new rhythm to be known. The figures within these tragic caesura—Oedipus and Creon, respectively—do not enter these tragic caesuras willfully. They are *made* only time and space by Tiresias's disruptive speech. They are made to forget. They are *sent* into an eccentric orbit with the dead. However, in the performances of this study, participants practice agency. They are not sent against their will. They embark, together.

A 2015 translation of Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" gestures to the possibility of authorship of heterotopias in societies, albeit in a passive register. Where the 1984 translation of Foucault's lecture describes heterotopias as "formed in the very

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<sup>386</sup> Hölderlin, "Notes on *Oedipus*," 318.

<sup>387</sup> Gabriel Tropic, "Modal Revolutions: Friedrich Hölderlin and the Task of Poetry," *MLN* 128, no. 3 (April 1, 2013): 594.

founding of society,”<sup>388</sup> the 2015 translation of Foucault’s lecture reads that heterotopias are “written into the institution of society itself.”<sup>389</sup> In addition, where the 1984 translation reads that a heterotopias is “a kind of effectively enacted heterotopia,” the 2015 translation describes heterotopias as “effectively realized utopias.”<sup>390</sup> These works gently, quietly, and relentlessly detach, dissolve, and hollow out corrupted meaning from place and time, sustaining and a no-place. By practicing chaos and making schemes, these heterotopian performatives realize utopia for the duration of performance.

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<sup>388</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” 4.

<sup>389</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967),” trans. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17.

<sup>390</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967),” trans. Dehaene and Caeter, *Heterotopia and the City*, 17.

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