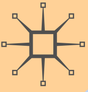

Staging Interspaces in Contemporary British Theatre

Environment and Fluidity

Vicky Angelaki

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For the voyagers who were my grandparents:
Vaso Angelaki and Manolis Angelakis, Vangelio Christoudi and Tolis Christoudis

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2023

Vicky Angelaki

Note Regarding Play Quotations and Pronouns

Quoted material from playtexts was sourced in four different ways across this book: from published playtexts in print form, featuring page numbers; from electronic publications of playtexts, using digital publishing/adapted pagination formats; and from the Drama Online platform, which specifies a page range. Access to Drama Online was provided in two ways: to me personally in the context of research for an essay commissioned by Bloomsbury for the platform (2021) and to my institution (Mid Sweden University) as part of a library trial period. Chris Bush's play was purchased as published text at the Schaubühne Berlin. This featured the German translation of the play titled *~~Kein~~ Weltuntergang* and included a QR code which linked to a PDF download of the text in English. The way in which play quotations are formatted and page number citations are listed throughout this book reflects the format of the source.

Every effort has been made not to assign erroneous pronouns to individuals mentioned across this book. The wording used throughout reflects this in cases where a person's pronoun is unknown to the author; in such cases, the pronouns used are they/them/their.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Environments and Interspaces

The research project "Performing Interspaces: Social Fluidities in Contemporary Theatre", whose primary output is this monograph, began as an imperative to account for spaces that are awkward, evade attention, or, when they receive it, rarely do so because they produce feelings of desirability, warmth, or contentment. These spaces are sometimes fixed and others mobile, but always, in a sense, fluid: brimming with potential and emergence, also due to their temporal contingency. They are transient and correlational: formulated by and dependent upon intimate and intricate ecologies, human and non-human, that cluster together to challenge the orthodoxy of other spaces that might be dominant, and structurally sound. This is the kind of site we might describe, like the system to which it belongs and whose patterns it performs and perpetuates, as robust; inflexible. Interspaces, on the contrary, are not definite and rigid—they are tentative, exposed; and they generate this effect for their inhabitants, that may be human or non-human. This book, the outcome of reflections, journeys, and new constellations of landscape reformulated across different geo-cultural environments, is, then, a pursuit to account for that which may be fleeting, but which has presence, substance and influence—and, more importantly, which carries interventionist potential.

In my work, I have dedicated considerable space to questioning binaries, and the present book, arguably, ventures in this foray at its most expansive version. It takes on binaries such as: the ideological and the aesthetic; the socio-politically engaged and the artistically ambitious; the

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private and the public; the human and non-human; the ecological and the economical. I hope that the reader might agree that the present book pursues this kind of dismantling on a grander scale, not only posing familiar questions, but also reformulating and expanding them, driven by the three primary events and, therefore, paradigm shifts that have marked recent history: cataclysmic climate crisis; immersion into the digital; and COVID-19. Each of these must be understood as a mitigating factor for how lives are lived today, but, also, for how these lives are represented in the theatre. Together, these factors, as well as their causes and resulting conditions, have created an amalgam overwhelming, almost impossible to take on for its ongoing unfolding; but we ought to try.

Historicising and contextualising the present is never straightforward, not only because we are observing a moving frame, but, also, because we form part of it. These fluxes, the interspaces that we inhabit, are true and compelling states of how lives are structured in their precise lack of structure today. Itself, this 'today' is both point in time and post-paradigm shift: post-climate crisis; post-digitisation; post-pandemic. None of these 'posts' indicate a safe critical distance, or that the conditions have been overcome. The 'posts' are not qualitative, but temporal. This time and the space that it creates with it, deep and open, compel at least an attempt at examination of what such flux entails, though one must take heed of assumptions that any firm resolution is at hand. Such is, then, the space which we inhabit and in which we are embedded: it seems to shake, contract, appear and disappear. Agency is both real and contested because it can be impeded by lingering systems of exclusion; moreover, temporally contingent as it is, because of the scale of surrounding crises, this agency comes with potentialities and limitations. Interspaces are not proclaimed as the sites where the problem is exposed and neatly fixed. Their dynamic lies in that they materialise and recur: parenthetical, unexpected, liminal and never negligible. They undermine the dominant authority, even if they might exist within its spatial contours—and they compel the involvement and attention of those that inhabit them.

As the book considers how relationships to landscape and spatial contexts more broadly are becoming redefined in the context of intersecting climate, health and financial crises, it is in dialogue with interdisciplinary critical discourses for the purposes of investigating how spaces of liminality have become both reality and metaphor for contemporary human conditions in their interactional modes with both human and non-human ecologies. The work considers not only human ecologies as

part of spatial biorhythms, but, also, non-human—and the impact they sustain from human agents. Liminality, as captured in the term 'interspace', denotes a state of flux and transience, arguing that the in-between is the defining characteristic: humans are both of nature and separate from it, often entrapped in problematic loops of anthropocentric thought; humans are also both part of their communities (along with fellow humans and non-human entities) and ensconced in their own human-created worlds (the home; the workplace; and other typically isolating physical and digital realms), the tensions between private and public requiring new attention in the context of how our historical moment, shaped by the shifting contexts described above, is redefining them. The book sets out to capture the new complexity in one's relationship(s) to their surrounding spaces, seeking to address how in-betweenness spatially, environmentally, geographically and socially conceived has been emerging as the primary state for the unmoored individual of our time—and how they might perform their agency in modes empathetic not only to other humans, but, also, and equally, to the non-human world.

In-betweenness has, then, acquired new grounding for being understood as a state in its own right, pluralist and not exclusive, dense in experiences and possibilities; and no longer marginal, undesirable, invisible. The 'interspace', in turn, functions to capture this in-betweenness of both life and theatre in both form and content. In playwriting, the latter affects both the shape and the theme of the play. In all texts discussed in this book, the interspace remains relevant as a way of understanding both the plays' structure and their events. As with every term that is fluid, so for the 'interspace' there is a risk of being considered as too 'soft-edged' or loosely defined. While I do not view interspaces in this way, I also do not treat such potential perceptions as problematic.

Still, to avoid an over-stretching into the all-encompassing, rigorous criteria have been applied to the selection of case studies. These criteria have related to innovation in both form and content, and to the representation of issues and voices that ought to claim a seat at a table that has not always been very heterogeneous in its composition. At the same time, COVID-19 has recharged discussions relating to environment, excess, human rights, oppressions and invisibilities. Therefore, I have also been concerned with choosing plays that can work together to emphasise such intersecting issues in the world after the pandemic. This entails scholarship that actively works against receding into a pre-, but also potentially post-pandemic lifestyle that might obfuscate concerns of oppression,

marginalisation and abuse against humans and non-humans due to the neoliberalist prioritisation of more immediately accessible material forms of comfort. The book, in sum, creates a space for conversations to be refocused along with new ones entering the frame, appreciating that 'business as usual' is a hollow and perforable concept.

The book does not claim to be discovering the term 'interspace'; it has previously arisen in ways and disciplines diverse. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, defining it as "[a] space between two things; intermediate or intervening space, interval", traces it as far back as circa 1420, when, as "entre space", it appears in a rendition of Palladius's *De Re Rustica* (also cited in the *OED* as "?1440") (2022b). Alternatively, as "[a] space of time between two events, etc.; an interval of time", the term is encountered in historical research in 1629 [1635] (*OED* 2022b). However fascinating such historical definitions may be, these, or any subsequent usages of the term in contexts tangentially relevant, would not be immediately intuitive to the context of this book, as that is not where my own engagement with the term originates. As I go on to discuss with reference to Raymond Williams specifically and to the aims of this book more broadly, the term, for this book, arises out of the imperative to remove binaries and reinstate potentials. My engagement with the term, then, specifically originates in the need to account for the spaces and conditions that are too often overlooked: for the heterodoxy and awkwardness too often rendered peripheral for the purposes of asserting orthodoxy and linearity in spatial perceptions that still gravitate around binaries. I am drawn to a comment that Una Chaudhuri makes when analysing the central conflict in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* in *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, and which, I find, comes with both implication and potential: that beyond the human level of Julie and Jean's tragic clash, "high and low, first and last", "[t]he spaces of the play [...] diagnose the situation quite differently. They bespeak a problem not of hierarchical displacements but of *lateral* movement, a problem of the unavoidable violation of contiguous, mutually exclusive yet mutually dependent spaces" (1997, 32). Such is the problem with structural binaries—and spatial binaries, whether physical or conceptual, are also such—namely, that they do not hold.

As Williams already discussed in his seminal *The Country and the City* fifty years ago—where, in my view, the 'and' serves as connector rather than divider, without, at the same time, erasing the distinctiveness of either site—"as we gain perspective, from the long history of the literature

of country and city, we see how much, at different times and in different places, it is a connecting process, in what has to be seen ultimately as a common history" (1973, 288). Williams continues: "[t]his is why, in the end, we must not limit ourselves to their contrast but go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis" (1973, 297). No singular stimulus, perhaps, has been as instrumental to the conception of the present study than Williams's *The Country and the City*, which I first read almost two decades ago and which, in its final section, "Cities and Countries", appears to make an overture to future scholarships and scholars to adopt this same challenge of troubling the binary in literary socio-histories to come (see 1973, 292, 306).

While I do not wish to be derivative of Williams, I feel compelled in terms of moral and scholarly sensibility to acknowledge *The Country and the City* as being the first and most influential, the most stirring and astute title to recognise, in geo-spatial literary studies, this 'and' between two spaces all too commonly imagined as antithetical, with the soft surface between them all too easily erased, as, rather, expansive, inclusive and brimming with interconnection rather than separation. That 'and', which opens up to either side, fuses, imagines and makes possible. As Williams observes:

> The country and the city are changing historical realities, both in themselves and in their interrelations. Moreover, in our own world, they represent only two kinds of settlement. Our real social experience is not only of the country and the city, in their most singular forms, but of many kinds of intermediate and new kinds of social and physical organisation. (1973, 289)

This 'intermediate' catalyses the act of delving into 'new kinds of social and physical organisation' as found in recent plays that engage with past, present and future histories of being together in the world. This is, then, the task that this book undertakes.

The Swedish term '*mellanrum*', which, in a single unified word consisting of '*mellan*' (between) and '*rum*' (space) communicates a cognitive framework for in-betweenness as empirically observed in the embodied experience of my adopted country's landscape, captures the literal and symbolic essence of spatial and perceptual fluidity not as abstract, but as substantive. Moreover, in its cultural and linguistic context *mellanrum* can be used to indicate not only place, but also time (as

in gap, pause, or interval), thereby setting the tone for this book's approach to space as pertaining to both place and time, as well as anchoring my analytical narrative. As concerns the further contextualisation of '*mellanland*', where 'land' is thought of expansively in its semantic potentiality (it may mean 'country' as well as 'countryside'), I would point the reader in the direction of relevant scholarship dealing with such landscape paradigms (see Edquist 2015, 120–21). The 'inter' of interspaces might sometimes refer to, but is far from necessarily the 'middle', which is why lexical and perceptual fusion, also as embodied in landscape, matters. Some of the spaces I examine could also be called urban or rural. Without discounting the value of such terms, I am interested in the dynamic density and oscillation of sites, rather than in their strict geographical contingents as gravitational centre. I am further interested in tracing what occurs in that space of transgression that, proceeding from Chaudhuri, disrupts linearity in spatial perception, redistributing the social field. And while I find Chaudhuri's term "*geopathology*" poignant (1997, 55), and I deal, in this book, often with related conditions of (dis-/mis-)placement, I am also keen to trace how these become recharged as tropes for justice, a result of the dramaturgical fabric of the plays. In that sense, I do not engage with these spaces purely acknowledging "[t]he problem of place and place *as problem*" (Chaudhuri 1997, 53), even though I agree that, as Chaudhuri observes, there is much to consider in "series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location, from the micro- to the macrospatial, from home to nature, with intermediary space concepts such as neighborhood, hometown, community, and country ranged in between" (1997, 55). I am interested, finally, in even finer grains and nuances in such in-betweennesses; in their imaginative, potential, possible, contextual, contingent, correlative, dense, vibrating, bleeding and corporeal geographies.

In dealing with such concerns, the present book builds on my previous work, most directly *Social and Political Theatre in Twenty-First-Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (2017), *Theatre & Environment* (2019) and "Writing in the Green: Imperatives towards an Eco-n-temporary Theatre Canon" (2022), making good on the promise that the discourses pursued in these texts are to be continued. I note the point that Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs make in their co-authored Introduction to their edited volume *Land/Scape/Theater* in justifying their emphasis on 'landscape' as term: "[s]*pace* is too unfeatured for our purposes: every inch of space is just another inch of space. Or space may be qualified in ways unhelpful to

our project, since we are not speaking of the performing space, the stage space, interior space" (2002, 3, original emphasis). While I value the statement, I also stand at a somewhat different observation angle, welcoming the fuzziness of 'space' as referent and idea, as site and as experience. This book is largely built on uncovering what 'space' has the potential to mean on both the theatrical stage and page, as concerns the depiction of and engagement with sites exterior as much as interior, natural as much as human-made (and their inter-crossings). In attempting this journey, the present study takes pleasure in its intricacies and uncertainties, problematics and possibilities. The very non-binary focus of the book, as revealed in the term 'interspace', is a statement against fixity and clarity and in favour of motion and unsettlement.

Elsewhere in their Introduction, discussing the importance of methodological heterogeneity, Chaudhuri and Fuchs remark that "the field is excitingly wide open" (2002, 4). I could not agree more when it comes to both how theatrical and socio-eco-spatial studies may be broadly conceived, and how I reflect on the value of the openness and variation of what the qualifier 'space' has the capacity to mean and represent. I am also in complete agreement with the sentiment that Chaudhuri expresses in "Land/Scape/Theory", proceeding from Gertrude Stein: namely, that "plays are landscapes" (2002, 11). Therefore, I take an approach that allows me to discuss spatiality in terms of both the plays' thematic—including visual—and structural—that is textual, fields. This is to uncover the textures of these spaces, and the very potency of plays as interspatial acts: intervening, interjecting, intersecting; acts offering fissures and possibilities. They do this while crafting interspaces that materialise, as above, through both form and content.

In order to enter that discussion, however, it is essential, in the first instance, to consider some further landscapes that provide this book with flesh and shape. While I proceed from the hypothesis that theatre is distinct and significant in its own right, I also consider theatrical text and performance as always already in dialogue not only with society, but also, and because of this, with other forms of art and literature. Moreover, as a comparatist, it is my role to actively seek out, establish and preserve these connections in scholarly discourse across cultural and geographical lines. These contexts are, therefore, the landscapes that I outline in the following pages.

Visual Landscapes

This book has been shaped by different ecologies: social, political, cultural and geographical. It deals with artistic work that one would describe as 'British', a terrain that in recent years I have been observing through different lenses, having relocated from the UK to Sweden shortly before COVID-19. It is not only the distance itself that is crucial, but, as I locate this book within the environmental humanities in the intersection with sociology and cultural geography and topography, it is also a matter of the specific positioning through which my perspective is filtered. That is, the geo- and socio-morphologies of Sweden have conditioned my way of looking. They are shaping my empirical observation and immersion—most relevantly to this book, to landscapes very differently inhabited: namely, much more sparsely in terms of human life. These landscapes are also very differently distributed in terms of interchange between the domestic and recreational, buildings and nature. In my hometown of Stockholm, these are designed to be part of one another; to intermesh and unfold one within the other. It is a landscape one might describe as urban, but of a very different urbanity to the ones I knew before. Across different neighbourhoods there is provision for ample green space in most residential blocks; wilderness itself—natural reserves, for example—is never too far away. In my southern neighbourhood of Skarpnäck, purpose-created in the 1980s, a five-minute walk provides access to the nearest natural reserve, inhabited mostly by non-human life; meanwhile, a three-minute walk in the opposite direction brings me to a station, from where a metro line, in circa fifteen minutes, connects me to the centre of a major European capital.

It is difficult to imagine many contexts where, on a quotidian level, such an experience of the interspace figures more prominently as one's inhabited reality. Moreover, having experienced the first stretch of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Northern town of Sundsvall, my first home in Sweden, under 'recommendations'—though not requirements—of travel restrictions, my own in-betweenness became substantially pronounced. On most days, I would do repeat crossings of the Sundsvall bridge—a two-kilometre stretch of space extending over Sundsvall's substantial sea surface, part of a highway connecting the town to Stockholm or Norway. As I was unable to travel beyond the city limits, despite Sweden's infrastructures of closeness that mitigate its vastness, the bridge served as that transitional space for me: both a destination and the

promise of a destination at the same time. Away from family and friends, in a home that was entirely new, I was not alone in developing novel perceptions of place and new spatial coordinates. I can only imagine that Sweden residents more firmly embedded than myself at the time must have also felt such shifts in location and rootedness, and in the function of place and space as both elastic and condensed. After all, a core part of the national, it would appear, character, came under pressure, since, in Sweden, "it is thought that about half of all travel stems from meeting up with friends and family" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 53). The idea for this book, then, began to bubble more urgently given my socio-spatial context and the globally shared crisis, and as I found myself "co-present […] receiving hospitality and […] enjoying the knowledge of local culture" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 53). The interspace was both a condition and a concept; it urged a framing and analysis. But I would have to wait for conditions to allow for my primary research tool, the theatre, to open up again—and for borders to do the same.

Meanwhile, an equally sited artistic paradigm took hold; as this book was fermenting, I was spending time at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, before, but, especially, after the worst of the pandemic and as cultural spaces were tentatively reopening. In the absence of international travel and live performance, the museum was providing solace by performing, resiliently, itself, in the eerie quiet void of human presence, retaining its own intimate inanimate ecologies. It was in these conditions that I discovered the painting that served as the mental image for the book: Georges Braque's *La Roche-Guyon: le château* (1909). On its canvas, human and non-human worlds are forever interspersed, intermeshing, interjecting, interwoven; distinct yet inseparable. The painting's vertical orientation adds to its urgency and depth of field; it occupies space, while also creating it; it is an action and a site of/for observation, and, depending on how and whence one looks, it expands and contracts, pulsating despite its superficial stillness. Its image and effect are the very definition of the interspace, motivating the concept of the analysis that unfolds in the next chapters.

At the same time as these connections to sites and sights, I also returned, on occasion of the pandemic's new spatialities, to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929; 2020): a definitive account of interspace and its value, mediating the individual's private and public existence by taking on the practical and symbolic significance of places that serve both dwelling and work. This re-reading was enriched by the installation

A Room of One's Own—A Thousand Libraries by the artist Kajsa Dahlberg (2006), also held at Moderna Museet (see Angelaki 2022b). Dahlberg's artwork not only creates an interspace between the present and past by using Woolf's work as a means of establishing a bridge between visual art and literature, and between socio-political, access and gender questions across time, but it also imagines the text as an interspace, moveable, changeable, transient—across time and across the minds and hands of readers who inscribe in its margins. The book becomes both the site in which ideas and emotions can be entrusted and deposited, and the site that produces these very ideas and emotions. It mediates and intervenes across multiple subjects; and, in its inanimate yet embodied flesh, it endures, in different readerly contexts, communities and reception environments. I returned, then, to the ideological and aesthetic framework of Woolf's output, as interspaces appear constantly, opening and closing, sharp yet fluid, with different thoughts distinct and interspersed across the broader narrative, intermeshing with it, changing it. The plays that this book is concerned with as textual and artistic sites provide that same space for engagement, both fleshy and flexible.

For part of the sabbatical year that made the completion of this book possible, I was hosted as Visiting Professor at 'La Sapienza'—University of Rome, an experience conducive to my immersion in cultural interspatialities and to further engagement with Woolf, whose work punctuates the end stages of this monograph's writing, like it does its beginning. These end stages were specifically informed by the exhibition *Virginia Woolf e Bloomsbury. Inventing Life*, presented at Rome's Palazzo Altemps (Fusini 2022). There, Woolf and her work were delivered amongst the historical marble forms, making the writer appear recent, perhaps almost new vis-à-vis the broader historical narrative. In these powerful interplays between layers of histories (and) of visual and literary cultures for which the museum itself served as interspace, the work of Woolf, text citations inscribed in the exhibition halls as early editions were displayed in the cabinets, served to remind the spectator of the potency of the room. This is the *par excellence* site theorised, politicised, appropriated and yet never entirely conquered; the bearer and accelerator of human lives, that, at the same time, continues with a life of its own, both receptive and responsive to, and irrespective and independent of, human presence—always immersed in a deep time. Both a room of *one's* own, and a room of *its* own, then, inviting a consideration of how intimate spaces are curated to resist systemic failures, having the potential to disrupt and disturb.

The urgency of Woolf's discourse, surprising the spectator in its large-scale display, made the point emphatically. Spatiality, inhabitancy, moments of encounter, arrivals and departures, gatherings and dispersals, their dynamics, and the inner biorhythms of sites: these are the forces that drive the discussion; they form the grounding questions. Time passes through these spaces, itself as elastic as they are, and equally relative and dynamic. It is the following quotation from Woolf's *The Waves* (1931; 2019), staged next to the author's image amongst the marble structures keeping the deep time of Palazzo Altemps, that perhaps best frames this notion:

> The door goes on opening
> The room fills and fills
> with knowledge, anguish,
> many kinds of ambition,
> much indifference,
> some despair
> Now this room seems
> to me central, something
> scooped out of the eternal
> night. Outside lives twist
> and intersect, but round us,
> wrapping us about
> Here we are centred. (Fusini 2022; Woolf 1931)

The mode of citation above follows the format in which it was presented in the exhibition (rather than in Woolf's source text), establishing the text as site, reimagined and reinhabited as it travels through time—a receiving space of possibilities, in transit. In the ensuing discussion I expand upon the importance of the intersection between human and non-human ecologies as filtered through spatial experience, the concept that, it seems to me, the above quotation is so affectively suggestive of.

It was both the closing of a cycle and a fortuitous encounter when, in 2023 and as this book was written, I was able to reflect back on its argumentation and imagine its place in a broader narrative through another temporary exhibition, this time at Maastricht's Bonnefanten museum, proceeding directly from Woolf's creative practice as a critical framework and titled *A Room of One's Own* (Van den Bosch, 2023). Temporary exhibitions, too, running on their own rhythms of time and space and specific inter-actual contexts hinging on the arrangement and concert of

the selected works, while adhering to a predetermined transience, anticipate from the audience a certain understanding that they find themselves in an interspace. There, one performs accordingly, responsive to the fact that the staging of the exhibition event occurs in space that is permanent, without it being permanent itself; not unlike a theatre performance. Relationships to that which we partake in are established, at the same time as we experience its impact. The richness of the moment does not suffer from, but is, rather, enhanced by the temporariness in which we are not merely spectators, but players, populating the space; inhabiting the structure; creating a trace, even knowing that a date of erasure is already stated. The exhibition *A Room of One's Own*, experienced as the final event recounted in the pages of this book, comes with the gravitas of the punctuation point. It was especially meaningful, then, to see the concept of the 'room' taken up again for all its possible incarnations and justifications, not least while decisively making space for women artists and elongating time so that this may be inhabited within the institutional framework. This, and women's complex temporalities, form concerns that this book returns to often. The exhibition stunningly staged women suspended in time, but also time suspended by women.

I am referring specifically to the work of two artists as staged in the exhibition: the mixed-media installation *Shattered Ghost Stories* (1993) by Lydia Schouten (born 1948) and the series of drawings and paintings by Carol Rhodes (1959–2018), particularly in the room titled *Overview*. Schouten's work depicts women's bodies floating in space and time, at a site as rooted (the museum) as it is unfixed (the installation transcends a singular space). In their orbits are the faces of others; objects; the instruments of interactions and expectations pointing to stories largely untold, quiet and quietened. Because of the intricate staging pattern of the exhibition, blue filters on glass windows perhaps best described as creating an ultraviolet effect and mystical atmosphere, the inanimate figures performing these bodies cast long shadows on the surface below them; women's lingering presence is thus symbolically and physically inscribed in space despite silenced histories. Such issues of reinstated visibilities resonate widely across this book.

As this section closes, it is the work of Rhodes, a late and especially impactful discovery, that merits a special mention. In her intricate series of landscapes dealing with what might be described as passing, inconsequential and even charmless environments, Rhodes captures the very essence of the interspace and instils in it light, weight, materiality and

presence in a way that speaks directly to the sensibilities of the plays analysed in the following pages; and to the very idea that inspired this book. The locations represented in Rhodes's work both exist outside of rigid time and space parameters—they are to be encountered and moved on from by animate agents in variable occurrences—and, in their endurance perfectly married to transience, command, beyond the spectator's mere gaze, actual perceptive engagement. Here is where the interval is to be performed; this is where the action takes place—in these unpeopled sites, where stories come to be inscribed: from the visual language of Rhodes, and the artist's, indicatively, *Business Park (Night)* (2007); *Construction Site* (2003); *Development Centre and Roads* (2010); *Inlet* (1997) *Moor* (1997); or *Road and Valley* (1999) to the sights and sites that the plays examined in this book create, depict and delve into. At the end, the developing discourse concerns, in the words of William Carlos Williams, "The contraction which is felt" (1923; 2011, 27) in the so-called liminal and parenthetical times and spaces that produce this very affect.

Critical Landscapes

While it is important to acknowledge the artistic (though at this point non-theatrical) incentives for this project, it is also essential to map out its academic pathways. These lie primarily in interdisciplinary sociological research, especially in its crossovers with geography, but, also, with spatial and mobility studies more broadly, not least as concerns the fast-arising spatial redistributions of the more recent decades that have generated a resolute shift of human activity to the Internet, even before COVID-19 redefined the notion of 'hybrid', leading it to become one of the primary interspatial terms of our time. 'Hybrid' deserves unpacking given its omnipresence and extensive inscription into everyday life as of 2020, including as refractor for the ways in which we revisit earlier plays of the recent period, or as factor for the form and content of post-2020 texts.

From its early roots as outlined in the *OED* as noun in zoology (1601; first adjectival occurrence 1775), and its adoption into cultural anthropology (1631) and botany (adjective 1775; noun 1788), to its "*transferred* and *figurative*" applications as "[a]nything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements", especially in philology (first adjectival occurrence 1716–17; noun 1850), its extensions into geology (first adjectival occurrence 1775; noun 1918), physical chemistry (noun 1932; first adjectival occurrence

1939) and meteorology (first adjectival occurrence 1932), to its entrance into computing (first adjectival occurrence 1959), 'hybrid' has had a long journey (*OED* 2022a, all references to first usage per category, italics original). Then, there are the compound usages of the term and its subsequent entrance into automobility, with different semantic nuances, reported widely as early as 1921 (one somewhat obscure reference dating even further back to 1917) and 1953, respectively, with references closer to what we refer to as a 'hybrid vehicle' today, usage that has continued to evolve steadily through to the contemporary period (*OED* 2022a). Finally, and while noting that the history of 'hybrid' is de facto environmental in the broadest sense, I am particularly concerned with the term's more recently emerging usages: dating back to 1996 and developing through to the 2021 pandemic context as found in the Chinese, American and British press, a definitive cited example from *The Times* (2021) relates specifically to hybrid working (*OED* 2022a). Here we encounter the 'hybrid' "[o]f employment, education, etc.: providing flexible models for working or learning, specifically by using digital communications technology to allow effective remote access and home working as an alternative to or in combination with traditional office or teaching environments" (*OED* 2022a). Today we can also locate 'hybrid' as a term functioning dramaturgically, applying extensively to the plays examined here: both politically resonant and aesthetically groundbreaking. Such a meaning is in addition to the extant, applied use of 'hybrid' as a mode of performance encompassing both physical and digital modalities in pandemic times, and, perhaps, also afterwards—a cumulative picture will only fully emerge some time from now. The term 'environment' is also, as can be seen in the above-cited definition, in a process of flux, with its current definitions extending to digital as much as physical realms, and, while denoting various ecologies, not at all exclusive to nature.

This is not to say that the natural environment has not also been a gravitational pole for relevant recent scholarship. Given this book's scope, I foreground Roberto Marchesini's *The Virus Paradigm: A Planetary Ecology of the Mind* (2021). Marchesini's study, best understood as emphasising "ecological networks of interdependence" (2021, 3), is complex and compelling, dedicated to a profound and systematic investigation of causality between environmental and health crises, while, at the same time, querying the term 'viral' and its potentialities as a framing condition. Marchesini's position could be summed up thus:

> The pandemic […] is nothing more than a fairly predictable result of a series of alterations that have been produced in the network of life. The idea that the entire biosphere is nothing more than a set of passive resources at our unlimited disposal, and with which we are not implicated in the slightest, makes it impossible for us to understand the pandemic: that is why we treat it as a sort of external, alien and accidental invasion, which cannot be traced back to the global model we call capitalism. (2021, 17)

Marchesini outlines the thesis that a systematic disruption of fragile ecologies for the purposes of human-driven comfort, extraction and monetisation cannot possibly be unrelated to arising pathogenies that are the very product of such callous attitudes. The ways in which transatlantic networks of consumption are structured, especially in the era of increased mobility, remain a relevant concern for this book and its theoretical moorings, and are considered in more detail in the section of this introduction that deals with the work of John Urry.

To provide a fuller overview of Marchesini's framework, I additionally highlight the following statement, emphasising how the experience of the pandemic has included the performative within it—an adaptation to a new life that draws on the vocabularies and practices of theatre:

> People photograph the empty, magnificent and ghostly cities, […] with the help of drones or from their balconies, which have become the proscenium of new forms of social relationships. This inaugurates a real aesthetics of the infection, which transforms the old town centers, emptied of people and cars, into postcards dominated by the illuminated monuments, the streets reflecting the solitary glow of the moon and the stealthy passage of wild animals. The pandemic sublime has thus become a style that arouses wonder and fear, […] and draws a portrait of metropolitan spaces completely subverted in their meaning. (2021, 14)

At the same time as the staging of everyday life, including its 'scenography' of non-human ecologies, became increasingly dominated by the awe-inspiring visual images that captured the radical redistribution of previously human-dominated environments, actual theatre, in its physical, embodied, simultaneously cross-lived and experienced iteration, ceased. The 'pandemic sublime', a stunning term that gives me pause, particularly stands out. Having encountered our familiar landscapes as they turned unfamiliar, it ought to remain relevant to humans as a spatial aesthetic;

a mode of interpreting; a condition infused in the environments of the plays and productions we encounter after COVID-19 (including the re-readings/re-stagings of plays that predate the virus). And all this in a way comparable to how, as I am arguing in this and earlier work, the climate crisis and the various desolations it has generated ought to shape, equally, the ways we see, read and do theatre going forward (see Angelaki 2019).

COVID-19 brought "to the surface repressed fragments that inevitably clash with the idea of emancipation from nature that had led us to believe that the body, reified into controlled flesh, was only that of other animals. What is waning is a whole ontological paradigm and not just a social and economic model", Marchesini writes (2021, 18). Consequences include an understanding that "no economy is ever an end in itself, but is always at the service of a collective life project based on certain values" (Marchesini 2021, 19), ones that recognise that 'life' is a great deal more than human, and that 'values' of egalitarianism do not only concern how we relate to fellow human beings. Hence "we can no longer conceive of an economy that does not take due account of the environmental impact of its practices" given the mutuality and flow between "Individual spaces and natural resources" as "converging terms" (Marchesini 2021, 19). Or, as was noted well pre-pandemic, in discourses equally condemning of neoliberalism, even as the dominant vocabulary still referred to 'change' rather than 'crisis', "[c]limate change shows that the private pursuit of individual gain around the world, especially since around 1990, has resulted in a collective outcome at the global level that threatens the future of capitalism" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 151).

In terms of theatre studies, also at the start of the previous decade, the conundrum was equally identified by colleagues, with Downing Cless highlighting the "human expansion of the cultural environment (economy) at the cost of the natural environment (also economy), that in turn alienates self from nature, which even becomes demonized other" (2010, 3). This striking vocabulary resonates widely across the plays examined in this book, and especially so when it comes to texts dealing with wild, untameable, or difficult and hostile non-human environments in their cross-effects with human agents. Cless further argues: "[e]conomy trumps ecology that in turn threatens economy" (2010, 4). The plays discussed in the present study evoke contexts of desolation in their spatiotemporal suspension. This is environmentally charged because of both destruction and grief, and also because the capitalist order, in its fierce colonising, has failed to accrue any sense of community. In different

ways, the plays featured in this book show how such capitalist orthodoxy might be undermined—however awkwardly—through a post-crisis (equally: financial, environmental, health, systemic) sincerity. The latter has, as we have made our way into the first quarter of the new century, delivered a tranche of texts that unapologetically confront the failure, boldly taking on narratives and histories, and identifying transitory spaces and experiences not as the outliers of error, but as the margins of change.

This is a book that rejects spatial binarism, while, at the same time, appreciating that spaces are constituted of distinctive features that furnish them with individual characteristics and unique capabilities. It is also a book that rejects exceptionalism in one of its most catastrophic iterations, that which involves imposing the human over the non-human. This study, finally, treats the COVID-19 pandemic like an embedded context for observing the devastations and desolations—physical, environmental, capitalist—that both predate and succeed the virus itself. In Marchesini's discourse, this condition of viewing and responding to the interpretative challenge while recognising that a watershed moment—environmental and epidemiological—has occurred and is still unfolding, is given a precise iteration in the following:

> Suddenly we feel the body rebel, coming back to remind us of the error of dualism. Suddenly we hear the deep beat of our animal flesh that throbs with joy or fear, living in a here and now which becomes important and deep, eternal in its minuteness precisely because it is ecologically nested in time and space. So we discover that the future could be different, that the continuum of our certainties is not so obvious after all, that our many impalpable and viral assumptions – the market, the technosphere, progress – will not be able to contain the coming crises. (2021, 41)

The plays in this book share the interspatial opening up of the discursive site; of the dialogical process with history. This is seen at the point of not only capturing *where* humanity has arrived through different fallacies and abrasions within our human and non-human communities, but, also, of *how* it has arrived there. This 'how'—the choice, the decision making—is charged so that the deepness of time and space is a recurring trait in the plays, presenting not a finality, but a range of possibilities.

Discussing how historical transgressions against the non-human world have set the stage for our most recent predicament as well as for other, potential pandemic (re-)occurrences, Marchesini concludes: "[t]he more

viral expressions will appear in the theatre of our lives, the more we will rediscover the sense of being a body, along with the ecological dimension of our presence in the world" (2021, 41). That the discourses of theatre are incorporated in those of the sciences is not rare; that it is done in a way where the theatre is not spectacularised but thought of as a process of profound immersion and synergy—including in the observation of the points of fracture of that synergy when it comes to the interaction between non-human and human ecologies—is perhaps less common. The above comment uses the theatre as framing device, but, beyond that, also as a way of being—and especially of being together. As such, it captures both its capacity to shape human experience, offering a framework for it, and its ability to serve as the grounding focus through which to observe the radical crisis in which we are not merely passively embedded in, but in which we have involved ourselves. Marchesini sets out a hypothesis where "[m]oving from a disjunctive to a relational vision means, becoming aware of interdependence—not only ecological, biological, epidemiological, but above all ontological", adding that "a relational ontology or eco-ontology […] means overcoming the essentialist reading and understanding that the human being lies in relationship, not in disjunction" (2021, 53). The position captures the dialogical and interventionist principle that this book sets out in relation to the plays it examines.

This is, across the board, the outcome of synthesis that locates the human at the point of managing the disruptions to all communities where the human has functioned as transgressor and appreciating that such established norms simply cannot provide any way forward. Rather, new modalities for being together and co-inhabiting spaces on a local and global scale, and for the responsibilities and agencies attached to these processes, ought to be urgently investigated. As Marchesini claims, "[t]he virus, therefore, can be used as a model to understand this paradigm shift that we have before us and which can no longer be postponed, if we want to give a future to our presence on the world's stage" (2021, 56). This is, ultimately, what it means to acknowledge COVID-19 as, equally, scientific, social, environmental and interpretative paradigm shift. The pandemic laid the interdependency bare, compelling ways of acting and seeing that cannot disregard it, and that ought to bear on how we view and engage with the world in the immediate and distant future.

This concerns, equally, how we treat human and non-human communities and environments, and how we address, represent and interpret these synergies in art.

There are two directions to pursue further in my theoretical framing proceeding from the above. Firstly, it is important to note that a substantial part of my case studies exist in the intersections of theatre and science, not merely re-performing established connections, but also producing novel directions. Here, Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr offers a lucid reflection on this interrelationship:

> The gasp of delight one often hears at a play dealing with scientific ideas, or the amazement at how an idea seems effortlessly and brilliantly shown, do not necessarily signal a passive kind of engagement. Rather, [...] theatre's interaction with science enables active audience participation, whether overt or subtly implicit, through its combination of liveness, immediacy, science, and communality. The act of spectating (inadequate though the word may be to describe what an audience does at a performance of any kind) involves cognitive processes that activate the whole body and generate new knowledges [...] the extraordinary wholeness of experience that science on stage allows – an epistemology uniquely enabled by the integration of theatre and scientific concepts. (2020, 11)

Shepherd-Barr's single-edited *Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science* (2020), where the quotation appears, is highly significant because it considers a number of parameters and iterations for theatre's fascination with science, as well as the mutual service that the two have the capacity to deliver for each other towards heightening awareness and agency. I hope that, as I take on health, well-being, technology, and, of course, climate and environment, I will be able to enrich the field that Shepherd-Barr so well captures above, through the socio-spatial perspective I propose in the pages of this book.

A natural link to the above considerations concerns the engagement of theatre studies with the environment. I have logged the most welcome flourishing of this field in earlier publications, which have also sought to contribute to its expansion (see Angelaki 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022a, 2022c). I have had the fortune of advancing such dialogues further in collaborative interdisciplinary publications, specifically the Special Issue of *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, which I co-edited with Elizabeth Sakellaridou under the topic of *Theatre and Ecology* (2022), and the Special Issue of *Green Letters* titled *A New Poetics of Space* (2022), co-edited with

Lucy Jeffery. Spatialities, ecologies and pluralisms in the approaches to such concerns shape our broader interdisciplinary field, and, in the more recent period, significant studies have contributed from different perspectives. Here, the work of Gemma Edwards (*Representing the Rural on the English Stage: Performance and Rurality in the Twenty-First Century*, 2023), Patrick Lonergan (*Theatre Revivals for the Anthropocene*, 2023), Mohebat Ahmadi (*Towards an Ecocritical Theatre: Playing the Anthropocene*, 2022), Tanja Beer (*Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance*, 2021), Theresa J. May (*Earth Matters on Stage: Ecology and Environment in American Theater*, 2021), Lisa Woynarski (*Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change*, 2020) and Julie Hudson (*The Environment on Stage: Scenery or Shapeshifter?*, 2019), focusing on full-length monographs, indicatively but not exhaustively, deserves a special mention. Theatre studies, we might agree, is long evolved past playing catch-up, to acknowledge May's (rightful, accurate) observation on the critical and creative field's (then notable) slowness to respond in her pioneering article "Greening the Theater: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage" (2005). The environment, in the present book and in my own work more broadly, serves a method, and not only theme; the book therefore looks to enrich the above discourses, as it likewise seeks to further the socio-political analyses of theatre's affective power of engagement, on which I expand in the next section.

Secondly, work towards recognising the contingencies that Marchesini (2021) foregrounds had been underway, not least in one of the most impactful, for the purposes of this book at least, contributions to cultural geography and movement sociology: Anthony Elliott and John Urry's *Mobile Lives* that, already in 2010, was posing urgent questions as to the impacts of novel mobile distributions of space. It is startling to consider Elliott and Urry's framework today, knowing how environmental and health crises (plus their intersections) have unfolded. Elliott and Urry specifically foreground "the textures of mobile lives in the twenty-first century", considering "the preconditions that have made such strange experiences contingently possible" and which "could come to a shuddering slowdown or even reverse" that could, in turn, mobilise "post-carbon futures" (2010, xi). The authors locate their work within a "post-carbonism" context, describing it as "perhaps one of the first examples of 'post-carbon' social theory" (2010, xi). This, as we have seen in COVID-19 times, has gained traction as a result of both the halt of movement mandated because of the pandemic and due to, as

Marchesini identifies, the imperative realisations of the urgent need for a reconceptualisation and refashioning of the relationship between ecology and economy in its aftermath (2021). The 'textures' of lives, spatial but primarily interspatial, fine and layered, are very much the focus of this book. Such a focus necessitates a joint endeavour of uncovering experiential nuances as they occur and locating them critically within the complex sites in which they take place.

I am especially struck by Elliott and Urry's own usage of "interspaces", occurring in the context of their broader discussion of "network capital" (2010, 10). This book draws on, but does not exhaust its focus on mobilities, and I will not, therefore, be dwelling on the concept here. I do, however, find it purposeful to consider some of Elliott and Urry's foundational principles, especially in their discussion of: "movement capacities in relationship to the environment"; "location-free information and contact points: fixed or moving sites where information and communications can arrive, be stored and retrieved"; "[a]ccess to car, road space, fuel, [public transport…]"; "time and other resources"; and, even though these categories cross-emerge, connect and refer in the book, most crucially, "interspaces, which ensure that the body is not exposed to physical or emotional violence" (2010, 11). Elliott and Urry define this specific sub-condition/category as "appropriate, safe and secure meeting places, both en route and at the destination(s), including office, club space, hotel, home, public spaces, street corner, café" (2010, 11). While this book might coalesce with some of these, it also extends to other situations. Concerns of viability, sustainability, safety and integrity recur in the consideration of spaces of possibility that come to bear on both the characters we encounter in the plays and the audience that experiences them. It is in these conditions that the enquiries of mutual "scripts of selfhood and textures of emotion" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 3), for characters and spectators alike, come to materialise, as this book hopes to demonstrate. Part of this, in certain plays, will concern "the reshaping of the self through engagement with increasingly complex, computerized systems [and how this] turns life towards the short-term, the episodic, bits of scattered information, slices of sociality" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 5). Specifically, technological practices that are "ushering in new environments" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 20) in a terrain "split as it is between intoxicating possibility and menacing darkness", all in the spirit of "being somewhere else" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 8) will be probed, especially in terms of how such factors inform

both the structure and content of contemporary plays, not least within a COVID-19 production and reception context.

Twenty-first-century mobilities, settlements and communities are all weighing considerations in this book. Communities operate on inclusion but also exclusion—and, especially when it comes to how such concerns are shown as diachronically relevant, it is important to consider not only plays that recharge (fictionalised but also actual) pasts through dramaturgical innovation, but, also, studies that pursue this very understanding of deep and inhabited time, challenging historical linearity. As plays pay attention to circularity and loops, so does the theory that this book applies to their elucidation. This includes considering what Elliott and Urry name the "various awesome conflicts over whether this mobile life on planet earth is actually sustainable into the medium term" (2010, 8). Here, both concepts of time (as in histories and the very definition of being located in time) and space (as in 'planet earth', its pasts, presents and futures; its inhabitants and their possibilities) will come under focus, evaluating the various kinds of 'awesome conflicts' that have arisen, both human to human, and, of course, human to non-human environment. Why it should be the case that these conflicts "have meant that the experience of a fulfilling life remains a distant chimera" due to the ways in which "[t]he emptiness of this [the hyper-mobile] vision and its costs for private lives, for those excluded, and for the planet" cluster will also form part of the discussion (Elliott and Urry 2010, 8). Disrupting the ongoing capitalist narrative through dramaturgical spatiotemporal interventions is an interconnecting trope of the plays examined; a shared thread despite—and also enhanced through—substantial formal and thematic differences.

It ought to be acknowledged from the outset that no single study can accomplish everything, or meet all expectations. This is a preamble to anticipating some readers' thoughts as to the theoretical frameworks pursued or not, and the plays and performances included or not.[1] I hope

[1] For alternative approaches to discussions of space and spatiality in contemporary theatre, without aiming to be exhaustive, I would especially recommend to the reader the work of Kim Solga (*Theory for Theatre Studies: Space*, 2019); Jo Robinson (*Theatre & the Rural*, 2016); (Joanne Tompkins (*Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space*, 2014); Silvija Jestrovic (*Performance, Space, Utopia: Cities of War, Cities of Exile*, 2013); Nicolas Whybrow (*Performance and the Contemporary City: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, 2010); Jen Harvie (*Theatre & the City*, 2009); and Jill Dolan (*Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, 2005). In terms of foundational, oft-cited discourse, including in earlier work by this author, I would invite the reader to

that the ensuing discussion will justify the selection of plays and frameworks, while acknowledging that other choices may have worked equally well, in what would have been a different book. In terms of the disciplinary constellations of this study, and for the purposes of best serving its critical and theoretical narrative, after much—sometimes considerably difficult—deliberation, certain choices emerged as the most representative of the book's ethos and imperatives. Specifically, I was keen to capture different voices, without, at the same time, any kind of tokenism. I was, likewise, mindful of checking in with the case study content dynamically, as the book developed, for the purposes of ensuring that the book might be as timely and resonant as it could be. That said, I am aware that like all research that engages in the theorisation and historiography of contemporary theatre, this study, too, is on shifting ground, faced with the ever-changing image of an ever-changing world.

There is, indeed, a dominance of plays and productions that began as commissions by London theatres in the book. I have not been able to conquer this while keeping to the thematic focus of the present study; but it seems to me that an attempt to feature different material for the wrong reasons might result in the kind of tokenism I mention above, and which I have actively worked to avoid. There are, also, certain thinkers that some readers might expect to feature in a study of this nature and which, however, on this occasion have not provided the lenses through which I home in on the theatrical material chosen. This is partly because there is the concern of self-overlap that one tries to avoid as much as possible, especially when one's work concentrates on critiques of problematic capitalist structures that have placed—and continue to place—inexorable weight on the natural world, including all different kinds of relationships and ecosystems forming part of it. Other absences are (also) owing to the fact that certain theoretical discourses are well rehearsed in studies that deal with spatio-cultural fluidities and, being rather dominant in scholarship, they are also rather well served. It is not by any means to diminish their value that they are not engaged with here; it is, however, to say that

consider Stanton B. Garner Jr. (*Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, 1994) and Bert O. States (*Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, 1985). These works, in turn, could be further contextualised by reaching deeper into historical spatio-phenomenological dialogues, more emphatically in the broader canon of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (see also Angelaki 2012), most relevantly *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945; 2002), and in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958; 1994).

part of the contribution of this book is that it hopes to move discourses towards new directions and, therefore, it is motivated also by the forging of a different methodological path.

Of course, one might point to the work of Urry that, even though different texts are engaged with in the two respective volumes, is a major reference here, and was also a reference in one of my earlier monographs (2017). This leads me to the next part of this book's critical justification: we may, as readers and scholars, value certain pieces of work—creative, critical, theoretical, philosophical—but they may not necessarily move or inspire us, or, indeed, compel and actively catalyse our research, as others might. It is a matter of feeling that one shares a language and a sensibility—and that the theory produces the analysis, rather than being adapted to it inorganically. To have worked to integrate sources that I, as reader, do not feel intuitively connected to, then, would have been disingenuous—especially when one has the fortune of being captivated by theory, feeling represented in certain discourses that nurture the idea that becomes a book. One single book, as above, must not and cannot promise to accomplish everything. I very much welcome future volumes that might share some of the sensibilities of this book, but approach them from different angles, using different materials. This, I think, is one of the greatest thrills of being in a time-deep dialogue: one book anticipates another, or an article, or several; and as these materialise, so the conversation is enriched, and it continues. In my view, such diversity is only a benefit.

One more note, then, in the closing of this section, which I hope does not read too much as a disclaimer: if an author's sensibilities are to feature, also in academic work, it is, perhaps, important to remark that any awkward, or temporary, or transient space discussed here, or encountered in everyday life, I am not inclined to view as in any way lacking, or incomplete. The in-between enchants me: stations, airports, hotels, abandoned post-industrial sites, train carriages, parking lots, highway rest stops; these are only some examples. I come to them from a perspective that could not construe them as non-places. Therefore, I also owe it to places like these, and like the ones examined in this book, to adapt my angle of vision and interpretation accordingly. All in all, I hope that the reader might agree that the book, through its case studies and theoretical methods, captures enough of what has already happened in the not-too-distant past of a very eventful twenty-first century, while locating this in a broader historical interplay with more distant impactful pasts, linking these intimately to

our present. I also hope that the reader will find a narrative thread in the book's investigation of developments still very recent and fluid, but which have sharply refocused how we view and engage with our time and space and therefore compel an attempt to gather them together, and reflect on, though not simplify and conflate them.

Analytical Landscapes

In her monograph *Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship: Provocations for Change*, Liz Tomlin expresses the hope that her work

> can inspire theatre makers to construct multiple new manifestations of dramaturgical practice that refuse the limitations of a binary that stipulates the superiority of one political logic over the other, and encourage a consideration of how the tension between the two might best be managed and manipulated in relation to specific material contexts of production. (2019, 18–19)

Tomlin also makes an overture towards novel critical frameworks that respond to today's political theatres in their plurality, which she envisages as part of an ongoing discussion, fruitful towards future scholarly analyses of new political performances, or, we might say, performances that can be read politically (2019, 19). The present book endorses such an outward-facing perspective at the same time as, itself, hoping to contribute to such forming traditions and the ongoing analysis of socially engaged work for the theatre, particularly that dealing with what might appear as an impenetrable crisis cluster: environmental, health and social (including financial). As such, the present study also hopes to join rigorous, nuanced interdisciplinary work emerging recently, including, indicatively though not exhaustively (in book, rather than journal, format): *The New Wave of British Women Playwrights: 2008–2021*, co-edited by Elisabeth Angel-Perez and Aloysia Rousseau (2023); *Crisis, Representation and Resilience: Perspectives on Contemporary British Theatre* (2022), co-edited by Clare Wallace, Clara Escoda, Enric Monforte and Jose Ramon Prado-Perez; *Twenty-First Century Anxieties: Dys/Utopian Spaces and Contexts in Contemporary British Theatre* (2022), co-edited by Merle Tönnies and Eckart Voigts; *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre: Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage* (2021), co-edited by Mireia Aragay, Cristina Delgado-García and Martin Middeke; and *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd:*

Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage (2015), co-edited by Clare Finburgh-Delijani and Carl Lavery.

To return to Tomlin, then, that "tension [in]between" and away from binaries (2019, 18–19), and how the "between" might be conceptualised—spatially, aesthetically, ideologically, dramaturgically, formally and thematically—forms the creative terrain and critical impetus for this book. The selected plays treat this tension dynamically, troubling the centre by imagining a space of charge that contains potential, that plants a seed for engagement; for change. The book is organised into five thematic chapters: "The Room"; "The Transient"; "The Limbo"; "The Deviant"; and "The Virtual". Each of these chapters aims to illuminate the concept of the interspace, as proposed in this book, from a distinctive, yet intersecting perspective, when it comes to each chapter's relationship to the remaining chapters of this book. For this reason, looking to set up interconnections from the start, serving the book's overall interspatial narrative and decongesting the reader experience of the individual chapters, this Introduction is followed by Chapter 2, titled " Theorising Interspaces: Creative and Critical Intersections", which sets out the critical mapping of the book, presenting the case studies' points of contact, and threading in the book's overarching methods.

Chapter 3, "The Room: Intimate Microcosms and World Formation", pursues a revised dialectics of inside and outside whereby the 'home', in its broadest sense, and, within it, the individual room, function as the lens through which one observes and experiences the world, existing both within a broader framework and as the centre of one's being. The chapter also queries how the experience of living within institutional contexts of self-proclaimed hospitality transforms the perception of intimate spaces, as well as their function and locationality within a social milieu, due to their recalibrating and re/decentring. The case studies are Rachel De-lahay's *Routes* (2013), Duncan Macmillan's *People, Places and Things* (2015) and Dipo Baruwa-Etti's *The Clinic* (2022). Chapter 4, "The Transient: Palindromic Nomadisms and Invisible Transports", focuses on spaces that are also entities unto themselves, but, in this case, without having a rooted position. This concerns vehicles as both means and site, tracing how transit may not necessarily imply mobility as a desirable condition, but as one that is at best a strategy of distraction, as in providing a form of narrative and rhythm to otherwise scattered lives, or, at worst, a mode of exploitation, functioning as the catalyst of victimisation and oppression, as in human trafficking. In this section, then, we contemplate the

human, in varying degrees of agency, passivity, or captivity. The case studies are: Clare Bayley's *The Container* (2007 (2009)), Cora Bissett and Stef Smith's *Roadkill* (2010 (2012)) and Rachel De-lahay's *Circles* (2014). Chapter 5, "The Limbo: Liminal Loci and Timeless Travels", takes on subjective times and time travel, as well as the ways in which these reveal fledgling consciousnesses that strive to take hold against the dominant transgressive capitalist consumption context that the characters find themselves inhabiting, and which promotes an exclusionary temporal linearity. The revisiting and occasional slowing down of time provides a window for intervention, disruption, re-routing and re-rooting towards a re-evaluation and re-positioning, and a re-inscription of the personal, socio-political and scientific/cosmic narrative. The case studies are E V Crowe's *The Sewing Group* (2016), Chris Bush's *~~Not~~ the End of the World* (2021) and Alistair McDowall's *The Glow* (2022). Chapter 6, "The Deviant: Unruly Spaces and Errant Experiences", discusses spaces existing in the peri-social sphere, relegated to the marginal by means of the lives and practices they accommodate, which may be defined as outside of normative and religious codes, within the contexts of the heathen and quasi-ritual. The chapter will query the role of institutional and community balances in their interactions with the eccentric, investigating the factors that render certain localities particularly desirable for and apposite to such activities, treating space not only as the physical context where the events occur, but also as a driving force towards producing these—particularly as far as natural and open-air contexts are concerned, whereby the elements are regarded as agents in their own way. The case studies are Rona Munro's *The Last Witch* (2009), Matt Grinter's *Orca* (2016) and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Welkin* (2020). Chapter 7, "The Virtual: Hybrid Environments and Deepfake Realities", analyses the digital milieu as a definitive in-between space, establishing a dialogue between the different stages of the COVID-19 era, bringing, equally, a reflection of the experiences that have already been shaped within pandemic times and an anticipation of the state we inherit as their legacy. The chapter probes how our electronic footprint has outweighed our physical one and traces the associated risks. It queries how our shifting relationship to the digital provides the basis for the ultimate in-betweenness: of the virtual both as gateway to the world and as destination unto itself, forever oscillating between private and public domains. The case studies in this chapter are Martin Crimp's *Not One of These People* and Lucy Kirkwood's *Rapture* (both 2022).

The book closes, as I have also preferred to do in previous work, not with a "Conclusion" but with an "Afterword", reflecting that it constitutes part of a narrative still in progress, and, even more importantly, a world in transition: climatic, health, social, political and economical. Thus, it ends by emphasising the importance of recognising flows, possibilities and inter-, rather than fixed states. The theatre, which interconnects (to) all of the above, which affords this book its primary material, and which always motivates the effort, is also at a time of transitioning, adapting, reformulating and implementing new modes, practices and ways of surprising, engaging, surviving and inspiring. Some of these, this book has logged; others, it is very aware that it can imagine but not anticipate—and they, I hope the reader might agree, form the critical analysis and historiographies of our future(s).

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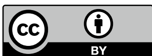

CHAPTER 2

Theorising Interspaces: Creative and Critical Intersections

Framing the Interspace

As this chapter, which is dedicated to the broader exposition of how this book conceptualises interspaces argues, the interspace is wide-ranging, fluctuating and multitudinous. The aim of this section is, therefore, to take on the term as defined in this book at large, and to introduce and unpack concepts that shape the approach that this book pursues in its subsequent, play and performance focused chapters. The guiding principle is to accompany the reader through the theoretical foundations informing these ensuing discourses. In turn, these discourses go on to focus selectively on the critical nuances that pertain to the kinds of interspaces that a respective chapter engages with, from a page and stage perspective.

The Room

The individual room is a site for action contained in spatial specifications and yet exceeding its immediate parameters, and even its potential limitations; therefore, rooms feature in different iterations across this book, treated as not merely accommodating, but propelling action. Rooms may be static, yet they unfold and refold into atmospheres and potentialities, affecting and affected by, those that enter and inhabit them. For the purposes of managing the otherwise vast landscape of plays that prioritise a singular space as the site of action, that is, the single room,

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Chapter 3 deals with spaces that are identifiable as rooms, but which, further, serve discreet and specific functions: they do not only have the remit of keeping, but, also, and in different ways, of detaining; through complex dynamics these spaces produce mental, emotional and physical holds. The rooms discussed in this chapter share that they are entered by individuals in a process of separation and extrication from their previous contexts, a process which, effected no less by other humans than by the spaces themselves, delivers monumental change and varying degrees of un-/freedom.

What *Routes* (De-lahay 2013), *People, Places and Things* (Macmillan 2015) and *The Clinic* (Baruwa-Etti 2022), three otherwise very different plays, share, is the unease arising from the individual's hope for a 'better', safer and more cared for version of self, and the material conditions that interfere with its fulfilment. In all cases, vulnerability is the definitive condition: physical, mental and emotional. It is this state that the main characters bring into the rooms they inhabit; the spaces themselves exacerbate it at the same time as they promise to relieve it. The interspace here, other than the site between an inside (domestic, perceptual) and an outside (the world beyond the 'shelter'; the social), materialises also because of this intricate state of accommodating these contradictory co-experiences. In all rooms considered in Chapter 3 there is an institutional function, the outcome of which will determine the individual's (re)integration into the world beyond the room; the room both anticipates and assumes that world, and keeps the individual separate from it.

The institutional is conceptualised as the healing site of trauma brought on, for example, by placelessness, addiction, desolation. But it is essential also to query how much the site perpetuates the trauma it purports to solve. There is a crucial intersection at the lexical level, which crosses over to the cognitive, if we consider 'hospital', for instance. It denotes a space of treatment for a malady or at least its symptoms. Hospitality is a connected term that, even though it does not imply treatment, or cure, it does suggest a degree of care. It is also a crossover term for different contexts: tourist, domestic, clinical. In Baruwa-Etti's play the latter two intersect with some tension and antagonisms arising, taking us into Jacques Derrida's staple term 'hostipitality'. This hinges on "the troubling analogy [...] between *hostis* as host and *hostis* as enemy, between hospitality and hostility" (Derrida 2000, 15, original emphasis). As Derrida writes:

> it is precisely the *patron* of the house – he [sic] who receives, who is master in his [sic] house, in his household, in his state, in his nation, in his city, in his town, who remains master in his house – who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome; where consequently there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door. (2000, 4, original emphasis)

These tensions interconnect the case studies in Chapter 3, as the domestic traverses all possible iterations, denotations and connotations, from the home to the homeland. Neither term is open; rather, they are restrictive in the envisaging of who has the agency to determine or even employ them.

In *Routes*, we are dealing with border control, and the domestic defined as a country closed off to those with no residence privileges; hostipitality is performed from the border check to the Immigration Removal Centre, and vice versa. It also applies to the halfway house where the play's two young characters, Kola and Bashir, first encounter each other, in conditions of surveillance, curfew and custody, which, however, fail to provide shelter for either of them. Later in the play, Bashir, having turned eighteen, will experience another detention context, waiting indefinitely to be deported to a country of origin that has never been 'home', as the actual homeland—Britain—turns Bashir away. In an intersecting plotline, another character, Femi, having re-entered Britain illegally to be reconnected with family and flagged as a deportation target instantly, will also encounter hostipitality while awaiting removal. The discomfort is built into the very architecture of the accommodating structures involved, with hostility performed as part of the host's suite of measures for exerting authority over the undesirable guest, with varying degrees of passive- and outright aggressiveness.

Derrida's concept also applies to *People, Places and Things*, where clinical and domestic contexts blend, as Macmillan's protagonist returns to the childhood home that functions as a halfway house, following treatment at a rehabilitation clinic. Here, I am not concentrating on the difficult conditions of the clinic as performing hostipitality, though, arguably, a case could also be made on such grounds. I am, rather, foregrounding the family home as the primary locus of hostipitality. The site proves to be the source of all the crises of the past—the very constellation of people, places and things, that spurred on the lead character's (I purposely withhold the name at this stage) addiction and created the

need for the clinical context in the first place. The hostility emanating from the space and its objects is equal to its familiarity—and it is perpetrated by the protagonist's hosts, who are also their parents. Institutional structures, then, are proliferated not only by clinical contexts, but, as in Baruwa-Etti's play, also by domestic ones, as long as there is someone receiving 'care' and someone in a position of authority claiming to administer it. Hostipitality here can be seen to describe a condition whereby the doors of the home are opened by its owners (a family) to an individual (a vulnerable woman whose recently deceased husband was the patient of one of the family members) but, in order to be accepted, this person ought to conform to the rules of the host. The accepted norms, from appearance to comportment, are not flexible, though they are purported to be. When the guest disrupts the patterns, questioning their validity, all balance proves tentative, leading to the guest's dramatic exit.

As Derrida notes, there is a concerted practice of "the law of hospitality as the law of the household", or "*oikonomia*", meaning "the law of a place" (2000, 4, original emphasis). In recent years, the word-play of "oiko-" and "eco-" has been producing interesting results (see indicatively: Angelaki 2022; Lavery 2018). The shared root allows me to comment that it is this laying of the law by those in charge of the 'domestic' in its broadest and widest iterations that produces, quietly yet firmly, hostile ecologies—what is also referred to as 'hostile environment'. In those rooms, interspaces of hosting/detaining, and while appreciating their differences and therefore varying degrees of hostility, the environment may even, at times, function under a guise of civility—but it remains a guise filled with conditions. Social anthropologist Heidrun Friese rightly observes that "[t]he uninvited guest, interrogated immediately upon arrival about the reasons, goals and intentions of his [sic] presence, becomes subject to mysterious decisions, inexplicable and implausible rules and regulations" (2004, 67). As Chapter 3 discusses, one of the binaries that also evaporate, or, at least, are radically questioned as a result of the spatial fluidity and interstitial function of the sites considered, is that between the invited and uninvited guests.

In terms of appreciating the semantic and symbolic function of language and its cognitive organisation and performance within and by institutions as far as hospitality, especially in its clinical iteration, is concerned, Michel Foucault's foundational discourse in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) is relevant. Here, Foucault makes a distinction between the hospital and the clinic, and their respective functions, noting that "[i]n

order to understand the meaning and structure of clinical experience, we must first rewrite the history of the institutions in which its organizational effort has been manifested" (1963, 68). He refers to François de la Boe's "clinical school" within Leyden's hospital (1658), culminating in the record *Collegium Nosocomium* (Foucault 1963, 68): that the clinic is the space of observation within an institutional environment of treatment and care becomes immediately obvious, and the choice of term by De la Boe is meaningful—this is a study within a hospital context. Meanwhile, Foucault's recurring reference to the 'nosological' and its correlatives invites further consideration of the derivatives of the Greek verb *nosō* [νοσώ, meaning to suffer from a malady], or the noun *nósos* [νόσος, meaning malady]. As opposed to the Latin term, now firmly embedded within the Anglophone lexicon and providing the shared root for 'hospital' and 'hospitality', the equivalent Greek terms are distinct, with no root overlap. *Nosokomeion* [hospital] and *philoxeneia* [hospitality] are entirely different etymologically and semantically, though they both entail a process of hosting. In the case of the latter, a stranger, *xenos*, is received in a friendly way—this could be applied to any abovementioned context of hospitality. The suffix '*-komeion*', however, indicates a site of admission and retention, implying, also, a degree of incapacitation for the guest, which could be health- or economy related, or both. With this suffix comes also a duty of care in a formalised context, which is implied and expected, though not guaranteed. Neither term precludes the possibility of an abuse of the remit by those administering the welcome, or the care, in practice.

Elsewhere, Foucault clarifies: "[t]he collective structure of medical experience, the collective character of the hospital field—the clinic is situated at the meeting point of the two totalities; the experience that defines it traverses the surface of their confrontation and of their reciprocal boundary. There it derives not only its inexhaustible richness but also its sufficient, enclosed form" (1963, 136). As boundaries evaporate, so do interpretations set on preserving them, and we move towards an understanding of in-house immersion, whose experience both Baruwa-Etti and Macmillan highlight. There is a powerful ambiguity that forms in the interspatial semantic possibilities of the Greek terms; and it is as rich, and laden with possibility, as the Latin equivalent—although the latter is more explicit in terms of linguistic dependencies. This may lead us to conclude that hospitality has never truly been a connotation-free term,

but, rather, one that has always been followed by terms and conditions; a linguistic reflection of social contracts.

To fully unpack Foucault's theoretical historicisation of clinical and hospital space here is neither possible nor purposeful. But before moving on I would like to flesh out some tenets of Foucault's, which will be of relevance to the ensuing case study discussion. For the purposes of this book, I am interested in the ways "in which one spatializes disease" (Foucault 1963, 1), and particularly in how such spatialisation relates both to the site that accommodates the afflicted patient and to that patient's own body that becomes the site of the malady. Still, I am also cautious of slipping into anthropocentrism. Therefore, in a chapter that considers disease intersectionally, linked to factors of gender, class, race—and deeply rooted within its social contexts—and where this disease can be affecting mental health, which, in turn, expresses itself somatically, or the body in its totality constantly, as is the case with the disease of addiction, I am also drawn to the following observation. This displaces the human subject from the centre, recognising the disease as an ecosystem unto itself:

> In the rational space of disease, doctors and patients do not occupy a place as of right; they are tolerated as disturbances that can hardly be avoided: the paradoxical role of medicine consists, above all, in neutralizing them, in maintaining the maximum difference between them, so that, in the void that appears between them, the ideal configuration of the disease becomes a concrete, free form, totalized at last in a motionless, simultaneous picture, lacking both density and secrecy, where recognition opens of itself onto the order of essences.
>
> Classificatory thought gives itself an essential space, which it proceeds to efface at each moment. Disease exists only in that space, since that space constitutes it as nature; and yet it always appears rather out of phase in relation to that space, because it is manifested in a real patient, beneath the observing eye of a forearmed doctor. (Foucault 1963, 8)

It is crucial that the disease is seen to create its interspatial *situation*. This, too, is an in-between locus that, for the mediators attempting to manage it, follows its own rhythms, to which the individual adapts, and by means of which the surrounding space is screened, filtered and transformed. And as to the elusiveness of the malady, to the fact that the space is open, and unconfinable to borders, even if it accommodates itself within a physical site (a building or a body), "[t]he space of the body and the space

of the disease possess enough latitude to slide away from one another" (Foucault 1963, 10). As Foucault observes elsewhere, the space of that body is "deep, visible, solid, enclosed, but accessible" (1963, 241). Hence the intractable nature of diseases; hence the regressions of the patients we see in Baruwa-Etti and Macmillan, and the ability of the malady, social and physical alike, to resist cure, but, also, control. Hence, ultimately, the conflicts of the plays, and their eruptions.

"In this corporal space in which it circulates freely, disease undergoes metastases and metamorphoses" writes Foucault (1963, 10); so it is for the malady itself and for the systemic malaise whose symptom and outcome it may be considered. Foucault's "medicine of spaces" (1963, 10) may today be understood as the medicine of interspaces: fluidities arise when, as Foucault puts this, "medical space can coincide with social space, or, rather, traverse it and wholly penetrate it" (1963, 35). What happens, in other words, when one's social space is also the space where medical observation—or a cure process—materialises, as we will see is the case in *People, Places and Things*, where all socialisation is reinscribed in the patient as part of the treatment process? And what may be the outcome when a domestic space becomes a locus of hospitality, but also, of cure, as in *The Clinic*? It is with this link between the medical and the familial that I would like to close this reference, highlighting Foucault's observation that, historically, in clinic treatment contexts, "the patients were often accommodated in the doctor's own house" (1963, 66), the space itself conceptualised as integral to treatment ecologies. Foucault's reference to "the silent life of the clinic" (1963, 67), the latter being "probably the first attempt to order a science on the exercise and decisions of the gaze" (1963, 108), is striking. Such framing will inform the understanding of how the clinic emerges as a potent organum and action site in Baruwa-Etti's and Macmillan's plays, respectively, in terms of enclosure, inner biorhythm and variations in the capacities and denotations of the clinic. In Baruwa-Etti's text, the eponymous clinic—unlike the dominant setting of Macmillan's piece, an actual rehabilitation clinic—is not a clinic as such, but a collective term assigned by a matriarch to both the family home and the family members because, due to their different skills and professions, they have so-perceived healing powers.

In terms of the overall grounding of spatiality in Chapter 3, and keeping in mind the bigger picture of this book, I return to Foucault and "tertiary spatialization", defined as all the actions through which, in a

> given society, a disease is circumscribed, medically invested, isolated, divided up into closed, privileged regions, or distributed throughout cure centres, arranged in the most favorable way. Tertiary is not intended to imply a derivative, less essential structure than the preceding ones; it brings into play a system of options that reveals the way in which a group, in order to protect itself, practises exclusions, establishes the forms of assistance, and reacts to poverty and to the fear of death. But to a greater extent than the other forms of spatialization, it is the locus of various dialectics: heterogeneous figures, time lags, political struggles, demands and utopias, economic constraints, social confrontations. (1963, 17)

The disease, then, is both the site that develops between the individual and the pathogenic environment of this same condition, *and* the environment in which the condition comes to be 'treated'. This space is laden with tensions, a locus of contradictions, accommodating the practices both of those with systemic control and those left exposed by that same system.

Families, here, constitute dominant and problematic environments. They are the host of the disease in the double sense of accommodating and producing it, as well as claiming to furnish the structure for its cure since "[t]he natural locus of disease is the natural locus of life—the family: gentle, spontaneous care, expressive of love and a common desire for a cure, assists nature in its struggle against the illness, and allows the illness itself to attain its own truth" (Foucault 1963, 19). Meanwhile:

> The medicine of species implies, […] a free spatialization for the disease, with […] no constraint imposed by hospital conditions—a sort of spontaneous division in the setting of its birth and development that must function as the paradoxical and natural locus of its own abolition. At the place in which it appears, it is obliged, by the same movement, to disappear. It must not be fixed in a medically prepared domain, but be allowed, in the positive sense of the term, to 'vegetate' in its original soil: the family, a social space conceived in its most natural, most primitive, most morally secure form, both enclosed upon itself and entirely transparent, where the illness is left to itself. (Foucault 1963, 19)

Such interspaces develop both in the context of the family home that becomes a clinic (Baruwa-Etti), and in the context of the rehabilitation clinic that performs home for patients, for example in group therapy where they roleplay each other's relatives, or in the context of the actual

family home, meant to continue, post-discharge, the work of the institution (Macmillan). The clinic, then, deputises and performs the family and vice versa, each environment a mimicry of the other.

Though deemed as sites of confinement and convalescence, clinical spaces are also some of the most attuned to the exterior environment spaces that one might imagine. Hospital-specialised architect Gustaf Birch-Lindgren imagines the clinical space as an ecosystem that "might well be compared to *constantly growing living organisms*" (1951, 28, original emphasis). The institution acquires a life of its own, which accommodates the lives of those treated within it; the space is a force equal to, if not greater than, the patient. Likewise reflecting on clinical spaces, physician Ester M. Sternberg emphasises how "space and place, and something as simple as a window with a view of trees, could turn the tide against illness and speed the course of healing" (2009, 24). Spatial agency intersects with individual agency, both conducive to well-being and to its lack, making imperative the understanding that "we can create for ourselves a place of healing—a tiny island—wherever we find ourselves in this world, at any moment in the interstices […]" (Sternberg 2009, 296). On principle, it would be difficult to contest this; but it does assume a certain degree of freedom. It is to the credit of contemporary playwriting that it captures both the need to catch up with oneself and one's ailments, and the contradictions involved in the process that might have all the requisites to produce healing in a hospitable environment—sometimes even an aesthetically pleasing one—but that leads to tentative results. Such conditions, as Chapter 3 discusses, apply, in different ways, both to *The Clinic* and *People, Places and Things*.

An equally important question concerns access and privilege and, returning to earlier considerations, the very hospitability of the hospitality site. In De-lahay's *Routes*, the latter is not a clinical but a detention context. Sometimes, as *Routes* shows, the only reality is that of dysfunctional, unsupportive material structures, bereft of perspective and prospect, where trauma percolates with no infrastructure to facilitate that 'place of healing' physically and mentally/emotionally. That is, the 'interstices' might themselves be governed by the rules of an extrinsically imposed system of surveillance and correction; of detaining and processing—with minimal space for interjection. That any positive action, as Chapter 3 discusses, might conceivably take place, as in the case of one of De-lahay's protagonists, is the mere outcome of empathy and

connection taking root in spite, and not because of, the surrounding conditions.

As criminology scholar Seán McConville notes, "[a]rchitecture has many components, including the mathematical, technical, aesthetic and ethical" (2000, 9). Reflecting on the possibilities for future penal architectures almost a quarter of a century before this present book, McConville observes that for a meaningful reform it "may be little reward if [a change merely] provide[s] conditions that are hygienic, nutritionally and environmentally sufficient, but socially bleak and psychologically brutalizing, with the whole enterprise being conducted in an ethical vacuum" (2000, 15). Not all those held in detention conditions are, of course, offenders at the most severe end of the penal code; there are many whose offences are minor; who fall through the cracks—another form of interstices. Delahay's play depicts precisely these situations, from young-age offenders in a corrective facility to those found guilty of illegal migration in a detention environment. In such dissimilar contexts of vulnerable individuals with histories of different transgressions, architectures of detaining or holding have a substantial, if not determining impact—or, as McConville notes:

> imagine an existence in which there are few countervailing interests, domestic preoccupations or shared joys and worries – what we call private life – what are the effects and consequences of the aesthetic experience […]? Does the absence of distractions and compensations intensify the effect of space and building? We cannot with any certainty answer this question, but it must worry us when we contemplate the necessarily restricted and sometimes bleak and arid nature of prison life. (2000, 9)

This 'bleak and arid nature', as I go on to discuss, translates literally and metaphorically across different sites and situations, making the intervention imperative all the more important to address within a context of theatre as community forum.

The Transient

A shared space emerges amongst the three plays foregrounded in Chapter 4; namely, they are all over a decade old, predating three major events that have shaped the experience of the recent period: the escalation of the climate crisis; the migration crisis; and the COVID-19 crisis. Nonetheless, revisited today as part of a contemporary historiography,

these texts can be even more revelatory than in their original context. In their co-authored *Mobile Lives* (2010), published close to the first staging of each of these texts, Anthony Elliott and John Urry make reference to mobilities very different from those typically associated with the term and the considerable degree of privilege that remains, arguably, one of its primary connotations:

> People today are travelling further, faster and (for some at least) more frequently. While many choose to travel, others are forced to be 'on the move'. Asylum seekers, refugees and forced migration also proliferate. Add to this a rapid explosion in communicative and virtual mobilities, […] and it is clear that a golden age of mobility has truly arrived – bringing with it dizzying possibilities and terrifying risks. (2010, ix)

That the declaration of our epoch as 'a golden age of mobility' is immediately followed by a disclaimer makes it all the clearer that mobility is far from unequivocally a benefit. Elsewhere, Elliott and Urry even more markedly invite their reader to consider that, beyond the way in which "globalism ushers in an individualized order of flexible, liquid and increasingly mobile and uncertain lives" (2010, 6), there is, concurrent to this, a considerably more dramatic scenario unfolding concerning those that

> have mobility thrust upon them, as the number of refugees, asylum seekers and slaves also hit record levels in the early twenty-first century. Such migrants will experience many short-term, semi-legal employments, relationships and uncertainties as they dangerously travel across borders, in containers and backs of lorries, always on the lookout for state and private security. And much of the time, refugees are immobilized within refugee camps located outside cities. (2010, 6)

This is, it is worth noting, assuming these vulnerable individuals reach their destination, which is far from a given. Additionally, even 'semi-legal' employment cannot be taken for granted in a context of modern slavery and sex trafficking, to which especially female migrants are exposed, as one of the case studies of Chapter 4 alludes to (*The Container,* Bayley 2009), and another emphatically shows (*Roadkill,* Bissett and Smith 2012).

Ten years after the publication of Elliott and Urry's *Mobile Lives*, as we know, another interspace opened, this time a viral one, halting mobilities and radically redefining what might be meant by 'possibilities' and 'risks'.

From March 2020 and for a considerable time afterwards, COVID-19, as the cause for urgently implemented travel policies globally, severely disrupted mobilities, at its most dramatic entirely ceasing and at its least invasive considerably impacting the options and modalities of mobility. As the sick planet was largely operating on pandemic lockdown, another part of its deteriorating health, the environmental, strained by the overabundance of carbon-heavy movement, became less burdened, however momentarily. Flights were grounded; urban environments were reclaimed by non-human agents; the world drew breath. Suddenly, scale became irrelevant—there was no mobility to speak of in the sense that it had become known to us in the explosive growth of recent years, in the golden era that Elliott and Urry rightly identify. (St)illness became the only scale.

And while COVID-19 impacts the socio-geographical-environmental aspect of the mobility question, it also affects another aspect: that of theatrical production and spectatorial anticipation. Given the public, but, also, the intimate aspect of theatre, performance was one of the most severely hit forms of artistic creation during the worst stages of the pandemic. The effect is doubly poignant when it comes to plays that deal with mobility: it is not only that the journeys that the plays describe are essentially reconsidered through the lens of a pandemic that has taught us that most everything can grind to a sudden and resolute halt; it is also the modes of access to and attendance of all and every play. One might even reasonably claim that, as a legacy of COVID-19 and of safe (in terms of health and finances) repertoire planning, it might take a while for theatres and companies to take similar risks with the programming of shows running on premises of sharing confined space as a way of accentuating mobility impacts, as in the case of *The Container* and *Roadkill*. Similarly, how we interpret the intimacy of such plays' spatial dramaturgies is likely to be filtered through our pandemic experience. One of the many tragedies arising from COVID-19, of course, is very much related to those considered in such plays dealing with human trafficking: escape paths disappeared; individuals suffering oppression vanished further into unaccountable domestic and otherwise hidden contexts; cycles of entrapment and abuse proliferated with even less hope of counter-action or accountability. As part of our post-COVID-19 understanding of confinement and its threats, then, these plays come with heavy resonance, even if they predate the virus—and even if the virus has impacted, however temporarily remains to be seen, the staging viability of such work.

It was "*corporeal* travel" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 16, original emphasis) that was most adversely impacted during COVID-19, and it is this that carries the greatest environmental, but, also, direct physical, mental and emotional risk combined, as is the case in all plays examined in Chapter 4. Elliott and Urry note: "physical travel involves lumpy, fragile, aged, gendered, racialized bodies" (2010, 16). Here hinges the need for the intersectional consideration of the causes and consequences of travel in terms of factors that combine environmental, health, group- and unique identifiers that converge upon exposures and crises. It is a task undertaken through distinct formal methods and thematic considerations, which, however, also intersect, in the case studies of Chapter 4.

Elliott and Urry offer an essential framing of mobility problematics, delving into the durations and traces of interspatial experience, including transport transience:

> Such bodies encounter other bodies, objects and the physical world multi-sensuously. Travel always involves *corporeal* movement and forms of pleasure and pain. Such bodies perform themselves in-between direct sensation of the 'other' and various 'sensescapes'. […] Bodies navigate backwards and forwards between directly sensing the external world as they move bodily in and through it and experiencing discursively mediated sensescapes that signify social taste and distinction, ideology and meaning. The body especially senses as it *moves*. […] There are thus various assemblages of humans, objects, technologies and scripts that contingently produce durability and stability of mobility. Such hybrid assemblages roam countrysides and cities, remaking landscapes and townscapes through their movement. (Elliott and Urry 2010, 16, original emphasis)

The above speaks directly both to the characters' and to the spectators' experience in the plays discussed in Chapter 4. Bodies indeed encounter other bodies and objects in the transit of their own travel as part of these plays' plot, but, also as part of the 'journeys' audiences share with the characters. In *Roadkill*, there is actual travel; in *The Container* it is imagined, while, in reality, we are immobilised within the travel medium; in *Circles* (De-lahay 2014), suspension of disbelief requires us, for part of the play's journey, to imagine that we are partaking in actual journeys on a bus, rather than being static in our seats within the theatre auditorium.

Of course, sometimes, bodies are also treated as though they were objects, carried in conditions of deprivation (*The Container*), or trafficked into slavery (*Roadkill*); other times, bodies are required, while in transit,

to suspend their attachment to objects—the car, the phone—so that they might share in an impromptu encounter within a temporary space (*Circles*). Sensations can be heightened to levels of pain extraordinary, and, occasionally, there might also be pleasure—in the case of the latter, this is only encountered in any consensual form in one of Chapter 4's case studies: *Circles*. In its engagement with youth hungry for connection, and as it distracts us from the subplot of the encounter perhaps beginning as a chance one, but becoming a series of scheduled performances, the play depicts a different form of joyride, tainted by spatialised and classed disappointment and longing, but no less an exercising of agency for that. This is until the force of gravity takes hold to reveal painful transgressions and betrayals. In the other two case studies, pleasure and pain occupy much darker spaces. One person's suffering and abuse is the means to another's pleasure in the case of the trafficked person in *Roadkill*, while, in order to reach some state of joy, as in being reunited with loved ones, one must endure an uncertain journey exposing them to grievous bodily harm, as in *The Container*.

No act of transient co-habitation is neutral, since, to return to Elliott and Urry, transport is gendered, racialised and classed, while the reasons for which bodies exist in certain transit and mobility conditions are systemic, involving agency, or its absence; access, or its refusal; freedom, or its deprivation. The bodies that we encounter in these plays, however isolated within their given contexts of transience, are not disconnected from, but, rather, perform their societies, even if they are excluded from, or marginalised within them. They are the outcome of the failures, transgressions and classifications of these societies, which suppress the disenfranchised as a mode of retaining capitalist, gendered, classed and racialised hierarchal structures; of withholding bodies and rights. Disenfranchised bodies find themselves inhabiting spaces that have been organised and distributed by others, mediated *for*, but *without*, and even *against* them. As they form part of this performance, so they proliferate the systemic injustices, and their own—seemingly inescapable, hence the vehicular, forever in transit metaphors in all plays mentioned here—vulnerabilities. Infrastructures are both made by humans and require human presence to continue. That an individual may partake in performances of mobility does not necessarily entail that a real choice has taken place; it could well suggest that the only available option was taken. An individual, moreover, is both what they bring to the journey, and what they become as its result; both their origin and their destination. And

they are, equally, the moment of transience between; no less significant than any kind of settlement or fixity. These hidden, or marginalised lives that we encounter in the plays of Chapter 4, are *both* there *and* not, equally visible and invisible.

In work published concurrently to Elliott and Urry's *Mobile Lives*, Geography scholar David Bissell also concentrates on corporeal, sensory and affective aspects of travel:

> mobilities are rarely experienced alone or in isolation from other people [...and] one of the figures that unite many different types of mobility is that of 'being with'. In the process of travel, we temporarily submit ourselves to become part of a mobile collective. To become a passenger always involves a 'being with'. (2010, 270)

It is not merely a case of occupying, but, rather, of sharing space: a condition on which all case studies of Chapter 4 focus their plots, imagining it as a flow between characters and audience. Communities form, sometimes on the very basis of circular movement; the "familiarity [...] between passengers" that Bissell identifies is the product of the in-between space that accommodates, however in passing, individuals that co-create this space by populating and sharing it (2010, 270–71). The affective turn, as Bissell discusses, also ought to feature in mobility, and, more specifically, transport discourses, having the capability to "transcend" the level of the individual (2010, 284). Affect, as Bissell notes, because it "emerges as a relation between bodies, objects, and technologies, [...] has distinctly spatial characteristics. [... I]t travels between things" (2010, 272). Additionally, "as affect is transmitted between bodies, the affective atmosphere of the carriage is intensified as it ripples out over space" (Bissell 2010, 276).

Bissell's framing is of direct relevance to my discussion of in-betweenness, of that which has a temporary nature but potentially crucial impact, and that hinges on specific spatiotemporal conditions of co-presence and exchange that "coalesce and collapse" (2010, 284). Bissell's concept of "affective atmospheres" also resonates: these reflect "the relational potential for things to act or change in a particular space" (2010, 273), or, in the context of Chapter 4, the capacity of the performance both to stage and to produce a space where the possibility of theatre as interventionist gesture might acquire flesh. Bissell speaks of a "'passenger body'" (2010, 277), which, in these plays that are dramaturgically built

on the premise of transport mobility, where the collective is imagined in different ways and as the spectator comes to be embedded, might also become understood as an 'audience body' of cross-sentience and relationality. The vehicle forms part of this ecology, to a degree no less significant than that of the passengers; we are dealing with "hybrid constellations of bodies and objects […] generated and sustained that eschew the dualistic conventions of the human/non-human" (Bissell 2010, 284). The vehicle, then, becomes part of human biorhythms and vice versa. Bissell concludes that "[t]hrough the movement of affect, dispositions become fostered and bodies become primed to act in different ways", which is also why "the complex interplay of technologies, matter, and bodies" and the "dwelling within the transient community that characterises spaces of public transport" invites, as Bissell also observes, further consideration (2010, 284–85). It is for these reasons that, I argue, vehicular transience is so compelling as a theatrical device, and why it merits further analysis as interspatial environment.

Installed outside London's Young Vic, the container of Bayley's eponymous play was not as prominent as it may have been in an even more central location, but it did occupy space at the same time as producing a distinct environment within itself. The outskirts of London, Edinburgh, or any city where *Roadkill* might be played, may not be especially conspicuous, but they do form part of an urban ecology that draws as much on a perceived centre as on the quieter corners. If *Roadkill* takes us there physically, in a vehicle shared by the audience and the piece's most precarious character—a moving space that both inhabit for a very brief time—*Circles* takes the audience there mentally, but, arguably, no less effectively, as we join the protagonists on a bus ride through Birmingham's urban centre and periphery without ever moving from our seats. It is difficult to imagine a stronger analogy for the fact that the characters themselves, however on the road, also, ultimately, do not arrive anywhere, with their sole space of disruption, as Chapter 4 discusses, being the vehicle itself.

The Limbo

The case studies of Chapter 5 can be described as ecofeminist plays, a comment made while recognising that the texts are very individual and distinct, yet they share plots built around female-identifying characters

immersed in contexts of broader spatio-environmental enquiry in conditions of oscillation. The plays handle limbo in different ways to reveal the vested interest of the human in the non-human, along with the gendered processes entailed in positioning oneself as agent. All the while, the texts target systemic grievances: historical, institutional and social threads that have prescribed for women roles that have been confining and entrapping. The very experience is captured in the dramaturgies of limbo: circularities, repetitions and spatial contexts that, more than accommodate, compel and produce such events. In populating time through minimal segments as in *~~Not~~ the End of the World* (Bush 2021), in visiting and revisiting different historical moments as in *The Glow* (McDowall 2022), and in creating worlds that exist temporally parallel to each other in a past that contains the present and vice versa, as in *The Sewing Group* (Crowe 2016), the plays show not only the embodied malaises that the institutional inscription of expectations upon women proliferates, but, also, the processes of intellectual, emotional and physical labour and engagement that seek to expose and ultimately dismantle such narratives.

Crises—patriarchal/hegemonic and natural/environmental most relevant to the analysis here—are best approached intersectionally; it is then that they can be more fully assessed. Specifically, I am concerned with how the capitalisms of largely patriarchal societies have inflicted the clock-time that has entrapped women in enduring narratives in ways that can be understood through framing such as this, developed by Urry:

> […] there are two transformations of time which have taken place: the realization of an immensely long, imperceptibly changing, *evolutionary* or glacial time; and of a time so brief, so *instantaneous* that it cannot be experienced or observed. Clock-time lies in the middle and it is clock-time that I have taken to be the organizing principle of modern organized capitalism. To the extent that we are passing into the postmodern, to disorganized capitalism, then we are moving to time as glacial or evolutionary *and* to a time that is instantaneous. (1994, 135, original emphasis)

I fully endorse Urry's 'both/and' approach to time here, as well as, more broadly, to concepts that might appear to be binaries but are, in fact, not at all mutually exclusive. However, I find that in the three decades since Urry's writing (1994), and, especially, as the advent of new technologies that have once more reconceptualised and reorganised time and the climate crisis have both shown, 'glacial' or 'evolutionary' time has been

marginalised and displaced when it comes to the tripartite hypothesis that Urry outlines. Meanwhile, clock-time and instantaneous time have been bolstered to form a cluster that appears to determine and regulate most, if not all, existence. Still, if reclaimed, glacial time's long-game rhythms can stand to produce an imbalance in capitalist organisations of time built on instant delivery and gratification.

The plays examined in Chapter 5 attempt an intervention by thrusting audiences into deep/glacial time, exposing the utilitarian clock-time that has chronically inflicted hurt on the environment through the very reproduction of transgressive resource-abusive systems (supposedly essential for thriving economies). These texts reveal the transgressions that nature and female-identifying subjects have sustained, bringing glacial time into practice through innovative, activist dramaturgies foregrounding its relationship with space and spatiality. The 'glacial' is explicitly addressed, from engagements with landscape across time that we see in all plays, to the literal engagement with the glacial site in Bush's play. The texts examined in Chapter 5, therefore, probe the socio-political potency of limbo as a condition both temporally and spatially conceived, revealing how it has the power to emerge as an ideologically disruptive interspace.

In an exploration of ecofeminism and temporality, literary scholar Arturs Mauriņš argues that their intersection is purposeful so as "to lay bare the processual links of the past and the future" (1998, 27). Proceeding from Julia Kristeva, Mauriņš argues that "the mentality of women has a different temporal nature than the mentality of men. Feminine time can be seen as cyclical, multi-tonal and non-lineal" (Mauriņš 1998, 27). Rather than refer to reproduction as a marker of the female body's capacities, and while recognising that semantic nuances may also be an outcome of the English translation, I am drawn to the term "regeneration" as it occurs in Mauriņš, who argues that "nature has placed upon women functions related to human regeneration that fully set them apart" (1998, 28). 'Regeneration' applied to the female through time in the context of nature-related discourses serves as an interconnector for the plays in Chapter 5, not least in environments whereby the male is either minimally present, and, when so, ineffectual, or entirely absent.

In *The Sewing Group*, even though the ruse of the play is such that we are initially uncertain as to temporal positioning before it is ultimately revealed that we are, actually, in the present, 'regeneration' still applies. Women emerge as versions of themselves, adaptable to different socio-historical contexts, as well as to their respective community dynamics.

Through their attempt to occupy these spaces, different possibilities for their interpersonal relationships—and for their relationships to their respective, fluid contexts—emerge. In *~~Not~~ the End of the World*, 'regeneration' allows us to understand the sustainability narratives that forever unfold into one another: of different versions of one and the same self; of one's agencies; of the environment. Time is deep and, because of it, space forever reveals itself with different nuances, from different angles of vision and engagement. And while the human agent evolves and re-morphs, it is space that is seen as permanent, but in a kind of permanence that involves different degrees of fluctuation: appearances and disappearances, metamorphoses and exposures.

In *The Sewing Group* women appear non-empathetic, though they establish some form of rapport, sharing space and cross-allocating manual tasks; in *~~Not~~ the End of the World*, they produce contexts in which either of the play's two main characters, through her research, can develop, exist and take up space and time; in *The Glow*, legacies, as in the other two plays, namely, what one bequeaths to one's community and to the future, also become relevant, as the text depicts the subject's deep relationship with time and histories, in which she attempts to intervene. Mauriņš's observation that "the freedom for which all living things yearn [crucially, not only humans] is expressed by women as care for others" (1998, 28), is especially relevant given the heightened agency of females in these plays. This does not mean that female characters are infallible; it does not even entail that, through their actions, they arrive at a more democratic ecology, or that their motivations for care are selfless or straightforward. But it is the case that through the tensions, and even though care is shown as a fraught and contested concept, these characters do reach a heightened appreciation of agency. As Mauriņš continues, given the care hypothesis and its associated coordinates in terms of women's locationality in the world, "the nature of a woman is more 'ecological' than is the nature of man. […T]his is a co-adaptive process, one which involves improving relationships with other partners in the respective ecosystem" (1998, 28). This process, with varying results, informs all three plays discussed in Chapter 5.

I am also interested in Mauriņš's tracing of this interrelationship through a time deep and glacial: as he notes, symbioses have emerged in the work of scientists as guiding principle highlighting an equitable "ecologism" (1998, 29). More broadly, Mauriņš revisits and distinguishes between historical antecedents of societies ruled by women and those

ruled by men, arguing for the flexible inclusivity of the former, especially in agrarian contexts, versus the rigid top-down linearity of the latter (1998, 30). That women seek out these contexts (*The Sewing Group*, *~~Not~~ the End of the World*) at the same time as reliving—and recognising—the limitations of male-led societies (*The Glow*), indicates that such female attitudes, too, are *eco-ed*, or *environmentalised*. In plays as invested in the time–space interrelationship as these, Mauriņš's comment on "the social, ecological and other aspects of the Western cultural crisis [as] macroploblems [to be scrutinised] from as high a vantage pint as possible" (1998, 30–31), especially as such scrutiny is intersectional, renders his discourse relevant to concerns of gendered environmental transgressions, which females, as agents through time, attempt to identify and reverse. The ecofeminism of these plays rests not on the succeeding, but on the trying. To hinge on the former would be another form or subscribing to a linearity that is not there; to illuminate the latter, as the plays do, is to acknowledge the glacial, the circular, the dialectical. If dialogues are forever happening and unfolding—hence also the dramaturgies of limbo—this is still better than dramaturgies of doom, showcasing merely how, once the damage is (already, linearly) done, there is no point in revisiting or in interjecting.

Mauriņš further argues that "[m]odern ecological thinking is based on the idea that multiplicity [associated in the text with femininity] is a value in and of itself, and the postulate of conquering nature [a trait of patriarchal societies] is rejected. The vast variety found in nature is the basis for the survival of the biosphere and the long-term existence of humanity" (1998, 31–32). Proliferation, then, emerges clearly as a positive, and as a shared space between the human and the non-human agent. Along with multiplicity, it remains a relevant concept to all three plays examined in Chapter 5, all of which prioritise female perspective and agency. The concepts are traceable across the plays' form, narratively arranged, as they are, in scenes and segments that embed and/or envelop one another. This mirrors the ongoing (re)definition of humans, non-humans and their interrelationships.

Even though a play like *The Sewing Group* might appear more static, its dizzying number of scenes (33) embodies this proliferation so that it materialises in both form and content—the latter through the depiction of the ongoing shifts in 'community' ecologies as power is redistributed amongst the play's characters. Likewise, *~~Not~~ the End of the World* stages proliferation as ecofeminist trope both in form and content. Here, too,

and as Chapter 5 further discusses, we are dealing with dramaturgical pluralism in an excessive accumulation of scenes. Time appears to be in a constant flux in terms of touch-points and locationalities—segments are short, interwoven, forensically explored for their possibilities and multiplying in their potentialities in the transitional, shifting mental and physical spaces in which they occur. This is true when it comes to the encounter between the two central characters—both scientists—and, albeit to a lesser extent, the circumstances of their respective demise. Motherhoods in all their iterations—including absence—are also explored, at the same time as the imperative for environmental preservation, as well as the different modes of asserting vested interests in the state of the world, becomes the starting point for dialogue(s). In *The Glow* multiplicity and proliferation likewise stem from form and content equally. The play's protagonist, the woman travelling in time, falling in and out of contexts and sites—ecosystems that she inhabits forever in flux—can be understood as both herself and as stand-in for female agency as it is shaped in, and likewise shapes, different social, cultural and historical conditions. The ecologies of relationships and their potentialities are equally embedded in these spatial and ecological multiplicities and potentialities.

Limbo is a matter of incessant return as much as of deferred departure, and, in the plays examined here, we witness both states. Places—mental, physical and emotional—have an affective impact, therefore they serve as gravitational centres. In this regard, limbo in itself emerges as site and space, an undesirable desirable, because its durationality opens up interventionist potential. This is compelled by a moral 'setting right' of sorts, even in the implicit understanding that the act can never be quite complete and that, at certain times, it may even appear a Sisyphean endeavour to reorganise and rewrite histories, both private and public. Those histories are both to be established and (re)visited exhaustively. This, we experience in the relentless reproduction of events in Bush's play, taking a mental and perhaps even physical toll on the audience. Not quite as indefatigable as the characters, perhaps, spectators might begin to experience the strain of a limbo so embodied in interrogation and memory, in creation and recreation. The physically and emotionally demanding journey through time that the female protagonist experiences in *The Glow*, and whose motivations are somewhat less clear, but that we might describe as a mission to furnish more empathy and agency to the human experience in the engagement with self and others—both human and non-human—is also an act of setting things right. In *The Sewing*

Group, finally, we witness the purchased experience of roleplaying set in motion so that the individual may (re)train themselves to feel that they belong; that they form part of a context greater than themselves through designated tasks completed within, and contributing to, a 'community'; that they both take a break from their everyday life in a parenthetical space and enhance this very everyday life through the effects of the parenthetical space. In that sense, the limbo is sought after as a site that enables these conditions, bare and unburdened by external imposition. In all cases, the parenthetical space becomes a force unto itself; linearity is thrown into doubt; norms are dispensed with.

Affective spaces do not need to be pleasurable to be compelling. Here, I am interested in tracing the prospects—even in the awkwardness and the uncertainties—of cross-affectivities between human agents and environments, especially in complex transitional/durational sites such as the ones that Chapter 5 discusses. This is a concern that literary scholars Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell and Robert Hudson reflect on as "[l]andscapes that, in some way or another, *affect* us and that we, in turn, *affect*" (2016, 1). In a remarkable Preface to the same study, affect theorist Kathleen Stewart troubles the expectations that might come with the constitution of affects. The localities that Stewart reflects on as profoundly affective are not idyllic, and their impact arises from time and depth rather than beauty and impression making. As such, these sites might be inconspicuous, like several of those we encounter in the plays of Chapter 5, but their affect is enduring and immense, as a study that "attunes to landscapes becoming affective" may reveal (Stewart 2015, xv). In other words, we are dealing with the moment of this very materialisation—with the transitional, with the occurrence as it grips, and takes hold—a de facto characteristic of the limbo experience that augments perception. As Stewart further reflects on "writing weighed with the world of an affective landscape" (2015, xv), so we might consider that these three plays capture the precise—however extended and sometimes repeated, or multiplied—moment of this very swelling, to use a verb that Stewart also goes on to use.

Stewart observes that "[a]ffective forms happen as singular events" (2015, xv). In Chapter 5, I trace the affective intensity of the singular event as captured in the three plays selected: identified and proliferated as a pivotal moment (the duologue(s) in ~~*Not*~~ *the End of the World*); the embeddedness in a community, however artificial (*The Sewing Group*); the encounter, experienced and revisited, and its durations (*The Glow*). The

pull, or the reason for the pursuit of durationality in a transitional and even uncomfortable space, is not a straightforward process. As Stewart notes, "[s]omething becomes legible as an object of repulsion or desire, as a thing attuned to, or missed or mistaken for something else" (2015, xv). As we will see in Chapter 6, these are the conditions that cross-apply in all plays. In the context of this chapter, Stewart's suggestion that "[b]eing in […a certain] landscape […can be] funny and sad, beautiful, comforting, claustrophobic and strange […] both propelled and burdened" resonates (2015, xv). Stewart writes about patterns, or "circuits of reaction" (2015, xv), and it is difficult to imagine a term that more accurately captures the deep, sometimes cyclical and always suspended times and dramaturgies of the three plays. Such are the embeddednesses of "the one who left but returns" in the space of "a life arrayed like a prismatic fan of remembered scenes" (Stewart 2015, xv). Or, as Stewart further notes: "[m]y affective landscape here is made up of entities that are both present and absent – atmospheres, potentialities, the unremembered, the things that got away, the sharp points of experiments in living. It leans back and forth between form and matter" (2015, xv). Stewart's wordscape is meaningful because it animates the darker corners that cross-connect past, memory, desire and their projection onto an uncertain next stage. Nature is both human and non-human: it compels and daunts, as we see in the case studies of Chapter 5. Therefore, the form of these plays follows matter by opening up to the explorations, overlaps, fragmentations and minutiae that tilt the balance of the world. And all this occurs in 'shut in' moments that appear to emerge as the most expansive of contexts.

The literariness of limbo proves it as a contested space that equally pulls and attracts and repels and intimidates. The *OED* defines it as "[a] region supposed to exist on the border of Hell as the abode of the just who died before Christ's coming, and of unbaptized infants" (2022). In other words, we are dealing with the liminality eternal of those pure at heart and soul; and of those vulnerable. It is the latter that Seamus Heaney focuses on in his eponymous poem (1972, 1980), which, already in its first lines, sets up a scene of unimaginable terror, employing natural landscape in its interaction with the human as a mode of rendering limbo a most impactful socio-political trope, intimately connected to female bodies:

> Fishermen at Ballyshannon
> Netted an infant last night
> Along with the salmon. (1980, 148)

The poem proceeds to disclose that the baby was born out of wedlock; that, as the narrator imagines, a young mother struggled with the pain of separation—and the immense weight of her actions—but the weight of religion became a load so unbearable that she felt there was no alternative. Heaney's criticism is directed not towards the vulnerable female, but towards religion and its systemic failures. Towards the mother, Heaney's narrator is empathetic, even kind, for example in imagining how she must have cradled the infant's body before surrendering it to the water (1980, 148). Heaney's poem is striking for many reasons: subject matter, starkness of tone, staunch rejection of the deep-reaching implications of religious rigidity. In its relatively brief length of five short and sparse stanzas, a sparsity shared by Bush and Crowe in the respective plays, it conveys a tremendous amount of information.

In the context of Chapter 5, it is, especially, the rich, gendered eco-imagery that ties limbo resolutely to the female condition, paired with impossible choices and uncertainties, that concerns me here. Moreover, Heaney's poem opens a parenthetical space: the moment in which the surreptitious act occurs, a woman alone in landscape, unseen, except for the land and its creatures, bearing witness. The vast landscapes discussed or visited in *~~Not~~ the End of the World* and *The Glow*, with women's bodies in parenthetical times and spaces, co-existing with, but, also, battling the elements, emulate this very feeling. This is not least in contexts of bodies, hearts and minds negotiating the multiple acts of birthing of time, knowledge or children, while feeling the concrete weight of one's agency, limitations and external pressures. In taking on limbos then, these ecofeminist plays function, like Heaney's poem, intersectionally, empathising with their fraught subjects while exposing systemic failures towards them.

The reference to Heaney is motivated not only by his engagement with limbo, but, also, by his broader exploration of the pastoral in ways that detach it from the bucolic and idyllic as they attune to nuances and complexities. The case studies of Chapter 5, it must be noted, are not pastorals as such—nor is my engagement with them angled on this perspective. But insofar as naturescapes inform the dialogues and images developing in these plays, and insofar as novel forms of a contemporary, sometimes reverse sublime—an awe-inspiring engagement with a landscape that can be spectacular and hostile, or awesome in its crisis—do materialise, Heaney's perspective is of direct benefit to this analysis. Heaney's homing in on the pastoral through the diegetic power of

eclogues is of direct relevance to the plays discussed if we consider, additionally, formal aspects, and specifically these plays' ec[o]logical formations in short scenes that deal with spaces and environments through textual minimalism and thematic maximalism. "What keeps a literary kind viable is its ability to measure up to the challenges offered by new historical circumstances, and pastoral has been confronted with this very challenge from very early on", writes Heaney (2003, 2). At a time of severe climate crisis, the challenge that Heaney expresses is of much value to appreciating the importance of dramaturgical interventions and innovations in plays that deal with nature so that the genre can evolve and remain resonant. "[L]iterariness as such is not an abdication from the truth", adds Heaney (2003, 4); and although poetry is his primary reference, an engagement with the theatrical (even in this specific text) proves that such representational concerns are never far from his line of sight. In other words, to explore the possibilities of the literary, furnished with new iterations, and to invest in the power of, in this case, theatre as a medium, is not to move away from scientific truth; rather, it is to enhance it, all the while engaging a broader audience. This locus between the literary and the scientific is, in itself, an interspace that invites habitation and flowering. Or, as Heaney puts this, "[t]he full flowering of all this, the rhetorical and spiritual climax of the eclogue" has the potential to "vivify the spirit as well as touch the heart" (2003, 10–11). We circle back, then, to Stewart, and to affective landscapes and their perception; in short scenes, texts, like landscapes, 'flower': they gather momentum; they reveal themselves; the spatial imagery they present or allude to as part of an ecotheatrical process takes shape and hold.

Without any intention of appropriating the work of disability and performance scholar and practitioner Alicia Grace for the purposes of the present study, which is not in itself pursuant of "disability dramaturgy" (2009, 20), I am, however, keen to recognise the important claims made in the following:

> To devise with a body, which is experiencing ceaselessly, shifting symptoms against a backdrop of lassitude is to devise in an intermediate or transitional state or place of limbo. With a certainty of restraint I create on a border rather than a plane and with border comes an inevitability of negotiation.
>
> Performing from limbo means performing on the margins of action. But limbo is a dance as well as a place – one *can* limbo as well as *be* in limbo.

> So, if we were to consider a marginal place as having its own dance, then what would this dance be? (2009, 16)

Grace is referring to an actual dance from the point of view of a disability performer—and I am keen to trace how this schema of a limbo dance that is reciprocal, both a state that one receives and that one (re)produces, might serve to explain how representations of limbo have the capacity to engage spectators in an act of interpretation and mutual contingency with the performance event.

The plays of Chapter 5 achieve this, I argue, by removing certainty in the linearity of plot and spectatorial expectations and "claiming middle spaces" (2009, 23), which Grace, as myself, perceives of as sites with potentiality. In restriction comes a prospect, in condensing comes an opening up; in negotiation comes a revisiting and redistribution of space that might lead to reformulation and reinterpretation; a different and new way of seeing for an audience. I am compelled to ask the same question that Grace incorporates in the conclusion to the cited article, namely: "[h]ow can we begin to see edges, middle places and borders as inviting, how can we expose the transitional power which these place hold?" (2009, 28). It is this precise pursuit that the case studies of Chapter 5 undertake in different, yet comparable dramaturgies of upsetting centre as a coherent space and reclaiming it as part of an emergent space that is more truthful to, and respectful of, fluid experiences and uncertainties.

Grace's closing remarks speak directly to the aims of Chapter 5, with applicability to all three plays discussed:

> According to the laws of permaculture, edges in the landscape are important because they are interfaces between two different types of environment or habitat. They share characteristics of both adjacent areas but have a unique character of their own. Edge eco-systems are known for their diversity and intense activity, they are also characterised as places of accumulation.
> The landscape of limbo is, then, defined by fiercely creative attributes: diversity, intensity, activity and accumulation. This is surely a prosperous place to dwell. (2009, 28)

Grace's framing of the proliferative qualities of the limbo space speak specifically to the ways in which Bush's interspace of the forever unfolding duologues establishes and reveals traces of lives of agency, encouraging

not only interventionist attitudes towards managing environmental crises, but, also, towards the structuring of empathy and counteracting judgement on the lives of others, and the ecologies of their personal and professional choices equally. These conclusions also relate to the ways in which E V Crowe conceptualises of a different site in which one can test their own limits of creativity and community, immersed in a strange 'inside' so that they might re-evaluate their everyday, and their dubious 'outside'. And, finally, Grace's observations resonate with the ways in which McDowall crafts a large-scale limbo populated by multiple segments that produce different points of entry into humanity's historical failures of agency towards developing empathy both towards the environment, and towards itself.

Further definitions of 'limbo' include: "[a]ny unfavourable place or condition, [...]; esp. a condition of neglect or oblivion to which persons or things are consigned when regarded as outworn, useless, or absurd" (*OED* 2022). It is intriguing that none of the current *OED* definitions of limbo can be interpreted as even marginally positive. Still, I am fascinated by tracing how the playwrights discussed in Chapter 5 take on this 'unfavourable place or condition' to reverse expectations and reveal its possibilities; and to trace, also, how individuals that, in one way or another, inhabit difficult situations, might, in this space of limo, arrive not only at significant realisations as to themselves, or themselves in relations to human and non-human others, but, also, function to encourage audiences to arrive at similar observations.

To close this section, then, I would like to consider Giorgio Agamben's short text "From Limbo" (1993). Engaging with limbo more broadly with reference to the Christian tradition, Agamben arrives at the observation that, those in limbo, "[i]rremediably lost, [...] persist without pain in divine abandon" (1993, 5). With specific reference to the work of Robert Walser, Agamben goes on to describe his "creatures" as "irreparably astray, but in a region that is beyond perdition and salvation" (1993, 6). Similarly, in all three plays examined in Chapter 5, the quest itself is not teleological, but durational and processual. Any revelations and breakthroughs occur during and because of it, and not because, at the end, a greater truth will be revealed. The spaces are self-contained, and, when they spill over to present time and so-called reality, as in the end of *The Sewing Group*, where the liminal space gives way to the everyday that is itself proven to be a form of limbo, in the finale of ~~*Not*~~ *the End of the World*, which (re-)begins by re-situating itself (again) without resolution,

or when, in the last moments of *The Glow*, the time travelling protagonist re-locates herself in the world only to acknowledge enquiry and anticipation as its most enduring state, the effect is largely anti-climactic. As Agamben notes, "these beings have left the world of guilt and justice behind them: The light that rains down on them is the irreparable light of the dawn following the *novissima dies* of judgment. But the day that begins on earth after the last day is simply human life" (1993, 6–7). The light as a staple of limbo, of emerging and continuing, is strongly reminiscent of the vocabularies of McDowall's play. This is discussed in Chapter 5, which picks up on threads of pursuit, continuance, revelation and illumination in its three case studies, with a view to determining how liminal interspaces, or limbos, emerge as empowered and empowering conditions of self- and inter-awareness.

The Deviant

The interconnecting threads amongst the plays examined in Chapter 6 are: a connection to the non-human; the metaphysical; the marginal and extrinsic to the mundane. *The Last Witch* (Munro 2009), *Orca* (Grinter 2016) and *The Welkin* (Kirkwood 2020) all depict processes of observation and fascination with entities, both human and not, that embody these qualities. These processes are far from positively motivated: rather, they stem from the majority's dominant feeling—fear—for that, which is larger-than-life and cannot be controlled. The deviant, in its cumulative possibilities and liabilities, both attracts and repels in communities otherwise held together by complacency, complicity and/or ignorance and avidly performing their restrictive homogeneity.

Already in its geographic locationality *The Welkin* declares its in-betweenness, unfolding in March 1759 in the Norfolk–Suffolk borderland (Kirkwood 2020, 6). The specificity is significant, as the play is geared around the occurrence of Halley's comet. *The Last Witch* does not state a specific timepoint, though it does proceed from historical fact: Janet Horne, the woman inspiring the play, was executed in 1727. *Orca* defines neither space nor time, sharing with the other case studies the timelessness of its story, a certain fluidity in its anachronisms and applicabilities, as well as the fact that it draws on the archetypal and primal in humans' relationship to non-human ecologies as a way of grounding humans' behaviours also towards one another. And while these may be

strongly shared elements with the case studies in Chapter 5, the differentiation occurs by virtue of the fact that Chapter 6 concentrates on how interspaces function in contexts of marginalisation leading to prosecution, where human and non-human eccentricities combine to create that which is untameable, uncontrollable and, consequently, a magnet for attention—in most cases negative. Given the above, and even though a consideration of historical sources cannot be exhaustive within the remit of this book, certain references are necessary in terms of context, and for the purposes of avoiding historical oversimplification.

In Matthew Hale and Giles Jacob's *Pleas of the Crown*, published a decade before Janet Horne's execution, witchcraft is listed amongst the highest crimes, "[i]mmediately against God" (1716, n. p.). Like heresy, the only crime to supersede it, witchcraft is "punished with death" (Hale and Jacob 1716, 6); the actions that might serve as its indicators are manifold and rather vague, in utter conflict with the severity of punishment. What emerges from the document is an attempt at imposing systemic legitimacy on arbitrary judgements, conveying a fear of the unknown and proceeding from the symptoms, rather than any reasonable comprehension of motive established on epistemic fact. In the related historical source *A Tryal of Witches at the Assizes Held at Bury St. Edmonds for the Count of Suffolk on the Tenth Day of March 1664 Before Sir Matthew Hale, Kt., Then Lord Chief Baron of His Majesties Court of Exchequer—Taken by a Person Then Attending the Court*, an account is proclaimed to be given by this individual "*for his own Satisfaction*" (1682, n.p.). The wording reveals the spectacularisation of the trial as punitive performance. For reasons given as, indicatively, the "*so much controverted*" nature of such events, and "*a Judge, whom for his Integrity, Learning, and Law, hardly any Age, either before or since, could parallel*", the account is deemed "*the most perfect Narrative of any thing of this Nature hitherto Extant*" (*A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes* 1682, n.p.).

The trial's geographical positioning within the range of *The Welkin* is important. The link is already significant in terms of the court setting of Kirkwood's play, which provides a connection to the criminal justice theme in *The Last Witch*. In more broadly assessing attitudes towards the metaphysical—and celestial—phenomena beyond humans' immediate comprehension synchronically, such accounts provide grounding. Additionally, and even though this is more of a hint than a plotline that the play pursues directly, the allusions to what might have been deemed a witch's demeanour that the young, female accused portrays in *The Welkin*

serve as further parallel. Another point of convergence is the fact that both *The Welkin* and *The Last Witch* concern the vulnerability of children. In the former, the murderess herself was a vulnerable child, who went on to become accomplice to the murder of a child; in the latter, Janet Horne has a daughter, seen as vulnerable to her influence. Meanwhile, in *Orca*, which plays on the supernatural without pursuing it too firmly, it is the vulnerability of children—once more, girls—that anchors the plot of the play, especially when it comes to these children's resistance to the dominant narrative of abuse inscribed in their community.

Justice, in all plays, proves a much more relative concept than one might expect, except when it targets those already marginalised in classed, patriarchal societies. In the account of the witch prosecution that Hale brought to print, the events of the trial occupy thirty-seven pages, and given the amount of detail provided any summary here cannot aim to be exhaustive. As is the case with all three plays in Chapter 6, so, in the trial too, the vulnerability of children occupies a primary position. Two women (both widows, Rose Cullender and Amy Duny) are the accused, with offences ranging from grievances within their community, vastly open to interpretation, to the affliction of seven children, which drives the prosecution, apparently sealing the conviction. As is summed up in the documentation, the accused—executed following the trial—never confessed (*A Tryal of Witches, at the Assizes* 1682, 59). In Munro's play, the execution of Janet preserves not only the so-called church-fearing local community, who have disposed of the perceived offender so that their lives may return to 'normal', but, also, that of her daughter. Eliminated, Janet bears the burden of the sin so her daughter can live free, or, at least, unprosecuted. The reality is rather different, as the play ends with the young woman on the run, forever in transit. The paradigmatic punishment of the woman branded as 'witch', then, delivers nothing more than the proliferation of patterns of persecution against vulnerable individuals, whether socially, emotionally, mentally, physically, or any and all of these combined.

In addition to children and vulnerability, motherhood as a fraught condition also recurs in all three plays prioritised in Chapter 6. *The Welkin* provides a remarkable range for the multiple iterations that it allows for motherhood: from its quotidian experience, to the state of it being desired but not attained, to the reality of it being attained but not necessarily desired, to the devastating conditions of miscarriage, or stillbirth. It is the interspaces developing between women in their most intimate everyday

experience that serve as the ultimate connector. To this motherhood is central, not least because it will be the determiner of the fate of the accused: if, as she claims, she is pregnant, she cannot be hanged instantly, as her lover—and murderer of the child—already has been. Motherhood, including its loss and longing, as a connection to a force greater than oneself, is, in these plays, only matched by the fascination with non-human nature at its own most powerful moments: from wild elements to extraordinary phenomena.

The major event of the appearance of Halley's comet in *The Welkin* emerges as the most compelling example and action framework, combined with the unpredictability of rural landscape in its exposure—the latter a shared theme across the three plays. References to the comet's prospective re-appearance brim with keen, occasionally anxious expectation. Sources contemporary to the time in which *The Welkin* is set reveal the overall attitudes to and discourses regarding the comet, capturing the surrounding atmosphere in a style that is of value to the focus of Chapter 6 and the plays' spatiotemporal embedding. In an account by the British Astronomer Royal Rev. Nevil Maskelyne, over 80 years since Halley's original article in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (1705) and twenty-seven years since the appearance of the comet—early 1759, anticipated by Halley on the basis of computations in 1758 (Halley 1705, 1897), it is mentioned that "its [the comet's] return to its perihelium […] came about the middle of March, only a month sooner [than the prediction of approximately the middle of April], which was a sufficient approximation to the truth in so delicate a matter" (1786, 427). The text is written in Latin; the line of greatest consequence to the present discussion is: "[u]*nde ausim ejusdem reditum sidenter prxdicere, anno foil.. 1758*" ["Whence I dare to foretell the return of the same [comet] in the year 1758"]. The work continues with praise for the scientific effort and "laborious calculations" that rendered such an adequately accurate prediction possible (Maskelyne 1786, 427).

A detailed account of the comet's 1759 re-emergence by French astronomer Charles Messier (1765), this time much closer to the actual phenomenon and documenting a period of over five months in the first half of the crucial year, captures the tentativeness of the prediction, the tension of the anticipation and the meticulousness of the examination more expansively. Early on, Messier offers the preamble that "all the former uncertainty, as to the exact time of the return of the comet foretold by Dr. Halley, was owing to the variations it must have undergone

from its several situations and approximations to the planets in its progress thro' the solar system" (1765, 294). Statements such as this or Maskelyne's (above) help contextualise the ambiguity as to the comet's exact arrival coordinates, referenced throughout *The Welkin*.

The framing of the comet itself is especially poignant in terms of the lexicon used. In his account, which combines scientific observation with embodied engagement, Messier, summing up Halley's rigorous process, asserts: "it was necessary to consider all the different situations and distances of all the planets with regard to the comet, during the whole of its last revolution, and even during the former ones, when the returns had been found to be unequal" (1765, 296). It is the consideration of the above that leads Messier to exclaim: "[w]hat immense labour ! and what geometrical knowledge did this task not require?" (1765, 296). To the fact that the calculations from the Royal Academy of Sciences "differed but one month from the observation" Messier comments: "[n]o small degree of exactness this, considering the immensity of the object" (1765, 296). Elsewhere, Messier mentions "[t]he impatience of astronomers" that produced "suppositions" about the processes that came into place regarding the use of instruments "before it [the comet] was visible to the naked eye" and that meant "it was not necessary to know its place throughout its whole course, but only at the first moment of its appearance, because, having once found it out, it would be an easy matter afterwards to trace it thro' its whole progress by observation and calculation" (1765, 296–97).

Meticulous accounts of Messier's observations and documentations of the comet at various stages of its appearance follow. These include apparitions of varying intensity, as well as near misses; breakthroughs are often followed by disappointments:

> It was not without some difficulty that I could take the position of the comet with regard to this little star [previously mentioned in the text, as yet uncatalogued], because I was obliged to throw light upon the threads of a silk micrometer, which was adapted to the Newtonian telescope, […] and the last degree of light from a wax candle I made use of, presently made both the comet and the star disappear. (Messier 1765, 299)

Subsequently:

> February 1, the sky being perfectly clear in the evening, the comet appeared, notwithstanding a strong twilight and the neighbourhood of the moon. (Messier 1765, 301)

But also, and following rather good observation during the month of February, in the last days of the month:

> The comet being no longer visible at night, […we] examined the exactest observations […], which helped us to determine the time and the place of the sky, where it was to re-appear in the morning, when it should get clear of the rays of the sun. This was to happen towards the end of March; but the cloudy weather, which prevailed at Paris during that month, prevented our seeing it again. (Messier 1765, 303–4)

The unseen, then, may well be there all along; invisible to the naked eye of the layperson, but also to that of the seasoned observer. The events of *The Welkin* do not occur in Paris, but are not too terribly far removed either—at least geographically. In rural England, an event is anticipated, tantalising in its delay and disappointing in its absence; but this does not mean that it is not already unfolding.

The engagement with synchronic analyses of the phenomenon serves two purposes: firstly, that of better understanding Kirkwood's interspatial dramaturgies bookended by a comet's anticipation and arrival; secondly, that of establishing how scientific language and method might help us appreciate the language and labour referring to the observation of the pregnant body—itself a major natural phenomenon—and the estimations and calculations this invites, as well as, of course, the interspace that it opens in the mother's body, and, clearly within the judicial system itself. Let us consider, for example, Messier's description of the comet towards the end of its visibility as "now constantly drawing farther from the sun and earth; its nucleus was likewise much contracted, and not terminated" (1765, 315). The parallels arising from such wording are especially poignant vis-à-vis *The Welkin*, where the pregnancy itself is not visible and barely, if at all, perceptible, leading to observations, hypothesising and revisions—until it is emphatically confirmed by a doctor. Terms such as 'contracted' and 'terminated' also make for striking analogies to pregnancy-related actions. Overall, the comet, observed through time and different stages, might be presenting like a pregnancy and birth in itself; in terms of its cyclical behaviour, it could even be imagined as a rebirth.

It is meaningful that Kirkwood names the play *The Welkin*—a reference to the comet, but, I propose, also to the person that galvanises the action of the play itself: the accused young woman and her fascination with the heavens, which may, in the interspace of the play's events, lead to her own rebirth of spirit, even as she perishes. More broadly, the female characters' engagement with the comet and the lifting of the gaze to the sky, beyond the menial and mundane, and despite their real care towards it, is indicative of their being attuned to nature—once more, a shared feature across all of Chapter 6's case studies.

As he begins his concluding remarks regarding the observation of the comet's orbit, Messier writes: "the comet has furnished me with an opportunity of determining the position of 29 new stars, which were not yet known, and which have served for the determination of the comet" (1765, 319). It is fascinating how such a quote applies to theatrical dramaturgy. The pregnancy of the accused in *The Welkin*, involving physical rather than aethereal inspection, is, other than by the clinician who is afforded the final word, cross-determined by the community of the woman's peers. The purpose of the deliberation and the entire observation process is to establish whether there is a foetus, and when it might be making its appearance as infant. But in being brought together to define this specific query, the women also undergo a process of re-definition, which we might describe as both self- and cross-definition, re- and cross-alignment, and, ultimately, self- and cross-discovery. A community of peers assumed within the judicial system as cohesive and homogeneous was anything but as the play's action began; towards its conclusion, however, it may even approximate such a state. These women, largely unseen in a patriarchal society where they are relegated to specific and contained roles, not only emerge as public agents in a legal procedure, but, perhaps even more importantly, they also emerge as visible to each other, and to themselves. Furthermore, they become established as essential for the determination of each other's position and revelation; a star system unto themselves.

Communities, then in their disparities and diversities, in their commonalities and collaborations, are not only composed of the human but, also, the non-human, and such ecosystems require the balancing of the two to survive. To take flesh, such equitabilities also expressly invite an intersectional approach that considers ecologies, economies, hierarchies, cohesions and discords. In this vein, Grinter's *Orca* is significant, identifying as its primary plot device—and, like Kirkwood

and *The Welkin* also as title focus—a non-human protagonist. Literary scholar Marco Caracciolo appears to echo the poignant function of the whale in Grinter's text as stand-in for substantially more than itself, or even than its cetacean community: "it is [… the creature's] mysteriousness that demands attention" proposes Caracciolo foregrounding the "nonhuman actant" (2022, 89, 104), as Grinter's play also does. The narratives of vulnerability—physical, mental, emotional—occurring through the systemic abuse of females and whales as perpetrated by male community leadership and quietly condoned by the docile majority are powerfully revealed by placing the animal at the centre. Or, as Caracciolo argues, "unreadable animals refer, metonymically, to an uncertain future where the fate of human and nonhuman societies seems to merge […] the mystery of nonhuman ways of being takes center stage, along with the materiality [even in its staging absence] of animal embodiment" (2022, 90). The human community exists at the orbit of the orca and vice versa. And although I may not entirely share Caracciolo's reservations towards the interpellating powers of empathy, the suggestion Caracciolo puts forward, namely that "[n]arratives that foreground the opacity and unreadability of animal minds are […] ideally situated to explore the limitations of reading strategies that involve empathetic projection from the human to the animal world" resonates, especially if we acknowledge the perils of merging "anthropomorphism and empathy", a tendency that, as Caracciolo observes, ought to be "undercut" (2022, 92).

That is, when encountering *Orca* we may be struck by its distanced tone, which not only veers away from sentimentalism, but, in doing so, also keeps us at bay from characters' mental-scapes. This, however, might be understood as a way of injecting new urgency to empathy by denying the very dramaturgies that are most typically associated with its (sometimes facile) materialisation. In that sense, Grinter's play can be considered representative of a more emotionally detached, yet no less affective kind of theatre, especially if it is seen as "expand[ing … our] affective awareness of the magnitude of the current ecological predicament while chastising […] attempts to control the nonhuman world in cognitive and symbolic terms" alongside pointing out the injustices we might be facilitating through taciturn acceptance (Caracciolo 2022, 94). To better understand the deceptive narrative simplicity of Grinter's play, we might also take into account Caracciolo's comment that a "negotiation of uncertainty introduces a sense of metaphysical mystery and

affirms it metonymically instead of explaining it [away] symbolically" (2022, 104), which, in this context, might in turn help us understand how the ominous, metaphysical undertones in Grinter's play come to be constituted.

Grinter's play references the repeat quasi-ritual performance of an orca hunt—the orca's conceptualisation by the locals hinging on "equal measures of anthropomorphism and dehumanization" (Huggan 2018, 61)—that serves as frame for the preying upon vulnerable girls by the fishermen that hunt the whale. In *The Last Witch* the burning of Janet becomes a mobilising act for a punishment-hungry community that finally captures its elusive target. Meanwhile, in *The Welkin* the threatened paradigmatic hanging of the accused (Sally Poppy) in the presence of the angry mob, audible every time the matrons open the windows of their temporary courthouse accommodation, serves much the same goal. Spectacle, trauma, death, then, and, at the centre, the captivity of the wild; that which so-called organised society has not yet developed formulas for, except to respond to its ferocity by elimination. The plays of Chapter 6, through varying degrees of engagement with history, folklore and tradition, examine the margins of recognition and intervention that open up before they might close again: the interspaces of possibility against the dominant and its toxic orthodoxies of violent subdual, self-authorised by performances of piousness, civic duty and—indeed—of community.

Urry's research identifies the shared traits and embedded disparities of communities, as well as, most importantly, the misconception that communities by default entail unity, cohesion and camaraderie:

> [...] community is also a matter of powerful discourses and metaphors. Certain ideas of a supposed *[G]emeinschaft* are vigorously attached to particular social groupings [...]. But many places that deploy the notion of community are often of course characterised by highly unequal internal social relations and by exceptional hostility to those who are on the outside. To speak of community is to speak metaphorically or ideologically. (2000, 134)

Moreover:

> [...] many places whose members may describe themselves as part of a 'community' are characterised both by highly unequal local social relations (divided by class, gender, ethnicity, age) and by hostility to those on the outside. Indeed the opposition to the outsider, the stranger, is often part

> of the mechanism by which those unequal social relations are established and sustained. Those inequalities are moreover reinforced by the use of the term 'community' which can falsely imply that the locality is based upon warm, consensual, face-to-face relations of communion. (Urry 2000, 140)

The interventionism of the plays discussed in Chapter 6, as well as in this book more broadly, also arises from the ways in which they carve out the in-between and interspatial site as a way of piercing through the inner sanctum of communities so as to reveal their binarism (in/out), by means of which difference is eliminated.

"To speak of community" is indeed "to speak metaphorically or ideologically" (Urry 2000, 134), which is why, also, the metonymic function, discussed above (Caracciolo 2022), that not only Grinter's, but, also, Munro and Kirkwood's respective titles allow is important. Janet Horne becomes the many women condemned for their difference, pilloried, burnt at actual stakes or sacrificed to self-congratulatory, proliferating orthodoxies; the celestial and its phenomena become the women—their gaze to the sky; their freedom; their own peerage built on disparity and exclusion from that of the men; the different, the otherworldly. For a given group to self-identify as 'community' is already a statement of privilege meaning that those in a position of power to do so are also those that determine how this very community is to be performed, and when/how someone, or something, fails to fit in. The 'exceptional hostility', then, comes into play at that exact moment; and, as we see in the plays discussed here, it has profound and enduring consequences. The 'collectivity', or 'togetherness' (perhaps the closest to capturing the denotations and connotations of *Gemeinschaft*), is reserved for those that perform, and thereby self-perform, their community in the anticipated way; for anyone or anything else, it remains off limits.

Quoting sociologist Bulent Diken, Urry references the term "'violent hierarchy'" (2000, 140), developed in the context of highlighting heterogeneousness and inequality in community motivated by factors such as those that Urry considers above. It is difficult to imagine a more pertinent description in the context of the plays discussed in Chapter 6 in terms of processes of stratification and exclusion set in place in the respective societies with which they engage. The 'stranger' that Urry talks about can be understood as not only they who are not from the place in question—not born and bred in the local community—but, also, they, who may be local, but appear strange by the measures of the local majority;

an aberration against established norms. To exclude is to retain power; to negotiate status is to procure compliance; to punish paradigmatically is to ensure that others fall in line. The fissure that the plays open between the metaphysical and the mundane, the human and non-human, the deviant and the orthodox, through dramaturgy that intervenes between past, present and future, so as to interrupt time from becoming a constant of exclusionary performance, is precisely where the interstitial innovation lies.

Community, in its connotations of unequivocal protectiveness and, to proceed from Urry's vocabulary, warmth, emerges as an utter paradox. There is no immediate warmth in the jury of matrons towards one another (*The Welkin*), but, especially, no warmth towards them by the dominant male contingent; no warmth towards a single mother and her daughter in especially harsh times and climates (*The Last Witch*); and also none towards the girls and women who fail to uphold the rule of abusive patriarchal law (*Orca*). The latter additionally brings an especially painful undertone to the term 'consensual' that Urry uses, and which can be directly applied to the sexual transgressions that girls suffer by the same men as the unpunished perpetrators, in perennial performances of sacrifice: a proliferating 'community' of Iphigenias. There is nothing consensual, in all three plays, about the oppression of acceptance. The factors that Urry identifies as pivotal—class, gender, ethnicity, age—continue to echo as markers, producing vulnerabilities.

Vulnerabilities, as already mentioned, apply to humans, non-human entities, as well as to environments. In her study *Violence in Place, Cultural and Environmental Wounding* (2018) anthropologist Amanda Kearney is motivated by principles of cross-species co-existence and collaboration, not least in contexts that involve discourses on colonialism and indigeneity. Even though, when it comes to the specifics of the work, Kearney's research concerns different geographical and cultural contexts from the ones that my present research engages with, the broader principles that inform Kearney's discourse as well as the propositions Kearney puts across directly relate to the approach of this book. I would therefore wish to engage with certain grounding concepts that Kearney presents, which can also be contextualised vis-à-vis the work of Urry (2000) and Marchesini (2021), particularly concerning the extent to which the concept of community can be seen pluralistically and holistically rather than exclusively and/or anthropocentrically.

Community forms around animate entities, but equally, around place. In Chapter 6, we are dealing with places associated with deviant behaviours and histories—and the question remains as to how the deviant is defined, and against which norm. The sites we encounter in the case studies are places that have both been wounded as (e)communities and have inflicted wounding, sometimes through harsh conditions, while others through becoming associated with the transgressive behaviours of community members, misappropriated by the human. As Kearney notes:

> Coming to know the ways in which place absorbs and experiences human conflict problematises the habit of separating human life out from the ecologies in which it is held. If people and place are bound through kinship, whether through necessity and survival, or choice [...] wounding is co-terminus. The harms done to one will impact upon the other. [...T]he context and milieu of life, place is a 'relational co-presence' [...]: the physical environment and ecology, locale, homeland, ancestral landscape, and also a presence that exists in the mind, providing certainty and security. [...I]t is place, along with people, that bears the scars of violence and becomes the subject of trauma narratives. (2018, 1)

Kearney additionally foregrounds "[t]he capacity to deliver harm in place as a result of human conflict and violence against ethnic or cultural others" discussing how, because of this interwoven co-existence, "[p]lace becomes the object of hateful desires" with "effects of violence measured by the prevalence of emotional anguish, physical suffering, erasure and destruction" (2018, 2). When we talk of "cultural trauma", as Kearney notes, it is important to remember that

> So too geography and architecture may become testimonials to what has occurred. Place enters the frame [...] carrier itself, and [...] witness to violence and trauma [...] also being capable of holding onto the effects of violence through intangible expressions of disorder, such as spectral traces, absence and silence. Even the most horrific acts of aggression do not stand as isolated exemplars [...] but cast ripples that reconfigure lives and the place world in the most dramatic of ways, affecting constructs of identity in the present, potentialities for the future and even renditions of the past. (2018, 5–6; Kearney cites Robben and Nordstrom 1995)

As Kearney observes, it is imperative that we engage with the "ecology of wounding", its constituting elements and cross-implications (2018, 8).

This includes understanding "place as an agent capable of being harmed but also as capable of becoming an instrument of harm when reinscribed with strange and often violent meaning by those who co-opt it into a wounding agenda" (Kearney 2018, 13). Wounding is not, that is, a singular or isolated, or time-contained process. In the context of a chapter that deals with a play that prominently—and metonymically—uses the name of a whale to denote a much broader circumstance, I am also drawn to Kearney's comment that "the human experience cannot be disentangled from that of place and other constitutive elements of place, such as non-human animals and ancestral beings" (2018, 8). I observed earlier how Urry frames the disparity and sometimes latent, but no less potent, hostility in communities. Here, I also note Kearney's related comment that "harm directed at people on the basis of perceived ethnic or cultural difference [...] is absorbed into place [...] able to infuse future relations [...]" (2018, 8). But if humans can construct narratives, as we also saw earlier, "humans are [also] not the only agents capable of authoring place" (Kearney 2018, 8).

Firstly, there is the fact that precisely because of the intimacy that develops between place and its inhabitants, it is not only the positive traits, but, also, the negative that acquire substance and significance; while place may be a source of strength and identity, so it may be the cause of hurt and devastation. Secondly, place can become weaponised: appropriated by those who are able to exert power and authority over it while diminishing and victimising others, it can be used as an ally towards the exclusion and even the annihilation of those not in positions of power. Such actions do not disappear without a trace, but, rather, are written into the socio-/cultural-/emotional fabric of a given society so that their impacts become durational. The ecologies arising are interwoven and complex; and narratives—classed, gendered, racialised—are difficult to break. This is, however, precisely what those working to counteract the long-inscribed narratives contested in the case studies of Chapter 6 attempt to accomplish.

The Virtual

Over two decades ago Alice Rayner identified the paradigm shift that the digital would present for theatre, arguing that "[c]yberspace, variously known as the Internet, the Web, or an interactive digital technology, offers more than a new landscape for performance; it challenges the

very meaning of 'space'" (2002, 350). After the spectacular advent of social media, and, more recently, the pandemic experience, the statement, arguably, resonates even more strongly. The ways in which Chapter 7 engages with contemporary playwriting and virtuality is not quite the same as the work that has been carried out by colleagues that, in the face and aftermath of COVID-19, have been logging and investigating the possibilities of digital performance. Still, as this chapter especially considers not only the impact and inhabitancy of virtual worlds but also conditions of isolation and distancing in two plays influenced by COVID-19, the frameworks developed in such publications that have been appearing with a welcome frequency in the recent period are helpful.

In *Theater of Lockdown*, which looks to a broader hypothesis for theatre after COVID-19, while probing the specifics of pandemic effects on theatre-making, Barbara Fuchs offers a "chronicle of an intense period of trial and transformation for theatre-makers and audiences alike" (2021, 1). These are apt terms to capture the experience, which, in its richness and durationality, an outcome of the uncertainty and constant need for novel adaptabilities that it escalated, has continued to generate modes of engagement, new forms and possibilities of dissemination. In COVID-19 times, arguably more than ever before, boundaries between stage and auditorium collapsed, not only because of the digitality in staging, but, also, because of the ways in which the challenges and effects of the pandemic dismantled any hierarchies and constituted both spectators and artists vulnerable to, on the one hand, the pathologies of the virus, and, on the other, the effects of the lack of interaction in a shared physical space.

As Fuchs writes, "missing theater became during the pandemic a shared condition for theater-makers, audiences, scholars, and critics alike" (2021, 1). New exposures, mental, emotional and physical emerged. Logging the legacies of COVID-19 in terms of questions for possible performance futures after the pandemic, Fuchs poses a number of significant queries, including: "[h]ow do new forms of exigency alter the conditions of both theater-making and viewership?" (2021, 2). To this question, one might add how the ongoing digitisation of all aspects of experience, including those—like theatre—that we considered the most enduringly live ones, has affected how one may relate to the world, both human and non-human. The latter allows us to consider how the theatre is not only a reflection of the world in the traditional manner of holding a light up to it, but, in its essential transformation, also a framework for

how to live, physically, and, as of late, increasingly digitally, in novel hybrid territories.

Such acts of watching and creating content are explored emphatically in *Rapture* by Lucy Kirkwood (2022) and *Not One of These People* by Martin Crimp (also 2022), and the two case studies of Chapter 7, resonating in terms of the plays' respective plots as well as their intermedial staging methodologies. And although Fuchs poses the question more in the context of how the digital capture and dissemination of performance "blur[s] the line between theater and film" (2021, 2), it is, also, essential to probe this as regards modes of watching in the theatre after the worst of the pandemic and as, in 2022, we came back to auditoria more confidently to experience plays written during—and with a reference to—COVID-19. Then, of course, there is also the question of what happens to the author as body, presence and carrier of agency in such digitised contexts. In terms of arriving at conclusions regarding the especially fluid contexts that these remarkably ambitious pieces for performance capture while retaining a coherent and cohesive dramaturgical core, I am drawn to a further note Fuchs makes regarding methodology of analysis, namely, that it can be "both inductive and historical" (2021, 4). With reference to the case studies of Chapter 7, inductive means that they trace the beginnings and the lived experience of the transitional stage in digital lives; historical means locating these within their extraordinary pandemic conditions synchronically and diachronically understood. I agree with Fuchs that "the immediacy of the pandemic and its attendant crises has underscored how even the most formally inventive work is also a response to its context" (2021, 10). I am also mindful of what Fuchs describes as the excitement and tentativeness of "an almost simultaneous chronicle" (2021, 5), as well as of the fact that, writing a couple of crucial years after Fuchs, in the shape of case studies for Chapter 7 I am dealing with two plays that are already embodying, in their pluralist form and content, what Fuchs refers to as the "profound realignments that cut across many different sites of production and reception"—including those yet to come (2021, 5).

As Caridad Svich puts this in *Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations during a Pandemic*, "how does one re-dream a new theatre?", or, likewise, as we are confronted with an occurrence "global and simultaneous in its traumatic scale", it becomes imperative to consider "what it is like to make theatre in the time of massive reckoning" and "how in times of crisis artist-citizens are tested and challenged to recalibrate the art form

in powerful and sometimes innovative ways" (2021, 1–2). As Chapter 7 discusses two productions that are, after all, located in physical theatre auditoria with the live presence of spectators, the link to Fuchs's work that concentrates on online forms is only sustainable up to a point. Still, the comment Fuchs makes as to "how theater might explore the affordances of the virtual, all the while privileging liveness" has bearing beyond lockdown theatres, applying directly to the embeddedness of virtuality in "pluralistic storytelling" such as that of Crimp and Kirkwood (2021, 18).

As Svich notes from an intersectional viewpoint (especially bearing in mind Svich's extensive work in environmental theatre practices) that allows us to interconnect planetary and human health pathogenies, during COVID-19 we have been sharply reminded of the effects of "unpredictability, volatility, loneliness and anxiety" (2021, 4). The cross-implications of these states are not remote from, but, rather, part of the embodied contexts of contemporary writers, leading to plays such as those of Chapter 7 that engage with topical concerns and represent the world in novel ways, sharing space with audiences in ways that, in their technological and thematic expansiveness and innovation, reflect that a shift has taken place. Svich poses a query that, in my view, also entails a proposition, asking: "is it possible to conceive of an evolutionary theatre that leads with an ecologically conscious, ethically responsible, pleasurable, biometric and non-consumer-based way of moving through an ever-changing world?" (2021, 7). In dealing with this question, one might argue that the Royal Court's promotion of Kirkwood's *Rapture*, sold under a different title as a new play by an unknown writer, was indeed minimally consumerist, pivoting away from the 'bankability' of a popular contemporary writer, even at a time when theatres were in COVID-19 (financial) recovery mode. Nor was the decision, whether in Canada, where Crimp's show began, or in London, again at the Royal Court, of staging a performance that featured one of the world's leading playwrights performing live exclusively commercially driven given the highly limited run of the show. Both texts, moreover, deal with ecologies of human bodies and non-human entities, and with their interminglings and recalibrations.

In addition to such key angles, a plethora of civically minded concerns are addressed in the plays, interrogating the individual's self-affordances, agencies, rights, responsibilities, compromises, failures and visions. There is a palpable dynamic in spatio-experiential flows borne out of the "broken

spaces and places", of "the concrete reality of shuttered, darkened buildings, and individual artists struggling with the fiscal and emotional after-effects of a severely unbalanced playing field", which might produce a new path "for the theatre to attend to the multiple emergencies of not only the field of theatre but also its position in and relationship to the planet and its many people and inhabitants" (Svich 2021, 8). Moreover, although it is in affluent, arguably financially secure and internationally renowned venues that Chapter 7's case studies were staged at it is important to remember that the power of transformation in established institutions willing to take risks is as important a civic-artistic interventionist gesture as any, and no less urgent for any perceived safety. "The collective, dissensual 'we'", which Svich foregrounds (2021, 8), is to be found in the ways that the texts of Chapter 7 frame the collective, challenged, proliferating, decentred, distanced and yet overlapping subjectivities of our time.

Although, like Fuchs and Svich, so literary scholar Marco Pustianaz is reflecting primarily on COVID-19 lockdowns, Pustianaz's *Surviving Theatre: The Living Archive of Spectatorship* (2022), too, offers certain assertions with wider implications. In another study of the interaction between technologies and performance, theatre scholar Seda Ilter offers a rich analysis, not least in relation to contemporary playwrights. Ilter's *Mediatized Dramaturgy: The Evolution of Plays in the Media Age* largely predates COVID-19 in terms of its primary analysis, but, belonging to that academic body of work that was published in the midst of the crisis (2021), it rightly attempts to account for it in its concluding remarks. Reflecting on the new circumstances, Ilter observes that "theatre, as a rapidly adapting organism, has adapted to this new reality and its intensely online ecosystem" (2021, 189). Referencing theatre companies that made their production recordings available online at no cost, Ilter acknowledges Forced Entertainment, whose piece *Speak Bitterness*, opening in 1994, is a point of departure for *Not One of These People*. With novel dissemination modes for existing work developed during the pandemic, the question of how such forms may furnish a link to the theatre's future, not only in terms of sharing, but, also, of post-COVID-19 sustainable dramaturgies, is very relevant.

Both Kirkwood and Crimp's plays offer a plausible response to such hypotheses, whether in the staging of a 'real' couple's life that, becoming increasingly immersed in a digital world and distanced from the physical one, has their very life (re)constructed through online self-archiving,

as in the first case, or of talking heads distanced from one another and from their author, giving proliferating accounts of self-surveillance and revelation, as in the second case. Crimp's play accomplishes a further development of the digital element—this time by rendering the speakers as non-existing subjects rather than physical entities with non-character reference (as in some of his earlier work), thereby making a point as to the dissolution of not only truth, but, also, of accountability in the online realm, and, therefore, casting the whole concept of the 'confessional', on which both the Forced Entertainment and the Crimp pieces are built, into doubt (2022). The hypothesis that Ilter outlines in the concluding part of her monograph is already verifiable in the short-term future that, with the likewise emergent forms after 2022, is fast becoming the present:

> This emergent digital space that we currently inhabit more intensely than ever is not only altering how theatre is made and plays are written but also changing our perception of the world and understanding of narratives. In this new global context with its fast-developing technologies, how we write is bound to change, and in return it will change us, leaving one to continue wondering 'what words can do'. (2021, 198)

It is important that Ilter's perspective is geared towards how the pandemic and its effects of digitisation will literally be written into the narratives of playwriting going forward, from the shape of the texts themselves, to how audiences—citizens—will engage with these new texts. The spatial emphasis of Ilter's projection is significant: it identifies the fusion likely to shape a new era as we populate differently conceptualised performance sites, as theatre responds to a shifting world by embedding novel dramaturgical approaches into the text itself, and as these actions redefine the site of the playtext and of live performance.

Theatrical texts, too, are sites that are becoming increasingly fluid. In *That Is Not Who I Am/Rapture* and *Not One of These People* the change is visible in the ways the playwright conceives of themselves as not a singular entity, but, as Chapter 7 discusses, as multiple entities, all the while holding on to an authorial core—one with agency, responsibility and accountability. In *Rapture* 'Lucy Kirkwood' becomes as much a palimpsest for versions of herself as she remains actual, having emerged as creator from the pseudonym (Dave Davidson) under which her play (initially *That Is Not Who I Am*) was advertised to assert her civic duty to truth-telling. *Not One of These People* is an example of how the capabilities

of language are amplified through digital implementation by individuals with no physical, but only digital presence. At the same time, on that same stage, we see the playwright (Crimp) both as himself and performing himself, both appearing and disappearing, both voice and character, both writer and actor. This is playwriting that does not merely benefit from the digital insights of directors, but writes digitality into its very narrative, creating interspaces between archive and liveness, and between deepfake and radical reality. The texts, expertly crafted, write their own fluidity into their very narratives; it takes this kind of boldness to metabolise crisis into creation.

The next part considers sociological research of direct relevance to the overall approach of this book and Chapter 7 more specifically: Urry and Elliott, already engaged with previously, and Saskia Sassen, in a co-edited volume with Robert Latham: *Digital Formations: IT and New Architectures in the Global Realm* (2005). The term 'architecture' speaks to the literal emergence of digital networks as well as to the conceptual restructuring of lives built around technological advances. As such, the emphasis on the emergence of a new space, which Latham and Sassen discuss extensively, speaks directly to the interspatial concerns of my present study. Early in their analysis, Latham and Sassen provide a definitive statement capturing the approach of their volume: "[c]omputer-centered networks and technologies are reshaping social relations and constituting new social domains. These transformations assume multiple forms and involve diverse actors" (2005, 1). Already here we have the identification of computer technology as source of major socio-spatial reordering; a reference to space in the term 'domain' that is liminal in itself as it suggests both a physical and an online terrain; an acknowledgement of the multiplicities of forums and media within which these actions occur; and an emphasis on the fact that agency is widespread in terms of origin, kind and any other indicators we may reasonably imagine.

Latham and Sassen's volume is of considerable coverage and, given its range of concerns, not purposeful to condense. For the aims of this book, I am interested in the spatial threads and redefinitions that Latham and Sassen propose, especially in their extensive and critically rigorous Introduction, which, beyond setting the tone for their book, also produces a framework for transitional stages in humanity's relationship with the digital. The text is both in dialogue with its time, and anticipates—cautiously and soberly—the future, from whose privileged perspective one might, today, both evaluate and expand upon Latham and Sassen's

claims. As this book proposes, we are inhabiting the era of the interspace. Within it, absolutes evaporate and binaries are rendered irrelevant. A consequence of this is that the online universe, for all its radical augmentation and increasing algorithmic automaticity, does not exist separately, nor can it be strictly diagnosed as the cause for all physical distancing and ceding of control from everyday lives, whereby actant and agent might be conceptualised as no longer synonymous entities.

Latham and Sassen identify the congruences that determine such flows as they consider "various mixes of computer-centered technologies and the broad range of social contexts that provide the utility logics, substantive rationalities, and cultural meanings for much of what happens in these electronic spaces", so as to highlight "the *intersection* of […] technology and society" (2005, 1, my emphasis). The authors emphatically address that society and technology are inter-embedded and evolve alongside, rather than separately from one another. The term "sociodigitization", which they define as "the process whereby activities and their histories in a social domain are drawn up into digital codes, databases, images and text" (2005, 3), is of crucial relevance. The term is further chiselled as "the rendering of facets of social and political life in a digital form" and "the broader process whereby activities and their histories in a social domain are drawn up into the digital codes, databases, images, and text that constitute the substance of a digital formation" (Latham and Sassen 2005, 16). 'Sociodigitization', like the fraught space it both occupies and produces, is fluid: as Latham and Sassen note, it is not possible to predict "what shape sociodigitization will take in the future, and with what implications" (2005, 17–18).

In Chapter 7, I argue that *That Is Not Who I Am/Rapture* and *Not One of These People*, appearing a decisive decade and a half after Latham and Sassen's forward-thinking volume, develop, present and expand upon such possibilities and hypotheses. The actual title of Kirkwood's play (*Rapture*) points to the mutual impact between technology and individual: it is a process of mining, enchanting, being enchanted and cross-performing that enchantment in networks of other actants and agents, thereby multiplying its reach and a/effect. The worlds that Kirkwood and Crimp bring to the stage are both depictions and digivisceral embodiments of the condition that Latham and Sassen posited in future terms, to be entirely corroborated by developments that occurred between their time of writing and this book's present moment: "As

new algorithms are developed, they will open up new forms of information manipulation, aggregation, and distribution around which also new digital formations might emerge" (2005, 18). These include new online spaces, where dialogue and communication requiring minimal resources and operating on mass scale occurs, as we see in Kirkwood; or algorithmically generated figures that are stand-ins for, but do not actually correspond to 'real' individuals, all the while operating on a sphere of simultaneous deepfake and hyper-reality, as we see in Crimp.

The density of 'sociodigitization' as term and process is explored further by Latham and Sassen in their broader methodological proposition towards the understanding of the transformational technological developments of our time. Latham and Sassen's distancing from binary constructions that set up either society and technology, or the physical and the digital as separate, a recurring concern in their Introduction as a means of evidencing the problematics of division, is of immediate value to my own approach. To speak about "thick environments" as the authors do, or, likewise, to acknowledge that "either/or categorizations filter out alternative conceptualizations, thereby precluding a more complex reading of the intersection and interaction of digitization with social, other material, and place-bound conditions" is to provide a theoretical path towards the hybrid (Latham and Sassen 2005, 4–5). It is, also, to allow the possibility of the interspace, which is the exclusive property of neither the physical nor the digital domain, to take root. The plays examined in Chapter 7 are site-bound: they take place in specific theatres, with the physical presence of spectators. But they also, and equally, draw on and conceptualise online milieux, on which their very existence hinges, as, beyond formative, instrumental. Latham and Sassen advocate "a relational perspective that emphasizes that forms emerge in and through complex social processes"—these forms refer equally to the social and the digital (2005, 9). I would like to extend their signification further to also include theatrical forms. Such a link is not an arbitrary leap for the purposes of this book, but emerges from the terms that Latham and Sassen postulate, and which bring them directly in the space of theatrical performance and its related vocabularies.

The term 'formation' entails three parameters for Latham and Sassen: "organizing/interacting/spatializing", which are "overlapping and mutually constitutive: space is organized; organization is spatial and interactive; interaction requires organization; and interaction produces spaces"

(2005, 10). I suggest that Kirkwood and Crimp's plays constitute interspaces both textually and formally—including, of course, dramaturgically. That is, they organise their space between the physical and the digital, establishing the site of interaction with audiences as equally contingent on both domains, which, without dispensing with their individual characteristics, fuse for the purposes of these performances. Through this process a new space comes to be constituted that is, likewise, produced and inhabited by spectators, and that bears the characteristics of digital and physical domains equally. Spectators interact with the play; the play interacts with spectators—as a positive and reasonably deduced additional effect, spectators interact with each other, while, arguably, recognising interaction patterns that they will have, in their own ways, experienced and or produced in the electronic domain—different forms of sharing; confessionals; dissemination.

Both plays, then, stage and perform the interspace as plot trope and embody it in their formal articulation. This aspect, returning to how sociology borrows from the vocabulary of theatre, is crucial. Latham and Sassen identify space and spatiality as of crucial significance, with the potential to be most unsettling because of the possibilities and flows they contain. Specifically, expanding upon their definition of space in this context, Latham and Sassen indicate "the electronic staging of the substance [or content] and social relations at play in a digital formation" (2005, 10). They further note that, in order to understand the potentialities of such a spatialising and staging context, we need to appreciate that the emerging site is a novel, mixed constitution that performs spatiality without tangible physicality and its related conditions that one might typically associate with space and its derivatives:

> Instead of geocorporeal social artifacts, electronic space is composed of picto-textual social artifacts embodied in electronic stagings of texts, images, and graphics through software and hardware. A range of realized and potential relations and actions is opened up to produce electronic space. (Latham and Sassen 2005, 10)

It is this network of relations and actions whose co-creation and outcomes the plays examined in Chapter 7 reveal. The texts serve as representative examples of 'sociodigitization', manifesting how this has emerged as, arguably, the dominant condition in recent years and especially from 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic onwards.

Latham and Sassen clarify: "the term staging–borrowed from the theater and the military–is meant to convey the putting into order and motion of semantic configurations. Staging implies a coordination of views, visualizations and narrations that unfold in time, put in place for public or private effect and readiness for further movement and action" (2005, 11). The reference to theatre alongside the military reminds us of the precision involved in the mounting of performance, and of the different actors (in the broadest sense) and coordinated endeavours involved. We are also reminded of patterns; systems; and repetition. These are, likewise, elements that we might expect to encounter in 'thick' digital environments that involve multiple actants, intentionalities and methods—and which converge upon a process of self-/re-presentation, response and participation—or, at the very least, spectating. *That Is Not Who I Am/Rapture* and *Not One of These People* show how visualisations and narrations in digital environments share both instantaneousness and durationality—as such, they are intricate stagings. They also show how the confessional, or the disseminatory, may be equally motivated by achieving both private and public effect—or perhaps might be focused on the former while also achieving the latter as binaries between private and public in the digital realm become increasingly blurred. The reference to 'movement and action' might remind us of the Kirkwood play, where the protagonist couple begin as motivated by their own separatist principles against capital and demagogy, but, gradually, deploy the same modes of dissent—the Internet and its various channels of dissemination—as means of garnering approval, seeking to mobilise it into activism.

Whether in the extraordinarily honest confessions delivered by fake people that we encounter in Crimp's play, or in the constant ways in which we witness social and political events reshape and aggravate the digital (self-)performances of the Quilters, the protagonist couple in Kirkwood's text, the space in which these discourses, attitudes, and, ultimately, lives unfold is proven to be not only fluid, but highly slippery. Reflecting on previous work (Sach, Bach and Stark), Latham and Sassen describe "a relatively open, loosely configured, discursive field susceptible to interventions that constitute serious breaks or ruptures, but which are more simple in nature compared to more highly structured and narrow spaces" (2005, 11). We might add that, to a certain extent at least, as social media and screen domination have increased exponentially in recent years and especially from COVID-19 onwards, the boundaries between these different kinds of spaces have also become fluid, with one seemingly adopting

more of the other's characteristics. That is, digital media outlets have become both more narrowly prescribed in how the user's behaviour is predicated, and more expansive in terms of the affordances they make. Therefore, 'interventions' or 'ruptures' (not necessarily positive terms) have increased in scale considerably. The fluidity between 'rupture' and 'rapture' also calls for attention in accounting for both the application and effect—processes of mutuality—of media and user, or environment and actant, as they have come to be shaped in the recent period and as captured in the plays of Chapter 7. Ultimately, to close with Latham and Sassen, this is a matter of appreciating the extensive complexities of "this in-between zone that constructs the articulations of users and digital technology" as a mutual flow (2005, 21).

Less bound to examples of networks, platforms and devices, Latham and Sassen produce a framework that has aged well; so has, for the most part, Elliott and Urry's, even though, overall, their argumentation is more intimately connected to specific (oftentimes superseded) devices. Elliot and Urry work on a case study model, using the lives of individuals identified by only a first name and occupation, and, otherwise, by behavioural patterns. These 'characters', or subjects, could be anyone. The ways in which both plays start from the entertaining and almost innocuous (the couple's first date in Kirkwood; the humorous and mundane amongst the confessional snippets in Crimp) produce a bridge to the way in which Elliott and Urry begin from the pleasant and filled with possibilities aspect of new technologies to enter, gradually, the immersive, exhausting and corrosive aspects of these same systems.

We saw in Latham and Sassen how sociology borrows from the lexicon of theatre; we see, in Elliot and Urry (2010), how it also borrows from its narrativisation in the vivid formation of character, in embedding crisis in the plot, and in denouement. Let us take, indicatively, the case study of a female-identified subject named Sandra Fletcher—working in advertising, her life comes with means and mobility. In what might even be conceived as a stage direction, Sandra "deploys digital lifestyle technologies in order to fashion a mobile, multiplex, connected life with others", which, to her, delivers "a new kind of freedom" (2010, 26). Beyond communication, as the authors note, the immersion in such possibilities also serves Sandra "as a basis for self-exploration and self-experiment" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 27). Already here, we have a reference to the multitudinous manifestation of self, her pluralism, her lack of fixity that involves both spatiality and identity. The

mobile space, built and sustained by technologies, serves as interspace between different versions of self, with a concrete yet intangible presence, sensory yet unattributable to any singular location.

But it is not long, as is also the case in the Kirkwood and Crimp plays, before the other side of this bilateral process enters the discourse. When Elliott and Urry probe "how mobile lives are interwoven with digital technologies and are reshaped in the process as techno-mobilities", this may indicate not only lives on the physical, but also on the notional move (2010, 27). As COVID-19's immobilised mobilities revealed, technologies allow us to be in multiple places at the same time—or in the span of very little time—thereby "performing mobile lives" not only in the traditionally meant travel-heavy lifestyle, but, also, without ever moving from a fixed physical position (Elliott and Urry 2010, 27). It is this complex interspace that Kirkwood and Crimp's personas inhabit. Therefore, in our time, the conundrum that Elliott and Urry formulate has, if anything, increased in urgency:

> Do software-operated, digital, wireless technologies give rise to any specific contemporary anxieties? Do they contain anxiety, or do they help create it? (2010, 27)

The toll on mental health derived from the over-availability and overuse of digital technologies, and the enhanced pressure to construct and perform the self in a certain way, along with the distortions and (un)accountabilities that this encourages, is a concern that Kirkwood and Crimp's plays have in common. Such deep-seated and far-reaching consequences are, for example, expressed here:

> [...] digital technologies also facilitate the mobilization of feelings and affect, Memories and desires, dreams and anxieties. What is at stake in the deployment of communications technologies in mobile lives, [...] is not simply an increased digitization of social relationships, but a broad and extensive change in how emotions are contained (stored, deposited, retrieved) and thus a restructuring of identity more generally. (Elliott and Urry 2010, 27–28)

It is a proposition that, further to entirely accurate on the basis of how the intervening period has been attesting to its veracity, is also another way of understanding the process that Latham and Sassen define as 'sociodigitization'. Elliott and Urry offer a significant term of their

own: "*miniaturized mobilities*", a reference to how "digital technologies" described by the authors as "multiple and intersecting", "are corporeally interwoven with self in the production [and proliferation] of mobile lives", "augment[ing] the mobile capacities of individual subjects in physical, communicative and virtual forms" (2010, 28, 43, emphasis original).

In Crimp's play the proliferation might be algorithmic and representationally structured on individuals that do not exist, but it is also a reflection of how mobile dialogues, much of the time confessionals into an e-void that, as a seemingly boundless electronic (self-)archive that one does not always control, is in fact not a void at all, constitute such an extensive part of everyday lives. In that sense, online and not-online domains merge. I avoid here the usage of the term 'physical' to indicate strictly a non-online domain, because the online domain, too, as we come to see in these plays by Kirkwood and Crimp, requires considerable physical investment, including corporeal triggers and reactions, and is therefore not to be relegated to the sphere of the immaterial. There is, also, the aspect of how much of the physical self, through the senses, and uses/movements/gestures of the body that fathom the device as its extension—and perhaps vice versa—is channelled into the handling of, and interaction with electronic objects. It is, ultimately, the fluidity in the space that our activities of communication—and our being more broadly—occupy and produce that Crimp's text, its dramaturgy and its staging so aptly capture, and that Elliott and Urry also emphasise here: "[t]he dichotomies of professional/private, work/home, external/internal and presence/absence are all put into question […] a digital life is inextricably intertwined with the engendering of new kinds of sociability […] and rewrites experiences of […] personal and family life in more fluid and negotiated ways" (2010, 28). As we will see, the fractured [self-]narrations in Crimp's text point very much to the effects, and embodied affects, of such processes as they come to not only form part of, but, to a great extent, determine, everyday life.

In addition to this, the play further complicates these states through its immersion in "complex, network-driven systems, […through which] we witness the emergence of various 'virtual' others. […] These virtual others […] reconstitute the background to psychic experiences of presence and absence in novel ways" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 33). And even though the example that Elliott and Urry use is *Second Life*, a platform relevant at the time but inconsequential today, the principle remains: there is a

staging and performance of self that is both one's own and not. The title of Crimp's play is suggestive of this 'othering': the statement it makes, and which its speakers repeat in specific parts of the text, implies a self-distancing from another that performs the transgressive, or apathetic, or ignorant gestures that one might never conceptualise themselves as being capable of. Culpability, cynicism and self-distancing from responsibility emerge as complex states that Crimp's text exposes, retaining the speed of the space in which they occur by denying the audience any time for reflection before the text—and we—have moved on to the next thought.

The fluid space between presence and absence that Elliot and Urry identify applies to the representational methods of *Not One of These People*, where individuals both exist and not, and are both present in the theatre space and not, with the playwright himself becoming the in-between site and vehicle/medium for their embodiment. It is also of value to the understanding of *That Is Not Who I Am/Rapture*, especially when we consider Elliot and Urry's reference to "the *technological unconscious* [that] comes to the fore and functions as a psychosocial mechanism for the negotiation of sociabilities based upon […] absence, lack, distance and disconnection" (2010, 33, emphasis original). We do not need a case as extreme as that of the Quilters—distanced, damaged, deleted—to appreciate how this unconscious takes hold, but it is worth noting that Kirkwood's text deftly structures and demonstrates the rooting into everyday lives and gradual escalation of such a condition. Elliott and Urry's vocabulary here, completely in line with the effects of a virus that would take hold an entire decade after the publication of the text, startles. The pandemic's escalation of 'absence, lack, distance and disconnection' accelerated the individual's surrendering to the technological unconscious that in turn produced an entire suite of effects. The dependence and paradox are highlighted by Elliott and Urry in their discussion of how miniaturised mobilities function as both a way of soothing feelings of detachment, inadequacy and their related anxieties, and become part of a cycle that renders them "from intoxicating to threatening"—thereby exacerbating these very anxieties of separation and absence (2010, 41). The gradual escalation and retreat, as well as complete absorption and, eventually, 'rapture' that we witness in the couple at the heart of Kirkwood's play, is, ultimately, exemplary

of the "various pathologies of mobile lives" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 43). Proceeding from this and the earlier, above-presented hypotheses and frameworks in the current chapter, then, the following chapters go on to address and expand upon the interspace, collective concerns and critical concepts, making detailed reference to the plays as texts and performances.

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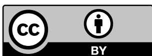

CHAPTER 3

The Room: Intimate Microcosms and World Formation

The prominence of the room as a dramaturgical trope is well documented. In British theatre, playwrights like Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp and Harold Pinter have an extensive record of revolutionising what the singular 'contained' room has the capacity to stand for and deliver in terms of dramatic events and transformative actions. These writers, named here for their consistent return to the topic, but also many others in individual works, have exploded any assumptions that a room is a space within one's complete control; that a room is finite; that a room, however seemingly willingly entered, is escapable, whether mentally, physically or emotionally. It is worth, by exception compared to the rest of this book, and recognising the vast material that this chapter has had to contend with in making its choices, to name selected occurrences of singular plays whose emphasis on the room has redefined how we view that so-called confined and safeguarded inside in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. In making these references, I also hope that it might become clear that, driven by concerns that recur in the plays I shall mention, this chapter is informed by difficult choices of case studies ultimately determined by intersectional potentialities as these emerge from the plays' dramaturgies and thematic focus. A further factor for the selection has been balance, both in terms of representation and the avoidance, as far as possible, of an uneven emphasis on specific playwrights' work across this, as well as previous publications.

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In 2019, Ella Hickson's *ANNA* problematised not only what can be expected and accomplished in a single room, but, also, how the theatre might begin to conceptualise and stage that very space. It is a production that I have discussed from different angles previously (Angelaki 2022, 2023) and will therefore not be expanding upon. Still, it is essential to acknowledge the play for factors including its use of binaural sound in the staging of a couple's apartment, of which we see predominantly the living room and adjacent kitchen, as the setup for the exposition and capture of a perpetrator, as the only set for the theatrical performance itself and as a mundane domestic context already exposed to external interference at a time of political surveillance and unfreedom in 1968 East Berlin. For these reasons, and for its pace and enclosures as these are conveyed viscerally and visually, the play stands out as both a domestic and a political thriller without losing its human heart. This is also the case for Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016), which might, in turn, be described as a domestic and scientific thriller. In a quiet coastal cottage, dramatic revelations occur regarding not only the relationship between the play's main protagonists, but, also, human agency in the halting of environmental catastrophe—and any methods of intervention in the face of moral and scientific responsibility alike. Kirkwood's stage directions indicate that "*The room is at a slight tilt*" because "*The land beneath it is being eroded*" (2016, 4–79). The house is, after all, in the vicinity of a power station—and the characters are nuclear scientists. More broadly, Kirkwood's subtlety and sharpness defines the playing field so resolutely that, beyond a dialogue with the basic tropes of Pinter's *Old Times* (1971 (2004)), for example, she develops a language all her own. By the time we reach the play's finale, as in *Mosquitoes* (2017), Kirkwood's soundscape is poetic and distinctive:

> *the sound of a wave building.*
> *It grows and grows*
> *It crashes upon us.*
> *Silence.*
> *Distantly, a church bell rings.*
> *As if from under the water.*
> *The sound distorted but unmistakable.*
> *End.* (Kirkwood 2016, 4–79)

Arguably, the "*End*" in Kirkwood's directions signifies more than the end of performance; what the spectators are left to imagine, rather, is the end of the world (Kirkwood 2016, 4–79).

Kirkwood has maintained a significant engagement with roomscapes and the power they yield: *Rapture* (2022), for example, hinges on the constant tension between the domestic home and the digital space as sites of equal weight and significance, strong forces leading to a spectacular implosion. The spatio-digital dialectics of the play is specifically explored in Chapter 7. It is also important to remember Kirkwood's earlier, quieter work, most notably *Small Hours*, co-written with Ed Hime (2011, 2016) and *it felt empty when the heart went at first but it is alright now* (2009). Both plays unfold in apartments and premiered in intimate theatres: London's Hampstead Downstairs and the Arcola respectively. The performance sites, like the plots, expedite the affect of enclosure. In the former play a new mother, alone, is increasingly unable to cope with a crying baby in space (her home) and time (a long night) that appear equally inhospitable, both confining and unable to contain her escalating mental, emotional and physical crisis. In the latter, the plot focuses on sex trafficking and one woman's resilience strategies in the face of utmost despair. Another extraordinary drama plays out in the crowded parameters of a heart, mind, body and room, with the protagonist all the while aware of the vast world out there, as unreachable as it is, somehow, an onwards force for endurance and survival.

There are further notable instances, which I have discussed in earlier work (2017): Dennis Kelly's *Orphans* (2009) locates the entire action in a couple's living room, where class, race and gender intertwine to emulate a hostile world of aggression and violence, with precariousness swelling to the point of suffocation. Meanwhile, debbie tucker green's *nut* (2013) and *truth and reconciliation* (2011) take place in an apartment, and in multiple (though on the set presented as one) institutional rooms respectively. In the former, an extraordinary mental health crisis unravels, as a person strives to find a place for themselves in a world that is forever marginalising them, and a family who, despite love, is unable, ultimately, to develop the empathy structures that might allow for some genuine insight. In the latter, crimes of war—of the highest trauma, and most shocking violence—are exposed through dialogues accommodated in various reconciliatory procedures. One play was performed at the National Theatre's temporary Shed space; the other at the intimate Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. Both spaces, malleable, one of them (the Shed)

even transient, and with the potential to be claustrophobic, once more amplified the plays' affects.

Events of horror—imagined even as a humorous trope, on occasion—unfold in the rooms of Anthony Neilson, and especially his plays *Relocated* (2008) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (2018), where contained spaces turn coercive agents, augmenting and producing the threat of violence, even at its visible absence. Neilson's balancing act of the grotesque and the deepest darkness takes flesh through sites as much as through plots, with characters that are marginal, or seeking a separation from the world, as the plays feed a profound sense of unsafety. Mike Bartlett has also invested in the room as a primary dramaturgical device for risk and exposure—from his earlier and smaller-scale plays, such as *Contractions* (2008), a meeting-room play where corporate voraciousness gradually swallows up all traces of the human, to *Game* (2015), a formally, textually and directorially adventurous play that required the reformulation of the Almeida auditorium into a central glass box, with four separate audience areas on all sides from where we followed the action through headsets as the play's ruse unfolded. This involved a couple accepting the offer of a free home for their growing family by conceding the rights to privacy for the purposes of not only being spectacularised in the sense of the prying gaze, but, also, targeted via game players using stunt guns for their own entertainment. Through such a plot, Bartlett raised important points as to access, privilege, class and sensationalism. Soon afterwards, with *Wild* (2016), Bartlett's theatre presented an early foray into shifting performance ecologies and live streaming. The act of surveillance, crucial to the play's plot, was heightened as spectators were able to watch the show as played at the Hampstead Theatre, across borders. Contrasting directly with this act of international free access, Bartlett's whistle-blower protagonist, isolated in a hotel room, was treading unsafe territory with his tracking, capture and survival all hanging in the balance.

This account cannot possibly be exhaustive; moreover, it is adjusted through the overall lens of this book in terms of priority areas that hinge on interspatiality and in-betweenness. In this context, allowances also ought to be made for rooms as spaces of hope and possibility, even if these are borne out of devastation and failure. Caryl Churchill's *What if if Only* (Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, 2021) is one of the playwright's most emotionally affective plays, depicting a grief stricken individual as they navigate—physically but not mentally alone—the different stages of grief, but, also, the varying futures that might have taken flesh if other

decisions had been made—or that can still take flesh, if hope prevails. Agency is key, presented on a cosmic and individual scale equally, taking on failure in terms of one's own perceived lack as partner, as well as one's shortcomings as a citizen—most notably in environmental complacency. Guilt emerges strongly, but so does perseverance along with a persistent faith in being alive and re-discovering what this may mean. All unfolds in a room, as the bereft person enters imaginary dialogues with individuals presented as temporal entities: different degrees of futures and possibilities. Ultimately, being jolted into action beats being thrust into despair. Churchill's metaphysical depth emerges as a vast horizon of prospect; suddenly devoid of love channelled towards a person, the room is not only a prison, Churchill shows—if the love is flowed into a world larger than the individual, the room could also become a cabinet of wonders.

Unlike *What if if Only*, David Eldridge's *Beginning* (2017) and *Middle* (2022), both National Theatre Dorfman plays, are not abstract; but they bring their own poetry and contain possibilities for profound change, standing on its very precipice. In *Beginning*, two individuals, each lonely for different reasons and navigating failed relationships, challenging parenthood, the absence of parenthood and a fast-approaching middle age with its own confining measures of success, also find themselves navigating the after-party battleground of an apartment. It belongs to one of them, and it is she who has thrown a move-in feast in which she has now met the friend of an acquaintance, striking a bond. She is professionally accomplished and financially comfortable enough to purchase an apartment in a desirable part of London; he is professionally unhappy and cohabiting, in a more modest commuter belt elsewhere, with his mother and grandmother, financially and emotionally compromised by divorce. His relationship with his young daughter hangs in the balance. The woman he has just met, however, wants to have a child—in fact, with him, detecting a kindness and a possibility for them both to extend beyond their current circumstance. And so, in this room, brimming with potential and too new to harbour disappointment, the terrain opens up for these two adults to make unsafe, potentially life-transformative choices. All this hinges on their freshly, tentatively co-created common space existing between and beyond their individualities, and therefore exceeding their shortcomings. It is a different story altogether in the second part of what has become a trilogy for Eldridge (the third part pending as this book was finalised), *Middle*, which finds a couple, well settled into their middle age, as their own well-lived in home suddenly becomes not only unfamiliar

but profoundly unsettling territory. She expresses her unhappiness and longing for an affair; he is confronted by her devastation, while struggling to negotiate his. This space, also—the open-plan kitchen/living room most familiar to the eye—becomes a battleground. Objects break, bodies and hearts are injured, and as the new day dawns, following revelations seismic and potentially unmendable, nothing is resolved. There is a tenaciousness that clings to life, and to the life of this union, however, even as it is about to expire. The humanity in Eldridge's writing is compelling—and the room is the arena in which to doubt, affirm and, perhaps, even reinvent oneself, appears possible.

Routes

Rachel De-lahay has emerged as one of the most original voices in negotiating two conditions that appear antithetical but that are, in fact, symbiotic: movement and stasis. In one the other is always implied; enclosure can suggest transit, while transit might well suggest enclosure. *Routes*, premiering in 2013 at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in a production directed by Simon Godwin, anticipates the migration crisis of 2015, typifying theatre's ability to sense oncoming shifts and reminding that before a crisis acquires visible, dramatic dimensions, it has already been present, escalating, requiring intervention. The play takes place in rooms that perform crisis in different ways: primarily a halfway house for young offenders (England) and a negotiation site where the process of illegal immigration is being administered (Nigeria). Through dramaturgically economical action involving a limited number of characters and minimal scenographic resources, De-lahay captures all key parameters concerning detention and hostile environment. The play is also economical in its time requirements, with an overall duration barely exceeding one hour.

What one critic identifies as a not wholly positive characteristic of *Routes*, namely that "De-lahay becomes trapped between two plays – an analysis and critique of the immigration system, and a domestic, character-driven piece about the individuals trapped within it – ending up betwixt and between" (Monks 2013), works, in my view, considerably to the play's advantage. This is because De-lahay creates a dynamic interspace, exposing fixity and detention from different interconnecting angles. In turn, this allows the playwright to capture both the human and spatial core of things in what is vast and elusive subject-matter, providing,

through spare staging, multi-angular vision. Paul Wills's set with its overhead structure-shapes creating frames, the impression of different rooms and the sense of lines drawn and intersecting lives that are, at the same time, fenced off, served to enhance this effect. The same critic refers to the set as "figurative design of endless white corridors-come-airplane-wings which smother the piece in a political filter" (Monks 2013), but I find the ambiguity of the shapes and their potentiality rather liberating, as they do not confine the play to spatial over-interpretation. This makes it possible for the rooms in which De-lahay stages action to appear not realist but abstract, expanding and contracting as relationships grow and as political frameworks limit prospects of redemption, or escape. As another critic frames this, "sharp lines hang above a square stage at the centre of the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs; positioned to allow six characters to cross fictional, national and emotional lines" (Sohi 2013). De-lahay's play, then, is far from lost in the in-between; rather, it thrives within it, allowing its constituting sites to be shown for all their possibilities and limitations. These include the lives that are happening, waiting to happen and failing to happen as the outcome of various systemic and institutional failures, themselves accommodated in these same structures (Monks 2013).

Routes, moreover, features the character of Lisa, a dramaturgical device serving to interconnect the two subplots: she is the mother of Kola, who lives in the halfway house, a youth hostel for offenders having served their sentence, where he meets Bashir. As opposed to Bashir, who has spent his life in Britain but does not hold citizenship, having fallen through the cracks of a system that has failed to support, or protect him, Kola is a British citizen—so their states of detainment are different. This becomes emphatically revealed when, on a day when the primary event would otherwise have been Bashir's scheduled meeting with his parole officer, Bashir is informed that, having recently turned eighteen, he is now an eligible deportation target—and is therefore being moved to a detention centre. The bond forming between the two is such that Kola feels compelled to visit Bashir in his free hours. He also attempts, through different acts of care, to persuade Bashir to remain positive, and not to surrender to an environment that is turning increasingly more hostile. It is there, also, that Lisa's strongest in-between agency comes into play, as Kola attempts to extract from her any possibility of support, or information, regarding Bashir. Lisa, however, is as resolute as where Kola's own living conditions are concerned: systems are in place, and errant behaviours have consequences. Lisa's interspatial function expands

in connection to the play's other main storyline: this concerns the Nigerian Femi who attempts to return to England, at first struggling to gather the amount required for the man who facilitates his illegal passage, and, then, risking arrest upon illegal re-entry, since a relatively minor incident from his first stay in the UK means his fingerprints are on record. Lisa eventually becomes Femi's detaining officer upon his arrest.

Femi and Bashir's cases—the latter facing deportation to Somalia, a home only on paper, to which he has no connection—are entirely different, and, yet, they capture the same state of in-betweenness. This becomes physically embodied in the rooms that the set morphs into as circumstance change, from the hostel, to the detention centre, to the illegal space where Femi acquires his passage prerequisites, to the space where he is held, and the one he will be transported to, awaiting the next stages in the handling of his case. Lisa's emotional condition is that of ambivalence, too: on the one hand she wants to support her son; on the other, she is trained in a job that perpetuates the systemic, and that is built on inflexible structures. As criminologist Mary Bosworth argues through an extensive investigation regarding staff at British IRCs [Immigration Removal Centres], the mental and emotional conditions of such workers are both challenging and conflicting (2019). And even though the sample that informs Bosworth's research may be employed in slightly different conditions to those of Lisa, it is precisely Lisa's function in the play as occupying different institutional, mental and emotional spaces (not least because of her work at border controller) that renders Bosworth's commentary especially relevant.

Emphasis is placed on the state of negotiating in-betweenness, and how this becomes sedimented within the individual. Bosworth observes: "staff turn away [emotionally withdraw] from those in their care, and also from themselves. Their 'authentic' self exists outside the gate, they insist, and they try, usually in vain, to maintain a split sense of being" (2019, 544). This condition, as we see, bleeds over to the personal when Lisa's own son finds himself in a custodial context, which generates a whole new level of negotiation. As Bosworth notes, part of what staff in detention and removal contexts are required to balance in their self-perception is that they "are both precarious and powerful", a feeling that extends from the personal to the professional (2019, 547). Ultimately, "[t]his rupture, with the other and with their self, can be profoundly painful and destabilizing, yet it does not stop them from doing their job" (Bosworth 2019, 547). And, so, Lisa continues both because of, and in spite of this fissure.

She has made herself strong enough to handle it, and even though it is a heavy load, she is able to deliver the task, unwaveringly, repetitively, perpetuating a bottom-down performance of authority. In Lisa we see the constant rehearsal and sheer discipline mandated for "an integrated sense of self", which is, otherwise, "hard to maintain" also because in some cases individuals in roles similar to Lisa's "want to connect in an environment based on exclusion" (Bosworth 2019, 554, 552). As we will see below, this is a condition experienced by workers involved in various stages of the removal process; this 'environment' is, once more, physical, structural, emotional and conceptual (Bosworth 2019, 552).

As Bosworth notes: "[e]motions can be a site of critical resistance and a coming together, as well as means of division. They create ties and may sever them" (2019, 543). We also observe this in the character of Anka, whose role is to offer support to detainees, and whose experiences of negotiation and in-betweenness are no less considerable. Anka is Bashir's case worker, who attempts to prevent his deportation by evidencing how the system has failed him; she, herself, will also ultimately fail. Anka's activism shows commitment and the belief that rigid, impersonal structures are worth protesting against; at the same time, she is also shaped by the pragmatic understanding that, most often, structures do not bend. The case is rendered further complex when her own sympathy towards Bashir, made more convoluted for his feelings of romantic projection towards her, means that another line between the personal and the professional is compromised. However committed to upholding barriers, Anka, between compassion and ideology, experiences a flow in her relationship with Bashir, without, however, explicitly crossing a line.

Then, there is Anka's own layered status, which places her in a different kind of in-between from that of any other character in the play oscillating between an inside and outside (as with Femi, Bashir, or Kola) or between personal attachment and systemic role (as with Lisa): that of the legal migrant who has made a home in a country other than their place of origin. Or, as Bashir puts this: "You really do make it look flawless. The way you've just slotted in. […] You just look like you belong here" (De-lahay 2013, 66–71). To this, he adds: "I could belong here. With you" (De-lahay 2013, 66–71). Bashir projects onto Anka not only his emotions, conflating romantic feelings with the possibility of her being his legal saviour, but, also, his notion of a home, which, through her established, legal status, and while being a migrant herself, she doubly embodies. It is important that, opening in 2013, the

play predates the Brexit referendum, but not the surrounding discourses that led to it. *Routes* is, therefore, significant in terms of capturing the emerging atmosphere, especially where Eastern European migrants to Britain were concerned (Anka's name and surname—Kruspska—imply such origin).

In an article published one year after the Brexit vote, sociologist Jon Fox astutely sums up the situation as

> The spike in hate crimes that followed the Brexit vote in the summer of 2016 serves as a poignant reminder that Eastern Europeans are still 'not-quite-white'. But at the same time this was a racism that was indiscriminate in its discrimination, targeting not just Eastern Europeans – the EU part of the problem – but racism's favourite targets of yesteryear as well. The toxic rhetoric surrounding immigration in the build up to Brexit allowed some Brexiteers to interpret the referendum results as endorsing their exclusionary views. (2017)

As Fox goes on to add, this reality stretches back further into the past than the referendum: "anti-Eastern European racism and discrimination that's recently been grabbing newspaper headlines may have increased in intensity and frequency since Brexit [...but is] building on solid foundations developed over the last ten or more years" (2017). As media and communications researcher Ros Taylor similarly notes, reflecting on work by law scholar Sara Benedi Lahuerta and political science scholar Ingi Iusmen, especially concerning Polish migrants, Britain's largest European migrant group by far according to statistics, "[d]iscriminatory attitudes and incidents involving EU nationals were already apparent before the referendum", becoming exacerbated in the lead-up to and the period following it (2019). The data further

> shows that the referendum has not only worsened the pre-existing 'hostile environment' experienced by EU nationals, but has also created a socio-political environment where Britons feel more entitled to express xenophobic views against EU nationals, leading the latter to feel unwelcome and to fear that their national origin, foreign names or accent may now start to be an aggravating problem in their dealings with UK institutions and in social interactions, both in the private and public sphere. (Taylor 2019)

Anka's own status, therefore, is a complex one, further proving De-lahay's instincts as to the storms brewing at the time of the play's opening. Anka's interspatial experience relates to the fact that she occupies a role of agency and responsibility, pointing out the injustices, and having experience of the immigration system from both sides. We learn, for example, that Anka has written an opinion piece with the purpose "to publicly shame the Border Agency" as part of her NGO work (De-lahay 2013, 66–71). That the spaces of the foreigner and local can co-exist within one person, continuously negotiated, not least while dealing with the significantly more complex immigration statuses of others more precarious, is a rather important statement of De-lahay's play.

Routes, due to its prescience and sensitive handling, succeeds in conceptualising the 'hostile environment' larger-scale in terms of institutions, structures and behaviours and smaller scale, concentrating on the sites—the rooms—that effectuate and perpetuate systems. These are the spaces that both promise and withhold, keeping without sheltering. We are given an early indication of this in the dialogue between Femi and Abiola, with whom Femi negotiates his passage, as they consider the possibility of a negative outcome in Femi's attempt to make it through immigration controls. Abiola remarks:

> If you insist on being under age they have to put you in a … 'halfway house', while they wait for the social workers to do the age verification test on you. When you are there, it is not a prison, you would perhaps be foolish to still be there when the people arrive. (De-lahay 2013, 5–6)

What Abiola is describing is not much different from the holding situation that Kola and Bashir experience, and where conditions of safety are lacking, though an overall system of surveillance is prevalent. There is a curfew, for example, but there is no guarantee as to the safekeeping of personal valuables, as Bashir discovers when a piece of jewellery—a chain—that he has inherited from his mother goes missing, prompting, as we will later see, Kola to trace and secure it in exchange for his train fare to visit Bashir. The 'halfway house' presents one with a room and basic lodgings, but it far from provides a home. As Kola is attempting to settle in at the early stages of the play, his conversation with Lisa verifies the hypothesis: "Well it's … nice. It's fine", she says, which he dryly confirms (De-lahay 2013, 7–10). In her tone, there is both pragmatism and guilt: she is reluctant to allow Kola's homecoming, not least because

he has exhibited violent behaviour towards her in the past. Then, there is the fact that Lisa is confronted by the physical realities of a space the likes of which are familiar to her through the system that she serves as employee.

The quiet moment between Lisa and Kola, therefore, offers one of the most poignant exchanges in the play, as the keeper of the institutional experiences a merging of the professional and personal worlds, still from a position of authority and agency, but with complex emotions as a mother. It is, overall, a moment of failure: there is nothing about the system that is reassuring here, though it is predicated on delivering safety. A subsequent exchange between Lisa and Kola is also indicative of the delicate balance in the relationship, aptly mirrored in the fraught atmosphere of the problematic space they find themselves in:

LISA. Move out properly. Have your own space. This will be your incentive.
KOLA. Move out of here to some next place?
LISA. Well, you can't stay here for ever. This is the real world now, Kola. No one owes you anything. So whilst you're here … well, they can put whoever they want in here.
KOLA. And my incentive is to move out…? (De-lahay 2013, 7–10)

Kola may not be faced with the exact same hostile environment that Bashir and Femi are confronted with, but he still faces an inhospitable environment. This is constituted by systemic failures whose injustices most clearly emerge when seen intersectionally: as the outcome of class, race and gender conditioning.

Kola finds himself in no man's land: his position is an undesirable one, while, at the same time, there is no certainty of 'graduating' to a better stage in his life personally or socially. What awaits him beyond the limitations of the current confining structure is far from freedom, or choice; it is, simply, another inhospitable room, with its own set of limitations. The fear of sharing an already uninviting space with someone who might cause further hurt is no sufficient force for onward movement, because, as Kola appears very realistically aware, there is no provision for a better outcome, or for breaking the systemic cycle of failure and suppression. Lisa's language implies an imagined noble goal; but for Kola there is no such incentive in a systemic structure that has—as is exemplified in this

very moment—produced for him only boundaries, clear lines that demarcate and prevent access. This is captured in Wills's set, which both allows for spatial merging that mirrors the play's dramaturgy of interblending plotlines and reminds us of the fencing off of the inhospitable sites that characters inhabit. One of the most telling statements that reinforces both these conditions comes from Lisa when she first meets Bashir in his shared room with Kola, reassuring him that his privacy is safe as "This is your space. We were just going. Going to get lunch" (De-lahay 2013, 7–10). But there is no such thing as "your space" for either Bashir or Kola, or any other individual in their respective, or similar circumstances of custody. Through the institutional-custodial blending with the parental-custodial, Lisa is voicing the hierarchal conviction that the system is in place to provide protection, and to uphold individual rights; all this, at the same time as it withholds agency and cancels a sense of selfhood for all that find themselves in vulnerable positions.

As Bashir and Kola's relationship evolves into friendship, Bashir asks Kola: "What were you inside for?" referring to Kola's time in the young offenders' prison (De-lahay 2013, 11–14). But this "inside" has wider implications, encasing all aspects of both their lives. They have been, still are, and will remain, for the foreseeable future, institutionalised, absorbed in a system that processes one state of detention after another. When Bashir shares with Kola that he has recently turned eighteen, Kola returns with a dry remark that reveals both his consternation and pragmatic acceptance: "Shouldn't they have given you your own yard already?" he asks Bashir (De-lahay 2013, 11–14). Kola's remark is disheartening enough, given that he is not even an adult and, yet, all he sees ahead are procedural lines and access barriers, but it is Bashir's response that registers as particularly devastating: "It won't be for ever", he says, referring to how much longer he expects to spend in the halfway house (De-lahay 2013, 11–14).

Unbeknownst to Bashir, it is precisely this undefined "forever" that is about to commence as, having passed his eighteenth birthday, he is about to be moved into the illegal aliens system and processed into detention awaiting deportation. Neither Bashir nor Kola can be described as romantics, or naïve, because they have already been exposed to enough personal and systemic hardship to counter sentimentalism. Still, in each of them individually, and in their relationship with each other, which grows into a space of open exchange with no expectations, hope for a humanity greater than what they have experienced so far occasionally glimmers. In

yet another quiet moment, when Bashir cannot find his Oyster card (in addition to his chain having been lost), he remarks to Kola: “It’s this room … I can never find anything” and “Maybe we could try keep this place a bit tidier” (De-lahay 2013, 18–24). The instinct, then, is to still try and make a home out of a space that resists—that performs all the signs of being too conditioned by its context to adapt to its inhabitants; that embodies its clinical functionalism against any margin; that runs on an exclusionary ecology set to disregard kindness. Even in that type of space some optimism can take root, De-lahay’s text shows.

Once relocated to the immigrant removal centre, Bashir is stunned to realise that these new living conditions mean “Twenty-three hour a day lock down?”, as he notes in disbelief (De-lahay 2013, 42–47). To Royal Court audiences at Sloane Square in 2013, the statement would be reasonably hard-hitting, but, then again, for the vast majority, arguably largely philological. A decade later, however, COVID-19, as an unexpected and decisive equaliser of experience, shifted and redefined our common vocabularies, creating an experiential interspace between different states of confinement and varying unfreedoms. My purpose here is not to conflate one state with the other; it is, rather, to suggest that plays that are prescient, responsive, and that breathe in and exhale their atmosphere, not least in a production context where very few new theatre texts receive revivals, have something valuable to teach us about our present moment, and about its unexpected twists and reversals. No freedom can be taken for granted, the play suggests—and no access either. Structures of privilege may become arbitrarily redefined and agency may be, very swiftly and non-dialectically, revoked. Of course, still, in many situations, COVID-19-confined contexts came with a considerable degree of comfort and safety—very far from the quotidian experience of migrants in limbo. In De-lahay’ play, no dialogue captures the different structures of freedom more aptly than the one between Kola and Bashir, during one of the former’s visits to see the latter at the immigrant removal centre:

KOLA. ’Cause I’m jumping trains for my health? Spending my money on your lost shit, for me? Trekking all the way over to this dry-ass place to come sit in this dead room when they can’t even provide a cup of tea for what? Huh?

BASHIR. That’s an awful lot of freedom you’re talking about. (De-lahay 2013, 59–63)

As in perceived, so in actual unfreedoms, grades exist, the play reminds us. As Bosworth remarks: “IRCs, designed as places to contain and then cast out those who are unwelcome, not only split the community in which they are based, but those who work within them” (2019, 554). They are in-between spaces of the highest undesirability; they exist in a flow of experience in their local contexts, embodying presence and absence in one and the same structure, both retention and exclusion, with equal visceral and symbolic impact. Other than unfreedoms, likewise, different degrees of access and of reasonable adjustments also exist—this is part of “the incoherence of these institutions”, a phrase that Bosworth uses in the context of IRCs (2019, 547), but which I am keen to extend to the different custodial spaces examined in this section. Within these, layers of nuances in the ‘privilege’ of even those systemically underprivileged are accommodated. But the most stinging reference, which sums up the rooms that individuals in Kola and Bashir’s situations, and in different variations, cross-combinations and custody contexts are expected to pack their entire lives into, is the one to a “dead room” (De-lahay 2013, 59–63). The room is a host, an interspace towards an uncertain deliverance to an uncertain future; “dry”—a term that De-lahay returns to in *Circles* (2014) (see Angelaki 2022)—and draining, the site continues to accommodate, an enclosure without a shelter, a ‘home’ without a home.

Across the different degrees of devastation that De-lahay explores, the play approaches its conclusion with Kola’s rejection of Lisa’s invitation to return home, driven by his acknowledgement of the fact that home does not exist. As Kola has learnt in his young life, some family rooms, shaped by families whose own inner ecologies are as barren and fraught as those of institutional inhospitable environments, have biorhythms of their own—coercive, aggravating, regressive. The only space in which Kola discovers a sense of purpose and of self is the transient site of the bond that he and Bashir have formed together; each of them unmoored, they anchor themselves onto each other. Within ‘dry’, institutional, “underrepresented” and “hidden yet politically charged spaces” (Den Elzen 2020, 288, 296), there is potential for radical change, which materialises when inhabitants, against the odds, shift these spatial ecologies. “You’re not the reason I changed”, Kola says to Lisa, referring to his transformative connection with Bashir; and, so, “I won’t be coming home, Mom” (De-lahay 2013, 64–66). Home is but a word—a shell, a framework; the fleshiness is lacking; so, also, the protection. The subsequent case

studies in this chapter, oscillating between the clinical/detention and the domestic context, go on to further explore this hypothesis.

People, Places and Things

Premiering in 2015 at the National Theatre (Dorfman) in a production directed by Jeremy Herrin, *People, Places and Things* came at a time when Duncan Macmillan was strongly emerging as one of the most distinctive voices of his generation of playwrights, a formal innovator that took on difficult subject matters, broaching them through experimentation and innovation. His play *Lungs*, which I have discussed extensively elsewhere (Angelaki 2017, 2019), set the tone for this already in the beginning of the decade, considering how, at the most basic, direct, individual level of the couple unit, the climate crisis might become not abstract bur embodied, presented as the direct outcome of individual decisions: namely, whether to have a child. The singular and the social body are shown not as separate, but as correlational. Exploring such concerns consistently, Macmillan's work, as I have also discussed elsewhere Angelaki 2017), has provided some of the staunchest theatrical critique for neoliberalism. Other scholars have more recently referred to Macmillan as "a symptomatologist who diagnoses the rampant issues in a neoliberal capitalist culture" (Fakhrkonandeh and Sümbül 2021, 509). Unlike these colleagues, however, I do not find that Macmillan's "'dramatic' symptomatology illustrates the ways in which addiction, performativity, therapeutic discourse, criminalization, and exhaustion of interpersonal space can be identified as symptoms of the late capitalist culture" (Fakhrkonandeh and Sümbül 2021, 509). I find, rather, that the interpersonal space, whether theatrical, clinical or domestic, here imagined and defined as an interspace, for all its uncertainty, enclosure and anxiety, also emerges as a site for reconstitution and is therefore fruitful, and far from exhausted.

Macmillan's work has been in dialogue with its contemporary context and with the historical canon alike. Theatrical naturalism appears to hold particular significance for Macmillan, and the artistic, scientific and social advances that characterise the period emerge as both methods and themes in his own work. The state of malaise as profoundly corporealised and never abstract, and the sources and consequences of that ill health, as well as the fragile body and mind as profoundly and always already social are touchstones in Macmillan's theatre. This is detectable from his earlier

to his most recent work: other than *Lungs*, where scientific enquiry is interwoven into everyday conversations, in *Every Brilliant Thing* (2015a) mental illness is staged as a dialectical condition, part of a broader synergy between individual and society replete with opportunities and failures. In each of these texts, spare and uncluttered, the body becomes the vessel. The actor in character, whether in monologue (*Every Brilliant Thing*) or duologue (*Lungs*) becomes an interspace—a site for the production and performance of the discussion; for reflection on the issue, while, at the same time, embodying this very issue. Macmillan's directions of bare sets enhance this condition. But even when the sets are more convoluted, and the plays receive a more spectacular staging, as was the case with the premiere production of *People, Places and Things*, the deviation from strict realism and the formal innovation of the text are able to sustain this sense of immediacy and interspatiality that the more minimal texts more immediately create.

More directly still, Macmillan has engaged with naturalism in his acclaimed version of Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (2019), which, once more, imagined the body in its tensions and struggles as the site for change, and the private space (here the home estate) as the interspatial ground between the ecologies of an inside and outside that, in the course of the play, draw dramatically closer (Angelaki 2021). That naturalism is a force of significance in Macmillan's theatre will become further evident in the course of this analysis. For the purposes of this short introduction, however, and to round-up Macmillan's engagement with nature and science beyond the present case study, his collaboration with scientist Chris Rapley for their piece *2071* (2014; 2015) also ought to be mentioned. As I have discussed in earlier work (Angelaki 2019), the text, in the form of a performance lecture more than a play, takes on the climate crisis as durational human legacy to the non-human world and to future human generations alike. Genealogies and legacies—including those of trauma, debt and malaise—are, of course, also central naturalist tropes. When we talk about Macmillan's work, then, we might conceptualise it as radical neo-naturalism, hinging on the thematic, the dramaturgical and the scenic alike to produce theatre that, all the while, remains sharp, minimalist and contemporary.

In terms of interspaces, then, the site that *People, Places and Things* creates and inhabits is complex and significant, materialising through both form and content. There are two main axons. Firstly, the space between naturalist and contemporary experimental traditions: the play begins as

Emma, the play's protagonist, experiences a spectacular collapse while she herself is the spectacle, playing Nina in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in what has been accurately described as "a liminal moment" (Fakhrkonandeh and Sümbül 2021, 509). *The Seagull* was wildly experimental and groundbreaking in its time, not least for highlighting a non-human entity as the bearer of its title, and setting up a thematic agenda that allowed for the environmental thread to emerge dynamically in terms of the ecologies of co-existence and care between the human and other than human, as well as their mutual exposures and fragilities. The entanglement with *The Seagull* speaks directly to Macmillan's concerns regarding theatre, agency and the environment beyond anthropocentrism, a hypothesis that is verified extensively across his body of work. Given the thematic threads of *People, Places and Things*, *The Seagull* is, moreover, a pertinent dramatic refractor in terms of the texts' shared concerns as to the role of the artist vis-à-vis history, society and tradition, especially in terms of asking how the individual talent, particularly one deviant and non-conforming, might carve out a space within which to exist. Both Chekhov and Macmillan imagine the tentative ecologies of the interspace between artistic traditions to be a site of contention, but also of striving, of creation, of growth; they also imagine it as one that is not only inhabited, but embodied by the artist themselves.

Macmillan's actor protagonist is both Nina and Emma; as the latter—her 'offstage' self—she still functions as the site of many characters that both co-exist and battle against one another. Some of the most fascinating spaces that develop in Macmillan's play are intertextual, and, more specifically, inter-character. The dramaturgical arrangement is intricate, always concerning Emma as a performer of multiple aliases, whether on stage or, later, in the rehabilitation facility where she attempts to treat her addiction, and in her subsequent re-entrance to community. The personas all branch out of the central hologrammatic narrative of 'Emma', no more—or less—real than a stage character, and always revisited, contested and amended. These re-conceptualisations serve to throw truth and falsity into disarray throughout the play, proving them to be a flow rather than a binary. As Macmillan notes, the process of interrogation of (self-)perception is crucial throughout the play, and this includes a radical undermining of binarism (Lunden 2017). In their study of the play, Alireza Fakhrkonandeh and Yiğit Sümbül observe the "double-edged status of such pivotal issues as performance, mental health and the

blurred boundaries between presence and representation, truth and simulacrum, individuality as essence and individuality as a script, and, finally, ethical sincerity and seduction permeating the play" (2021, 504). The topic of the play, as Macmillan observes, is such that this relationship becomes even more problematised because of the multi-levels of performance: identity, the text's very playing field and the structures of falsity and (mis)representation involved in addiction, but also in acting (Lunden 2017), provide a shared space that is both complex and promising.

Processes of rehearsal extending beyond the stage acting context and still involving roleplay (Lunden 2017), as seen in the play's rehabilitation clinic group therapy scenes, reinforce the link between the clinical context of rehab and the institutional context of theatre. "[T]he quote-unquote real world" is a fluid space that is forged out of rehearsal and performance, as fleshy as that which we encounter in the theatre auditorium (Lunden 2017). As critics noted, what makes Macmillan's play so impressive in the body of theatre work on addiction is its ability to "draw parallels between rehab and theatrical process, and to present the action from the addict's point of view. It helps that his protagonist is an actor" (Billington 2015). Another critic adds that Chekhov out to be included under the substances Emma abused right before entering rehab and as she produces her respective list for the clinical staff on admission (Green 2017). It is true, but it is also in that inter-experience between personhood and character that Emma comes the closest to her core, and that she most approximates a centre of self, however contested. As the same critic adds, Emma compactly sums this up as "'[a]cting gives me the same thing I get from drugs and alcohol'" (Green 2017). Emma, then, is in a position of having to negotiate and reformulate narratives of self not only so that she can get to the core of her identity as a human being, but, also, so that she may restore her core identity as actor; until she completes rehab in a meaningful way, both remain unreachable.

That Emma is a constellation of characters is first hinted at early on, precisely in the context where she appears most invested: her workplace; professional performance. During her onstage crisis at the start of the play, and as the distinction between real and fictional dissolves, Emma is left in an indeterminate space in-between herself and Nina, exposed in the presence of the audience and her fellow actors, struggling to negotiate the resulting quicksand where both selves, blended, appear to be sinking. She seeks to defend Nina as much as Emma; they are equally tentative in the moment of crisis, and when they both split into yet another self as

Emma catches a glimpse of her understudy backstage, dressed precisely as Emma/Nina and preparing to intervene, the sight is critical in escalating her deterioration. It is to the credit of Macmillan's text that the territorial negotiation between the real and unreal remains tense and fruitful precisely because of Emma's fierce intelligence, and her resistance to victim status, or to surrendering her narrative to others. The encounter with herself as Nina, here, a palimpsest, as much as Emma is a palimpsest for the character and its future iterations already seen in the body of her understudy, is so crucial for Emma because it is the first relegation of self—an understudy embodies relegation by definition—but not the last that Emma will experience. To step outside and observe the self while also being in, embodying, and proliferating her at the same time as she relegates her to others to perform her equally and to produce and inhabit their own space[s], is an experience that Emma will later also have in rehab.

In the first of such occurrences Emma relegates herself to Hedda Gabler, or Hedda Gabler (broadly as Ibsen imagined her in the eponymous play) is invited to inhabit Emma, as they formulate a shared space for Emma to stage her own problematics of self by finding refuge in, arguably, the only language where she feels safe: that of the theatre text. As part of group therapy Emma is invited to share, but she is not willing to cede territory, so, in the liminal space of the clinic, she creates a further interspace through character, keeping others at a safe distance. After all, a role to Emma is not a lie—it is a reality and, as above, part of her self-definition; in that sense it is also the closest she may come to an expressible truth. The characters that Emma inhabits inhabit her no less than her own actual self. In the second occurrence the character is Emma herself, relegated to an entire team of self-understudies. Emma now witnesses herself as being performed by a multitude of other, proliferating Emmas, in one of the play's landmark moments: the detox scene, unfolding in Emma's room in the clinic.

Captured in stunning fashion in the premiere production, the segment is described in Macmillan's text as follows, meriting the long quotation:

She looks up and watches the snow outside.

She watches another Emma get out of the bed and start to unpack, clutching her stomach as it cramps. Emma watches as another Emma gets out of the bed and starts to pace around the room, itching her arms. She sees another Emma get out of the bed and fill a glass of water from the sink in

> *the bathroom then drink it quickly. She is shaking and smashes the glass in the sink.*
>
> […]
>
> *Another Emma appears and vomits into the toilet. Another Emma sits on the floor, holding her legs to her body. She reaches up to the light switch and turns it on and off rhythmically. Emma walks around the room, looking at the other Emmas who do not notice her or each other.*
>
> *The pacing Emma is sweating and breathing heavily. Another Emma is shivering with cold.* (2015b, 13–98)

And as the hours, then the days, go by,

> *Emma sits on the bed. Snow falls onto her. The Emmas continue to move around the room, each one privately struggling with the physical effects of withdrawal.* […]
>
> *One of the Emmas starts to have a seizure. Staff rush in to attend to her.*
>
> […]
>
> *In the bathroom, a Nurse helps to clean another Emma after she's wet herself.*
>
> […]
>
> *Another Emma enters the room and drags the desk chair to below the light fitting. She ties a belt around her neck and stands on the chair. Nurses rush in and help her down.* (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98)

Then, in a visual segment that reveals equally the dramaturgical and conceptual poetry of Macmillan's text:

> *She* [Emma] *watches her Understudy, in costume, walk across the room holding a dead seagull, then climb out of the window.* (2015b, 13–98)

The appearance of Emma's understudy as Nina is especially meaningful in conveying how Emma perceives the infringement of both her personal and professional space. When Emma first enters the clinic, she even signs in as Nina; as one reviewer remarks, Nina is "a distressing and distressed character who both is and is not herself" (Als 2017). This wording—'herself'—allows us to infer that the reference might be to Emma; or it could also be to Nina, or indeed the shared space of crisis that has developed between them. With Nina inhabited by someone else (the understudy), Emma is being pushed out and needs to negotiate new territory for herself. Soon after the above the Emmas disperse and disappear, eventually leading to one singular body of Emma emerging from

her bed. She is portrayed by the actress that has been portraying her all along, but described as having "*something fundamentally different about her appearance, as if another actress is now playing her*" (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98).

The dramatic ecopoetics of Macmillan's text is twofold: firstly, it hinges on the way the play imagines the human body as an ecosystem claimed by the different biorhythms of entities cohabiting it in tension, a complex territory far from under the control of one singular subject entity; as such, the human's significance is tested—nature and its patterns prevail, and the constructed anthropo-centre is thrown into disarray. Then, and equally significantly, there is the way in which Macmillan writes nature into the text. When Emma plays Nina on the theatre stage in the beginning of the play, "*It is raining*. […] *Trees rustle outside and wind howls softly in the chimneys*" (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98). This is as we enter Macmillan's text in the interspace that develops within it, expanding to accommodate Chekhov's; or, perhaps, it is Chekhov's play that expands to accommodate Macmillan's. As others have also commented, "a sense of flux" is observable (Fakhrkonandeh and Sümbül 2021, 511). In the 'fictional' landscape, signs of disquiet are already visible, establishing an interspatial path to the 'real' landscape that Emma will encounter upon arrival to the rehabilitation clinic. The human follows in the way of the non-human; the lines between theatrical and life narrative blur:

> *As Emma talks her acting becomes more genuine. She is talking less in character and more as herself. She is sincere, vivid, compelling. She doesn't slur her words.*
>
> […] Real things have happened. My heart is broken. I don't know what to do with my hands when I'm onstage. I'm not real. I'm a seagull. No, that's wrong. (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98)

When Emma enters rehab under the name of Nina, snow is falling. As Emma begins to watch the other Emmas while detoxing, she also "*watches the snow outside*" and, as events escalate, detox accelerates and Emmas proliferate, so the stagescape of the play becomes more intensely symbolic, with Emma observing as "*Snow falls onto her*", until "*It begins to snow across the whole room*" (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98).

The significance of the image—and the element—is nuanced, reflecting Emma's convoluted and hallucinatory state of mind. Firstly, Macmillan creates a link between health and environmental crises: for the first,

the image is the ailing body in plight, tested, beyond the physical, also mentally and emotionally to the extreme; for the second, the snow itself, beyond poetic and supple, is a hectic and dense image, suggestive of irruption and abandon. Beyond pure, snow can also be aggressive and overwhelming, the cognitive expression of which state is captured in the expression 'snowed under'—and so the text communicates Emma's loss of control and surrender from structure to matter. Here, already, the text attacks the human/nature fracture and the space between the two blurs to an amorphous site that transitions, post-crisis, to its next, indeterminate iteration. Secondly, the image becomes interspatially symbolic because of how it expedites the dismantling of the inside/outside binary, expanding the play's ecosocial range. The outside, larger in volume than the inside that attempts to shield itself from it through anthropocentric logic, is already within; room and land are presented as equal parts of a continuum, and not as a divide. We are reminded of the environmental prerogative of Macmillan's theatre as also encountered in the final arresting image of his *Rosmersholm* version: there, the landscape offers a response to another human crisis, this time the suicide of the two protagonists who thrust their bodies upon the watermill of the Rosmer estate (2019). It is an act of despair as direct outcome of mounting social pressure, and the immediate proof that personal and public are intertwined. Such concerns ring true across *People, Places and Things* as well. As *Rosmersholm* closes in Macmillan's version, water forcefully encircles the Rosmer drawing room and submerges both human-made objects and fragments of nature—flowers now floating on the drawing room floor—surrendering everything in its wake to a force much greater than human ambition. In Macmillan, then, naturalism persists; non-human nature serves as site and catalyst for crisis, emphatically reminding how the body of the land is also our own, and vice versa, and that humans are of the elements, as much as the elements affect humans; the health of either and both hinges on symbiosis, not separation (Angelaki 2021).

In her seminal study on character in contemporary drama and performance, Cristina Delgado-García defines her approach as one that "not only endeavours to vindicate the persistence of character in theatre", but, also, one that "aims to demonstrate that theatre may have the ability to redefine subjectivity and intersubjective relations towards positive social change" (2015, 13). It is such revisionist and interventionist dramaturgical possibilities that I am concerned with here, insofar as character also serves to formulate a shared space between stage and audience, towards

what both Delgado-García and I, in earlier work (2012), identify as the intersubjective: in this context, that which bears the possibility of imagining the fluidity in character and the fluidity in the spectator/citizen's experience as part of a potent, unifying and bilateral flow.

Although Delgado-García pursues a different methodological approach to the one of this book, I find her overall investigative imperative compelling and I am keen to follow how the above hypothesis may cross-apply to theatre that post-dates Delgado-García's study, and which delivers character innovation of yet another sort. Delgado-García's definition of character is especially fruitful in this context:

> By 'character' I refer to any figuration of subjectivity in theatre, regardless of how individuated or, conversely, how unmarked its contours might be. […This] encompasses not only what is commonly perceived as 'conventional character', which privileges understandings of the subject as a self-identical, unique, coherent and rational individual, but also those entities that have received alternative nomenclatures in theatre studies […]. These alternative labels often signal discomfort with identifying as characters those instantiations of language that foreclose the reconstruction of stable imaginary biographies, coherent or intelligible bodies, and distinct personalities firmly located in space or time. My position is that theatre always and inevitably produces subjective contours. I call this contour 'character' and think of it as a continuum […]. (2015, 14–15)

To keep these interpretative outlets open, Delgado-García goes on to note, "might deepen our understanding of subjectivity, and our reading of its formulations in playwriting and staging practices" (2015, 15). In a play where character fluctuates across finely drawn contours and less determinate subjectivities, where 'fictional' characters interblend with 'real' ones, where 'real' characters generate versions of themselves, and where the main character is revealed to be someone else entirely in the finale, Delgado-García's hypothesis on how even an undefined character may be defined resonates.

More specifically, then, the character that we primarily become accustomed to as 'Emma' is herself an interspace, hosting, in the same body, different versions of selves that, without necessarily entailing a mental health condition, co-exist as negotiations that are emotional as much as territorial. Her high-functioning personality enables and proliferates this, so that she becomes the site and vessel for the different characters to co-exist within one and the same space. This is also the reason that when,

in the finale, Emma finds herself back in her childhood bedroom, so-described by her in group therapy as "a museum to my childhood self" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138), she is at her most vulnerable. The contested, difficult site is not only an interspace between her past, present and future, but, also, between herself and the people, places and things that she must learn to position herself protectively against in the process of her recovery. In this site, the dismissive remark from her mother that Emma is on the receiving end of takes target at her core: the character that, for all its fluctuations, she has held together. Making a reference to Emma's dead brother Mark, along with a sweeping generalisation regarding Emma's addiction, Emma's mother exclaims: "you only smoked to pretend you were interesting. Because, unlike Mark, you never had a personality of your own" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). Likewise dismissive of Emma's plea to refrain from such value judgements, her mother continues: "You think you're this chameleon, living hundreds of lives but you're always just you. Full of certainty when you discover something but you never see it through and this [her recovery] will be no different" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). As Emma's mother intensifies her attack, it is also revealed that the box filled with all of Emma's addiction-related paraphernalia, the substances her mother seized from Emma's home on Emma's instructions early in the play, as she was entering rehab, has been left by her mother under Emma's childhood bed. The room fast becomes emotional quicksand, now re-morphing into an in-between site where sobriety and relapse rapidly alternate in plausibility. Then lands the final blow to Emma's character cohesion, and to any assumption that, as an audience, we have achieved some familiarity with her: Emma is revealed to be Lucy—or so she is called by her mother.

Previously, we have witnessed Emma claiming to another addict and later councillor at the rehabilitation clinic, Mark (at times a possible projection of her dead brother, as much as an actual character in his own right) that her name is Sarah. She justifies this late admission by adding that she had to adopt 'Emma' to avoid duplicating another actor's name. To this, Mark responds with a mocking attack, different in tone, but not in content to the way in which Emma is later dismissed by her mother:

> Hello, I'm Sarah. I'm Sarah and I'm an alcoholic and drug addict. I'm a liar and I'm going to fuck this up and break all your hearts by dropping dead on a bathroom floor because I'm too fucking interested in staring into the blank void of my own personality. I'm Sarah. Possibly. Who really

> knows? I'm Sarah and I'm brilliant at being other people and totally useless at being myself. (Macmillan 2015b, 13–98)

In the experience of the live performance, the revelation of Emma not even as Sarah, but as Lucy—arguably indeed her actual name—caused a gasp, but did not land as an entirely watershed moment, testament to Macmillan's ability to create fluctuating emotional and dramaturgical spaces, which retain their rigour through nuance rather than outburst.

Delgado-García, as we have seen, mentions "understandings of the subject as a self-identical, unique, coherent and rational individual" as well as "[non-]stable imaginary biographies, coherent or intelligible bodies, and distinct personalities firmly located in space or time" as equal markers of character (2015, 14–15). It is an astutely flexible definition that captures the core of Macmillan's protagonist's character, whomever we might take her to be, and in whichever iterations. 'Emma' is an articulate subject, and she is also multiple; in her fluctuation between art and life, and between sobriety and addiction, she can also be incoherent and unintelligible and often non-verbal as she absorbs and is absorbed by her surroundings, shifting rooms that change and disappear into one another as she moves from one life stage to the next. The lack of contextual cohesion does not reduce her agency as character. This is also where Delgado-García's observation of character as 'continuum', and no less viable for that lack of fixity and determinacy, resonates. Such a dramaturgical approach to character as flexible, non-delineated site, also speaks directly to the scope of this book and its emphases on fluid, non-binary spatialities and their empowering potential.

The body and the room as interspaces carry equal dramaturgical force in Macmillan's play, containing, and being contained in one another. As in-between site across different temporalities, Emma's childhood bedroom suddenly transports us—it might be forwards, or it might be backwards, or, equally, it might be to a site projected, and altogether imagined. When we last see Emma/Lucy in 'real time' conditions, her mother has just exited the room, leaving her alone with her past as gathered in one box, her addiction confronting her and relapse looming large. Having made a start towards leaving the room for a group meeting that might bolster her recovery, Emma returns towards the plastic container, feeling its gravitational pull; the space becomes even more charged. But then, "*She mutters her lines to herself*" in what might be an act of self-affirmation, or performance; or, indeed, as the scene turns out to suggest

by the finale, an audition (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). The lines that Emma performs are familiar: they refer back to a conversation that Emma has with Mark at the clinic, following her readmission after a relapse. As the play opens to its second act—symbolically also Emma's own second act beginning—she recalls the start of her acting career. It was not in the theatre but in in the corporate world, where her role was to deliver a monologue filled with company spin. As Emma delivers her lines, the multiple Emmas begin to proliferate once more. As she explains to Mark that it was this promotional monologue that became her audition text for acting roles, "*The room continues to fill with Emmas*" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). As Emma's crisis escalates, once more, space and body become one and a "*low, rumbling sound is starting to shake the walls*" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). The room is fixed but also transformable and transformed. The Emmas that Emma, in an extraordinary physical, mental and emotional ordeal now visualises, are a product of her addiction/sobering up hallucination, but they are also significative of her multiplications of self as she experiences them in the everyday.

Emma further confesses to Mark that her dead brother, who helped her prepare for auditions, was able to retain the monologue better than she did; this might arguably be an indication as to which world Emma inhabits at the end of the play, when she manages to deliver the text with ease. Once more, space has transitioned into something else and "*the lights in the room are falling and a spotlight is emerging on Emma*" (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138). She appears to be auditioning. The corporate monologue that Emma performs under the spotlight augments the blurring of dream and reality, as its content points to the surreal—the speech focuses on the quixotic, investing in the dream and making the impossible possible—but it is, as we have heard earlier in the play, merely entrepreneurial publicity monetising high emotion. We might, indeed, be in the future rather than in a dream, or illusion; the play does not leave us with any kind of reassuring grip on reality, as our parting image of Emma is one amongst many others, interchangeable versions of herself in its physical appearance, auditioning for the same part. As Emma finishes delivering her monologue, the voice of a man thanks her in the distance and

> *She looks around. She is no longer in her bedroom, she is now standing on a bare stage. At the back of the stage is a queue of Actresses, all the same age and demographic as Emma. Some of them are stretching their facial muscles*

> *or shaking their limbs loose, some of them hold pieces of paper and silently practise their lines.*
>
> Yes, okay.
>
> *She smiles into the darkness.*
>
> Thank you for seeing me.
>
> *Emma leaves the spotlight, passing the Actresses as she goes. She leaves the stage.* (Macmillan 2015b, 99–138)

The play closes with another actress beginning, presumably, the same monologue—a nod to the fact that we are perhaps thrust back to the beginning of Emma's career, or, even, to a future where, as she has voiced fears earlier, given her addiction struggles she may only be hireable by that same company for that familiar corporate spin in tradeshows. But Macmillan's stage directions, rounded off with the impactful "*She leaves the stage*" (2015b, 99–138), are entirely ambiguous. The stage, we know, is the only world that Emma draws life from. In leaving it, a much greater exit might be implied; or, indeed, we might take the direction literally, and Emma has just walked away at the end of yet another audition; an act of routine. Whichever interpretation one might pursue, as Emma steps out of the frame and of her own narrative, we are reminded that *People, Places and Things* retains its own coordinates and textual ecologies—and that it occupies that most challenging and fruitful of spaces, where ambivalence is all, and fluidity the only constant.

The Clinic

Dipo Baruwa-Etti's *The Clinic*, premiering at the Almeida in 2022 directed by Monique Touko, signals an important moment in the theatrical re-negotiation of the private and public space in contemporary playwriting, revisiting the concept of the clinical and its potentialities while, at the same time, questioning the safety factor of any enclosed, whether familial and domestic, or healing and therapeutic space. In fact, dismantling the binary altogether, the play imagines the two as part of a unified spatial experience—an interspace. The play, through an allusion to one of the most emblematic institutional sites in its title, queries the state of being institutionalised, not merely in medical contexts but, also, and primarily, within social structures which claim to protect, while, at the same time, perpetuating problematic socio-political doctrines and positions of privilege and exclusion. In this case, this structure is the

family. One can become equally institutionalised within the systemic as within the parameters of a familial environment, *The Clinic* shows. It is especially so when the family in question is comprised by individuals that embody several different institutions and functions that, together, co-regulate society: political parties; the police; healthcare structures; community centres, thereby making the family into a hyper-institution with impact of considerable force. Baruwa-Etti's critique is distributed evenly amongst such institutions, without, at the same time, failing to acknowledge the inner complexities that shape each of them—even as these are mirrored amongst a family's members. There is even some compassion and empathy in how Baruwa-Etti crafts and handles the environment of the play, mindful of the greater socio-political milieu which characters inhabit, and in which they have claimed their positions of authority and control: an overwhelmingly white hierarchical structure, where, to be given power as a non-white individual, is, still, not to be taken for granted, irrespective of agendas of equality and inclusion. What is it, in fact, that may have been dispensed with in the name of inclusion, the play seems to ask—along with why it is beyond significant to radically question access, norms and agendas.

The play centres on an affluent Nigerian British family, presenting to the Almeida's audience, for whom being confronted by images of affluence however in the spirit of criticism is not an uncommon experience, a less commonly encountered image of such affluence. This is a non-white family that is performing its affluence with pleasure in a home that is as protected as it is, as both the text and the production scenography reveal, open to external interference. As one critic commented, "[i]t's clinical. […] This family bisects Black middle-class experience, including chic glass ceilings and brick walls" (Jenner 2022). The family kitchen/dining room serves as the primary setting of the play. Open plan and extended outwards to the auditorium that enwraps it from most sides, the stylish room is demarcated only stage left, by a sliding glass door functioning as the inside/outside divide and barrier. The door opens and closes often, but its function is primarily symbolic given that the greatest part of the set is in fact always open, and the enclosure it asks us to imagine is classed and ideological, though far from literal in the physical sense.

For the above reasons, visual, thematic and in dialogue with society from different angles, I consider the play to be an important gesture—also because Baruwa-Etti is still a rather young playwright, and a production

at a venue like the Almeida is far from to be taken for granted in the post-COVID-19 context when theatres, as they recover, appear prone to so-called safer, canonical repertoire choices. Moreover, the foregrounding of Black identity affords the play a considerable breakthrough in terms of penetrating institutional environments that, for all their (attempts at) inclusivity, judged holistically, still have space for improvement. *The Clinic* is more intriguing still because of the relationship between text and production, where differences emerge, despite the fact that either context singularly may appear rather tightly controlled. The latter is the outcome of Baruwa-Etti's extensive stage directions, which tread in naturalist and realist traditions, despite the fact that the play also produces a sense of the—at times—intangibly surreal and menacing; others have described this effect as "undertones of suspense and elements of the supernatural" (Curtis 2022). Fascinatingly, interspersed in the text amongst the stage directions that those who have seen the live performance would immediately recognise are other, much more conceptual, bolder and even challenging notes. These point to a creative questioning of place and spatiality that concerns this book directly. Taken together with the play's Epilogue, which resolutely proceeds, in my view, from the aesthetic of such stage directions, but which did not form part of the premiere production, these spatial configurations provide fruitful ground for exploration in the broader context of the play's themes. There are occasional moments of awkwardness, arguably stemming from an attempt at too many statements, and perhaps even an espousal of too many issues; but then again, it is also important, as emerging playwrights are concerned especially, to not limit a canvas that can be bold and expansive.

The play is as close to a kitchen sink, state-of-the-nation drama as this book will come, but its kitchen sink is different from the ones that have traditionally dominated British stages since 1945, as are its perspectives on class, race and ideology. And in that very kitchen sink is prepared a tea that, for a never disclosed secret ingredient, which we might interpret literally or metaphorically, appears to cultivate contentment, docility and reassurance. This is the vibe of the household itself, until, at least, it is surrendered to literal flames that are raging in the background as the play's final act—and, in the premiere production, the performance itself—closes. Yet, nothing, and no one, actually burns. The ambivalence as to the space that the script occupies, and the extent to which its rather straightforward symbolism is a highly coordinated attempt to criticise the naivete in adhering to, and promoting, principles of cohesion and contentment

built on containment is uncertain—and it is not my prerogative here to probe the playwright's intentions, or to explain the play on that basis. As one critic put it, "[t]o underline the fire image, the text throws in many an example of flames and ashes. Almost too many, in fact, as if Baruwa-Etti is afraid we won't get the point" (Hawkins 2022).

To trust in the play's fluid interpretative space when it comes to the above is, in my case, intermeshed with the experience I had of attending, for reasons of travel research economies that worked rather fortuitously, a relaxed environment matinee of the play. There, I found myself in an auditorium occupied by what one might imagine as the Almeida's core audience base of rather affluent, primarily white and, I would also expect, to a considerable extent local enough residents, but, equally, by a group of very young people, ostensibly attending for educational purposes. This younger, diverse audience remained engaged throughout, and their expressions, reactions and affirmations of the production, vocal and never disruptive, were a privilege to experience. This led, no less, to an effusive reaction at curtain call. Audience response is as important an interpretative filter as any; therefore, my own experience of the production is rather gratefully conditioned by this environment. It matches quite closely the account given by a reviewer who concludes: "[i]mpact, though, is everything. The audience explode with laughter and by the end nearly everyone's on their feet. As a state of Black middle-class nation *The Clinic* is state of the art. As state of the nation, it's ours to refuse at our peril" (Jenner 2022). As another reviewer observed, the play, however not infallible, offers a valuable "kaleidoscopic look at what it means to be a Black person who wants to change the status quo" (Hawkins 2022); or, elsewhere, capturing the play's ideological interspace, Baruwa-Etti was recognised for investing in "the meeting point between Black activism and Black conservatism" (Lukowski 2022), "ask[ing] questions about how change can be made and show[ing] Black Britishness in its plurality, clashing at the intersections" (Akbar 2022).

It is the focus of this section to capture these intersections, as also represented in Baruwa-Etti's envisioning and distribution of space across the play. For all the extensive stage directions, which were very largely reflected in the scenography (once more Paul Wills), there are critical aspects in Baruwa-Etti's spatial orientation of the piece that remain at the level of the playtext and that ought to be taken into consideration in order to imagine, and to establish, the playing field that the writer conceptualises. Baruwa-Etti's play consists of a Prologue, an Epilogue,

and four scenes between the two. These four scenes have in common a rather conventional spatial delineation, in that they unfold in the open-plan kitchen/dining area of Tiwa and Segun. The opening directions of Scene One describe this as “classy, lavish” (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 4). In the grounding stage directions, Baruwa-Etti specifies that all action takes place in East London, including the sub-settings of the hospital where Ore (the family’s daughter) works as a doctor and Wunmi’s (the woman that Ore will bring to the family home for the purposes of providing a supportive structure) house. The Prologue takes place in both these sites, while the Epilogue in the second (Baruwa-Etti 2022, n. p.). The Epilogue and its spatiotemporal locationality and aesthetics provide focal points for this section, not least because, in the premiere production, as before, the segment was omitted. Taken together with the Prologue, the Epilogue encourages a theatrical style considerably more fluid than the remainder of the play, as well as a spatiality that is less fixed, or rooted. Roots broadly conceived, given the family’s Nigerian heritage that features prominently in discussions, as well as the garden of the home, which marks a number of entrances and exits and is never far from view or reference, are also crucial. To belong, to originate, to be grounded in, determined by, aided, but also obstructed by context that determines one’s flourishing or wilting, are recurring concerns. They also persist in the course of Ore’s constant problematising of life, agency and responsibility. All the while, the broader ecology of the family in their Nigerian beginnings and their affluent London establishment is conceptualised both ethically and socially, morally and practically, and is equally projected and actual.

Baruwa-Etti introduces us to the specifics of the house’s setting and its visual appearance in Scene One. Here, a crucial note is also made regarding Ore, immediately after she has entered the playing field of the home, meeting all other members of her family: “*As the scene plays out, she* [Ore] *goes between being a part of the conversation, observing her family, and staring at Wunmi, who is still present in her own space*” (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 4). Ore’s smoking—the only member of her family to have the habit—also often places her in an oscillating position not only between the figurative, but, also, the literal inside/outside. For example, soon after, we read: “*Ore enters, but stays by the door to finish her cigarette*” (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 5); elsewhere, and as the plot of the play advances to the point where Wunmi has been taken in as a collective family project, Ore’s uncertainty as to the new conditions increases visibly, and we read directions

such as: "*Ore opens the garden door, but lingers by the door*" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 37). The cause is to allow fresh air to flow in for Wunmi, who is finding the indoor temperature uncomfortable. But from these all too literal actions, Wunmi "*fan*[ning] *herself*" and Ore opening the door to provide some relief—arguably not only for Wunmi—we understand that Ore is uncomfortable not only at a physical level, but also on a moral ground, just as Wunmi is uncertain as to her own position in the domestic and social narrative (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 37). For Ore, coming (back) into the living room implies that she endorses the new situation of Wunmi sharing the family's domestic space; but she continues to wonder if a so-called safe environment of privilege is the best way to provide healing for Wunmi's trauma of losing her husband, and for her social malaise, which stems from intersecting gender, racial and class norms, affecting, no less, a young mother like herself. Elsewhere, and as Wunmi is becoming more settled in Ore's parents' home, observing the scene, "*Ore enters through the garden door. She watches them, confused, but somewhat happy* […]" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 65). That Ore often seeks to be outside, in the garden, that she lingers between environments, but, also, that she often enters the home through the garden door, signals her increasing outsider status that is reversely analogous to Wunmi's progressively insider role.

Interspaces between inside and outside are physical, tangible: the garden, the house and the door between them; as well as conceptual: what it means to be inside; to let go of certain instincts of resistance; or, likewise, what it means to be outside: to dispense with comfort and privilege. Ore is quite sincere about the dilemma and the practical difficulties. As she earnestly shares at one point:

> I've been trying to organise an event.
> Like a forum to discuss how to navigate BLM now.
> Having early conversations.
> Meeting some good people. (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 66)

But also:

> It's hard, taxing, juggling it [volunteering] with work
> but I guess that's activism, right? (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 67)

Ore makes these quasi-rhetorical, quasi-reassurance-seeking remarks to Wunmi, whom she perceives as the authority in organising and volunteering, even though, as the next section discusses, she has been 'admitted' to Ore's parents' household precisely so that she may be "recovered"

of the stresses and anxieties that these very processes cause as she had experienced them in a dramatic climax following her husband's untimely death (Baruwa-Etti, 67). "[L]et your anxieties burn", Wunmi eventually advises Ore, in essence reversing their therapeutic roles (Baruwa-Etti, 68). As Ore becomes involved, so Wunmi disentangles herself—the ideological distance between them, therefore, is also a flow and interspace characterised by mutual push and pull, by conquering and ceding of territory: spatial (the home, the domestic) and moral (strengthening or diminishing activism).

If we are encouraged to follow anyone's perceptual prism in the play, this is Ore's. She stands between worlds more than anyone else, grappling with their inconsistencies, possibilities and conflicts, while, at the same time, being claimed by both sides ethically: on the one hand, from the option to continue trying to make a difference from within the system; on the other hand, from that of stepping outside of extant structures and questioning the system through activism and community organising. The lines are not clear: Ore's is a family of individuals who, from their respective positions, serve society; but Ore is also disillusioned at their complacency, privilege performance and distinct barriers between themselves and those that they claim to serve and protect. The ending of the play as staged at the Almeida foregrounded Ore's dilemma of being beholden to a family vis-à-vis being compelled to act against structures that perpetuate authority and privilege. Staring into space, towards the audience in the production's finale (and not towards the remaining family members, as the stage directions suggest), facing forward as each family member calls out Ore's name while a fire burns in the background, the ideological and emotional interspace that Ore inhabits is now attacked from all angles (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 128). Meanwhile, Ore's own sense of moral duty and ambivalence has never been more compelling. The stage directions capture this state of mind, as well as the territorial transaction that, from negotiation now escalates into a battle:

> *Is this her destiny?*
> *Is this her destiny?*
> *Is this who she is?*
> *Is she meant to say yes?* (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 128)

An affirmation to her family's invite to take a slice of the burnt cake means that Ore joins in the family ritual—that the kitchen as coercive space has

imposed the ideology of control that Ore has been resisting and which Wunmi has eventually rejected by making a strong exit moments earlier. To affirm her beliefs, at the same time, means that Ore will need to break rank with all institutional structures that have so far defined her identity—including, first and foremost, her family.

Considering the kitchen as site of intersections physical, material, mental and emotional, including all the stimuli, rewards and conflicts that might arise as a result of such spatial sharing and encounters amongst human agents, domestic space researcher Angela Meah arrives at observations relevant to the present discussion (2016). I will especially foreground the following, which, also through theatre-based vocabulary, establish the kitchen not only as the site of encounter and interaction, but, also of performance. As Meah notes:

> While kitchen spaces and their objects are revealed to be sites in which mundane practices converge, so, too, do they emerge as having affective potential wherein they do more than provide a backdrop to social and domestic life. Indeed, the materiality of the kitchen figures as crucial in processes of identification, negotiation, and relationality by which it has moved 'frontstage' in the emotional topography of domestic life [...]. Implicit in [the present] conceptualization of the kitchen [...] is an understanding of home as an emotional space, experienced in both embodied and psychological ways. (2016, 56)

In *The Clinic* the kitchen is the site where the family perform their affluence, activism, care and ideology. It is in such a dominant, also literally 'frontstage' space that, upon joining the household, where Wunmi will first perform her abjection to the systemic injustices that have limited her agency, ones even perpetuated by the kind of class privilege immediately observable upon encountering Ore's family kitchen. But it is, also where, gradually, Wunmi will perform her own increasing agency in a spatial context where she at first enters as a most uncertain and insecure guest and eventually emerges as not only a confident space user and sharer, but, also, as a space shifter with a certain degree of authority. By the latter I mean that Wunmi's presence in the space alters its characteristics: in the premiere production, for example, we noticed that the wine bottles that feature prominently in the shelving in the beginning eventually disappear, while a record player appears on the countertop. Wunmi comes to inhabit, appropriate and, to an extent, transform the kitchen.

This effect is even more strongly reinforced when Wunmi graduates from consuming Tewa's (Ore's mother and, until then, the most authoritative agent in the spatial environment of the home and the kitchen) tea, a process that is almost ritualistic in producing mood enhancing and soothing qualities emerging from a secret ingredient, to preparing the tea herself. As Wunmi informs Ore, Tewa has even shared the secret ingredient with her. Ore, like other family members, are unaware of the ingredient, so the power play is quite significant: it is not only a matter of trust, but, also, a matter of spatial authority that is granted. To prepare the tea in Tewa's kitchen (especially as Tewa herself will, in the play's fourth scene, admonish her children for entering the house and using the kitchen in her absence) is, arguably, the most effective power indicator. That the action, to return to Meah, unfolds in the site of "mundane practice in which space, objects, social conventions, and human agency converge" (2016, 56), indeed around a most mundane quotidian event—tea making—and the objects associated with it, renders the performance of power all the more striking in its quiet impact. The serving of the tea is an act of care, which comes with symbolic and practical consequences: it determines both who dictates the rhythms of the space in terms of non-human environment (layout, objects, sounds, scents) and who administers the healing.

The kitchen eventually also emerges as the site of resistance and Wunmi's final revolt. As the play's closing scene and conflict unravels, Wunmi makes an emphatic exit from the domestic set of the family's performance of self-importance, civic agency, and, most of all, saviour complex facilitated by material privilege, declaring: "I'm better now. I can face the world again" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 126). The statement is soon followed by the final dismissive remark, which speaks directly to the house's spatial arrangement and especially the glass door between kitchen and garden. Meah notes: "the open-plan layout of a space might facilitate a sense of connectedness with other people, or a connection with the world beyond while remaining safe in one's own corner of it" (2016, 65). Spaces, in the context of this play at least, can be seemingly outwardly and generously designed, but are, in fact, inwardly and insularly orientated; the interspace is in the tension: in the inter-function and cross-possibility. Whether a space will appear open or closed—literally and metaphorically—is also a matter of human agency and perception. As Wunmi remarks, addressing the family: "What's that saying about glass houses? People who live in em shouldn't throw stones" (Baruwa-Etti

2022, 127). The statement lands as direct response to Tewa's patronising assertion to Wunmi that she has not actually recovered; therefore, Wunmi not only intercepts, but, also, cancels out Tewa's and, by extension, the entire family's agency over her life, decisions and wellbeing.

It is precisely this wellbeing that the family claim to be serving, functioning as a healing space and context for Wunmi upon her initial invitation and admission to the household as therapeutic environment. Given the emphasis that has been placed in middle-class culture on the design, upkeep and modernisation of the kitchen as functional and interactional space, especially in recent years, Meah makes the compelling point that "this room has become constituted as an important site of consumption, renovation, and renewal" (2016, 57). As also emerges from Meah's research, this renewal is not only material, in terms of décor, but, also, emotional, affecting modes of habitation and the inhabitants themselves. In the play's first scene, when Tewa suggests to Ore that the solution to Wunmi's problems is to be taken into the household, Tewa makes what is, arguably, the play's definitive statement:

> Look at our family.
> We've got power.
> Between us, we're like a clinic.
> We help people.
> Restore.
> We don't give up. (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 34)

The proposition lands when Wunmi, as well as everyone else—Tewa's psychology book writer/researcher husband (Segun); her law enforcement officer son (Bayo); her politician daughter in law (Amina)—are gathered in the family kitchen, where Tewa at that stage has absolute agency and is "embodied within the space" (Meah 2016, 59). The space itself is both domestic and clinical, or, at least, has the capacity to perform and perpetuate both characteristics. The 'clinic' that Tewa proposes is, therefore, constituted of elements both animate and inanimate, embodied and performed by means of the kitchen, the emotional and practical centre for all operations. This is what Meah describes as the spatial "performance – or doing – of 'family' and, therefore, of everyday life", where Tewa has increased "agency in the effective accomplishment and performance of everyday life" (2016, 57). Like Meah's essay, so Baruwa-Etti's play "foregrounds the situatedness of the kitchen within the emotional

topography of domestic life" and "emotions are acknowledged as being dynamically related to and co-constitutive of place" (2016, 57).

In closing, one must consider the more conceptually fluid locationalities of Baruwa-Etti's play as framed in the Prologue and Epilogue. Other than the most spatially fluid part of the play, the Prologue is also the most textually economical, running somewhat against the otherwise lengthy stage directions and scenes that comprise the piece. The Prologue contains no spoken action other than Wunmi's call—directly to Ore, but, it would also seem, to the world more broadly: "Help me" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 3). The plea is the outcome of Wunmi's desperation arising from a system that has failed her, leaving her, especially after her husband's death, exposed to major financial and emotional pressures as single mother to an infant. In performance, the scene created tension by gathering considerable momentum in a hectic onstage visual and aural atmosphere that broke with the realistic conventions of the play. In so doing, it was responsive to the spatial and emotional environments that Baruwa-Etti creates through the corresponding stage directions, worth quoting fully:

> *In different literal spaces, Wunmi creates Black Lives Matter protest signs, while also tending to her six-month-old baby August, who cries occasionally.*
>
> *Ore, wearing her hospital scrubs, watches them. We hear hospital and protest sounds collide, Ore distracted by it all, until Wunmi looks directly at her.*
>
> *They make eye contact and everything quietens.* (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 3)

After Wunmi makes her urgent appeal to Ore and as the Prologue closes, "*Ore snaps out of her daze, rushes away*" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 3). As the first scene opens, and we see Ore in her family home, as mentioned earlier, she is in double interactional mode: on the one hand with her family, in real place and time, and, on the other, with Wunmi, who, as also mentioned in the beginning of this section, is "*still present in her own space*" (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 4). It is a silent encounter, but one that still dominates Ore's attention as she is attempts to negotiate her co-presence in two different experiential and spatial planes at the same time. This co-presence, on the personal and civic level, is motivated by Ore's institutional role as doctor, as well as by her concern and empathy towards Wunmi. Ore's institutional function both connects and distances her from Wunmi; the latter is the outcome of diverging income brackets and layers

of privilege, further augmented by the dramatically different embodied experience that Ore has in her private life compared to Wunmi.

Both experiences are captured in the Prologue and in the transition and early moments of the play's first scene. The interspatiality of the event additionally reflects the growing sense of commitment and unease in Ore, who must decide how, if at all, she can exercise any agency in performing her activism and supporting Wunmi. The action of the Prologue also serves to enhance the spatial and perceptual oscillation of the play between the protected inside and exposed outside, both of whose functions will be challenged and even reversed as the play unfolds, and as the family home proves to be anything but safe and predictable, from rising tensions in relationships to an altered dynamics in the family following Wunmi's admission to the home.

The outside, rather than associated with risk, comes to be gradually associated with freedom. Through the stage directions, as well as affective soundscapes that evoke sites and conditions, the Prologue economically and effectively 'presences' locales that do not, otherwise, form part of the play's scenography: the hospital; the protest site; Wunmi's own private space and domestic context. The presencing of these locales creates a spatial intersection that locates the play and its problematics in different co-existing sites simultaneously, fostering an in-betweenness that challenges the plot's physical fixity in the family home. In this way, the play also locates its action always already outside, highlighting the bearing that ideologies, behaviours and actions taken or debated within four (even glass) walls have on the broader community and society at large. Conversations occurring amongst characters, including Amina's references to considerable tensions in her constituency context, or Bayo's narrations of police enterprise and morally dubious methods, further accentuate this effect.

The Epilogue begins with a stage direction that somewhat emulates the abstraction of the Prologue, though it largely serves to bring the two aesthetic worlds of the play—the conceptual and the realist—to a final confrontation that produces a sense of merging rather than deviation:

> *We're in Wunmi's house, but it's a bare stage, apart from the ash on the stage and a baby monitor.*
>
> *Wunmi and Ore stand opposite one another, Ore in her scrubs.* (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 129)

Although the ash on the ground establishes a connection to the prior scene, where we have seen the family continuing to serve cake as the house is burning, there does not appear to have been an actual fire. Rather, the play seems to be continuing on the fire as metaphor motif that it has established throughout, where fire is treated as both the opening up to full emotion, and the exposure to something deeper, untameable and risky—a rite of passage. But fire, as emerges from Ore and Wunmi's dialogue, is also the all-consuming ideological framework that engulfs without possibility of release those that give themselves over unto neoliberalist ideologies that ultimately serve only as a point of separation, despite any attempts at imagining oneself as part of a community.

"You took me somewhere I should never have been", says Wunmi to Ore, and the space is as much literal as metaphorical: the physical and emotional/ideological environment of Ore's family home (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 129). However separated, as Wunmi notes, Ore's family "are the world", and, therefore, through a metaphor that is both spatially tangible and perceptually intangible, they inhabit and shape what lies outside the spatial limits of the house, thereby being directly responsible (Baruwa-Etti 2022, 130). Here, too, Ore stands in-between, embodying the notion of the interspace, the negotiating entity and intervening site between experiences and ideologies. Her empathy towards Wunmi and her cause, and her care for her family, emphasise, one more, Ore's ideological ambiversion. Ultimately, this is where the play's most astute socio-political gesture materialises: in capturing this ambivalence, self-doubt and active negotiation of roles, positions, perspectives, loyalties and commitments. As Ore and Wunmi part—amicably—nothing is resolved; but the ashes on the ground at least suggest that what gives way for something else to be built is itself porous, messy and slippery. As such, the site of debate, rather than of certainty, is made possible.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on three plays: Rachel De-lahay's *Routes*, Duncan Macmillan's *People, Places and Things* and Dipo Baruwa-Etti's *The Clinic*. Despite their considerably flexible and far-reaching thematic range, for the purposes of this book the plays have served as exemplary of one of the most emphatic categories of interspace that we might imagine: the room. As this chapter has argued, the room both occupies and creates complex multitudinous territory, which can be both 'sited', in that it

is located within a given fixed structure, and fluid, in that it operates as an interactivity between the inner and outer life of its inhabitants; between their individual concerns and circumstances as they unfold in private spaces and the larger space these occupy in public life. Given that the room serves as anchoring space—for all its moving elements—and dramaturgical device for much of the theatre that we have seen and will continue to see across different historical periods and in different cultural, social and political environments, to select case studies for the purposes of a singular chapter appears a task that is not only challenging, but perhaps even practically unmanageable. To navigate this difficulty, decisions were made that considered 'the room' within, but also well beyond its domestic context, in conditions of clinical and institutional hospitality and surveillance—as well as in the blending of the two.

This has allowed me to show that the room as a site is compelling and catalysing both in spite and because of its apparent stativity, and dynamically inhabited, for all its imagined neutrality. This hypothesis has been cross-considered in various contexts of emotional, mental, physical, political and judicial flux, where the room functions as the grounding locus and driving force for action. A room, as this chapter has affirmed, is never neutral; it is the site of contestation of the either/or, inside/outside binary. It performs its interspatial fluidity by being both the site of deprivation of humanity, and of forging a genuine connection, including in legally fraught contexts that emphasise systemic failings; this, we have seen in *Routes*. Likewise, a room can be both the site of suffering and of release, of tragedy and of catharsis, of plight and of healing; this, we have seen in *People, Places and Things*. Finally—at least for the purposes of this chapter—a room can be both the site of familial and institutional performances of authority and control, and of ideological questioning; moreover, these performances can affect the private, as well as the public milieu equally; this, we have seen in *The Clinic*. I should like to close this chapter, then, by recognising that for each of these plays—and their rooms—discussed here, a myriad others invite consideration, elucidation, investigation. The priority of this chapter has been to ask how the room is being re-imagined in the engaged dramaturgies of our time, ones where playwrights have delivered new tropes for theatre's intimate spatialities. New complexities, dynamics and tensions arise; the room shifts and vibrates; it expands.

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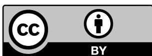

CHAPTER 4

The Transient: Palindromic Nomadisms and Invisible Transports

This chapter begins with an ambiguity in terms: mobility, as I have also discussed elsewhere, does not only imply movement—it might well also imply immobility, voluntary or otherwise, and stasis (Angelaki 2017). Mobility itself may be voluntary, or otherwise—and between these two terms, all intermediary grades exist; it is these states, and their associated spaces, that this chapter is concerned with. Mobility, other than chosen, might be imposed, necessary, as in routine, or essential, as in an escape. It can be about transit or about routing, about presence and arrival, as well as about absence and disappearance. Mobility involves different stages, then, of being, trying to be, or failing to be *en route*—and it does not imply by definition, irrespective of its common associations—that one of these states is more advantageous, or privileged, than another. That which is named 'mobile' might be a vehicle, or indeed a body; it might also be their concealment and their endangerment. To remain in place does not imply a condition of passivity or withdrawal, and to be in transit does not suggest that one has aim, or that they may indeed reach their destination.

In fact, the very notion of a 'destination' is an ambivalent trope, more subjective and loosely defined than objective and fixed—whether as a place or an idea—and its importance is outperformed by the journey. It may be trite, in a way, to make such an assertion—after all, it has been much repeated across literature, not least in C. P. Cavafy's emblematic poem "Ithaca" (1911(2009)), which very much identifies the journey

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itself as the only destination worth striving for. But it is, in my view, imperative, not least in the aftermath of a pandemic, im- and re-mobilisation experience, to consider how we treat mobilities, journeys and destinations today, informed both by the shifting contexts of the first decades of the twenty-first century and the newly redistributed environments that COVID-19 has left to us as legacy, and which have altered our relationships to place, placement and place-ability. When it comes to journeys of all different kinds—physical, temporal, experiential, emotional, mental, historical, private, collective, and, of course, ones that do not involve the traditional concept of the journey at all (as above)—this chapter selects as its case studies three plays. Through an analysis of these, it seeks to capture how the journey as metaphor, contested site and process, desirable and undesirable, as well as, in different ways, as deliverance, even in its failure, is imagined afresh. This involves engaging with dramaturgies that defy assumptions and confound expectations, including moving without moving at all, and remaining static, even in motion.

The transient here is considered as that which is in motion but unaccountable; that whose presence is followed by an absence; that which is public yet invisible. To be transient does not necessarily imply that one moves at speed, though it does suggest that one's trace fails to land heavily—not because one is inconsequential, but because one is vulnerable. To be transient is to exist, also to vanish; to occupy a space that is physical yet non-verifiable, to uphold a system of organisation of life and privilege, and, at the same time, to move extrinsically and in parallel to that system. The spaces that accommodate transience, are, it follows, also those that produce it: vehicles, containers, unregistered domains, fake addresses, identity records falsified or erased.

This chapter is the outcome of a selection process that has prioritised invisible transports because of the ways in which, playwrights who handle such topics, have served to reveal—in modes visceral, unnerving, disquieting—the systemic endowments for injustices best understood intersectionally: as the outcome of class, race, gender. To fulfil the imperative of considering how patterns of suppression and abuse, performances of privilege against human rights (not least emerging from a COVID-19 period that has further contributed to enclosure and invisibility), and loops of circular transience—including cycles of abuse—proliferate, I have had to side-line plays that examine mobility in other ways. Elsewhere I have discussed modes of largely privileged mobility to argue as to how it does not necessarily imply freedom and how, even when a trope of

means, mobility might still be accompanied by dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Angelaki 2017). There are other modes of discussing mobility and transience, of course, and sometimes these can be tropes for investigating political events—for example, Simon Stephens's play *Pornography* (2007 (2008)), which has received, rightly, much critical attention, and deals with the 7/7 London bombings; or, from the US, George Brant's *Grounded* (2013), which deals with a jaded, PTSD-suffering drone pilot, mobilising an entire war that hinges on precision, sharpness of movement and speed of attack from an entirely immobilised position. There are nuances to movement, to its politics and to its possibilities. While I acknowledge the capacities of texts like the above, such methodologies and thematics do not form the core of this present enquiry.

My concern here is, rather, the ways in which oppression and abuse become institutionally entrenched in how societies are run, how those most vulnerable become enveloped in patterns that further their marginalisation and hiding in plain sight, and how such occurrences are linked to mobility. This chapter, therefore, concentrates on Clare Bayley's *The Container*, first staged at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2007 in a production directed by Tom Wright, later coming to London's Young Vic in 2009; *Roadkill*, for which director Cora Bissett also developed the concept, with a text by Stef Smith, and which, likewise, opened at Edinburgh in 2010, later coming to London's Theatre Royal, Stratford East (2011), and Rachel De-lahay's *Circles*, which premiered at the Birmingham REP directed by Tessa Walker, before transferring to London's Tricycle (2014). Already, the productions themselves can be seen as transient, even before we delve into their respective stagings, which involve itinerant conditions and non-permanent structures, quite literally in the case of the first two, and dramaturgically in the case of the latter. Movement, then, is part of the very fabric of the plays—but, then, equally, so is stillness, confinement and hindrance from reaching that so longed for destination.

The Container

The play considerably predates what became known as "The Long Summer of Migration" in 2015, reminding us that the main concerns it deals with—illegal migration of extreme precariousness, where no end result is guaranteed and survival is at risk—also long predate their moment of most public eruption. The play even predates one of the

definitive moments in migration-focused contemporary playwriting, itself with a strong interspatial focus: Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Schutzbefohlenen* (published in English as *Charges* in 2017). This adaptation of *The Suppliant Women* by Aeschylus, dealing with the arrival of a group of migrants to a city where they seek shelter, and whose authorities might decide to grant or refuse this, hinges on the ultimate expression of migrant uncertainty: the refugees are both present and unaccounted for, both in transit and at a destination, occupying a space in-between asylum and deportation. Bayley's play even predates Anders Lustgarten's *Lampedusa* (2015), considerably smaller scale but still quite emblematic, whose title foregrounds the very site that, in its in-betweenness, in October 2013 became the final site reached by precarious migrants transferred illegally by sea, as their boats capsized off of the island.

For all its significance, *The Container* does not, however, predate one of the most impactful pieces of the recent period in European theatre and performance, which is also a staple work in the theatre and migration field: Christoph Schlingensief's *Bitte liebt Österreich* (*Please Love Austria*) (2000). For one week during the *Wiener Festwochen* (Vienna Festival), the piece formed part of the city centre ecosystem, which, at the same time, it intervened upon, and disrupted. This came at a crucial political junction, when Austrian politics' right-wing turn became embodied in a coalition that, formed of the conservative (ÖVP) and the far right (FPÖ) parties, led to EU sanctions and public outcry (see, indicatively, Merlingen et al. 2001). It is difficult to imagine a more prominent site for Schlingensief's piece, which was installed and performed immediately adjacent to Vienna's iconic Opera house on the Ringstrasse. As the piece was framed at the time:

> Amid intense public interest, twelve participants introduced by Schlingensief as asylum-seekers spend one week in a cordoned-off, CCTVed shipping container complex […]. Blue flags representing Austria's far-right populist FPÖ party are hoisted on top of a container.
>
> As onlookers applaud ambiguously, a sign bearing the slogan 'Ausländer raus' ['Foreigners out'] is unveiled and then attached to the container together with the logo of the Kronenzeitung, Austria's biggest-selling tabloid.
>
> Excerpts from speeches by FPÖ chairman Jörg Haider resound across Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz. With clear references to the BIG BROTHER TV show, the Austrian population are asked to phone in and vote out

> inhabitants [...]. Votes can also be cast via the Internet, where Webfreetv broadcasts events from the container live – 24 hours a day for a period of six days.
>
> Every morning at eight o'clock, two residents are ejected from the container to be deported to their native country. The winner can look forward to a cash prize and the prospect, depending on the availability of volunteers, of Austrian citizenship through marriage. (Schlingensief 2000)

It is worth revisiting the framing of the piece at such length to be reminded of how this century began in terms of shifting political ground, but, also, how artistic dissent was framed in a way that still resonates a quarter of a century later. It is worth, also, recollecting that the disruptions to a changing atmosphere and public mood swinging towards extreme conservatism, rightly identified as urgently needed by artists such as Schlingensief, emerged long before a more globally pronounced rhetoric problematising such a turn in voting and politics. As we know now, this turn continued to evolve in spectacular ways, especially over, but far from contained in, the past decade.

Finally, opening in the summer of 2007, Bayley's play predates the Brexit referendum, which placed migration at the centre of the debate and subsequent vote, by nearly a decade. This is crucial in terms of how the play was already responding to a public feeling that was shifting towards insularity. The text does not only make a comment on migration and the plight of refugees more broadly conceived—it also, and rather pointedly, takes on the UK as a country receiving migrants, given that the refugees being illegally transported share the UK as final destination. The UK migration processing, detention and removal system is, of course, also a major focal point of a play discussed in the previous chapter—Rachel De-lahay's *Routes*. If in De-lahay's play we encounter the conditions that prompt illegal migration, the aftermath of arrival, and the reality of stagnation, in Bayley's play we are confronted with the radical vulnerability, uncertainty and devastation of the process of illegal transport in itself, as well as with the false allure of a destination framed as the promised land.

One feels, in the container, the movements and shifts that, through the motions of the vehicle, are the only indicators of an outside reality—the bodies of the migrants are set to the rhythm of the motor vehicle that carries, conceals and compromises them. This is our shared spectatorial space, and the non-verbal discourse that establishes our physical grounding and the transport illusion. As the performance journey starts,

"*The drone of an engine is heard. As the play begins, the lorry is heard to come to a halt*" (Bayley 2009, 5–15). It is not long before "*The truck starts moving*" (Bayley 2009, 5–15), and, as the play progresses, we will experience more sudden shifts: "*The lorry jolts and comes to a halt*"; "*The truck stops again. A few jolts*"; and "*The container jolts some more. They wait*" (Bayley 2009, 15–46).

An audience of the play is likely to have at least encountered reports as to the conditions, entirely contrary to the ideal, that will greet the illegal migrants upon arrival, whether they manage to enter and remain in the country, or not. This is part of the play's critique and irony, both when it reminds us of the fluidity of national identity and the itinerant nature of privilege, and when, in doing so, it claims it as a power trope, an image that has nothing to do with the reality of the disenfranchised migrant:

> ASHA. English people are kind. They welcome people from all over the world
>
> […]
>
> FATIMA. He [her son, who lives in England] says the Queen is really German. Her husband is Greek. And the government are all Jews or Scottish. So, you see, they understand. (Bayley 2009, 5–15)

There is an additional dimension to the play's affective devastation: the fact that whether the migrants arrive or not will remain uncertain. To say that Bayley's play ends on a cliff-hanger does not quite capture its emotional charge, which is accompanied by a physical and mental discomfort exacerbated by the conditions of confinement. But it is accurate to note that the text does end by leaving us wondering what happens next, and pondering on the likely outcome of a transport such as the fictional one we have been a part of—or of other ones, that we may have heard and read about, in the all-too-common incidents of refugees expiring on the way to the promised land:

> JEMAL. Shhhh. Maybe they're putting us in the train now. Keep quiet.
>
> ASHA. How long is the tunnel?
>
> JEMAL. It takes about forty minutes.
>
> ASHA. Forty minutes and then we are in England?
>
> […]

The container jolts some more. They wait.

AHMAD. We must be on the train now. Do you think we're on the train?

They wait. Silence.

FATIMA. I think we are on the train now. Soon we will be in England.

Silence.

ASHA. I can't feel us moving.

FATIMA. Soon our journey will be over.

AHMAD. Are we moving?

ASHA. Are we there? Do you think we have arrived?

Nobody answers.

Slow fade.

The end. (Bayley 2009, 42–46)

As the weight of Bayley's finale sets in, an immediate implication is that 'to arrive' is a very relative term; it does not at all imply a desired destination; it might indicate an endpoint, but this may not be the one that the traveller set out for, especially if, as is the case here, the passenger's agency is non-existent.

By denying an answer to the question of whether the container has made it onto the train to cross the channel to England, Bayley's text astutely reminds us that migrants are always in transit. It emphasises that, even though upon exiting the container as spectators we will touch the stable dry land of Edinburgh, or London, or any other site where the container may be installed, in that very moment—and as the enduring product of systemic injustices—many others, unlike us, are on the road. They, unlike us, have no control over their next steps; whereas we are left to recalibrate our actual stativity after the experience of darkness and enclosure, before, eventually, negotiating our way towards that very site that refugees, surviving, traumatised or perishing, are forever striving for: home.

The dialogue quoted above is indicative of the fact that, for all their differences, the migrants forming the set of characters all have in common their anxiety and insecurity. Amongst them, levels of privilege vary; this will also play a role as to who manages to remain on the container through

to the end of the play. When the performance begins, there are four individuals in the container: Fatima, described as "*Somali woman, forties*" and her niece, Asha, "*Somali woman, fifteen*"; Jemal, "*Turkish Kurd, twenties*"; and Ahmad, "*Afghan man, fifties*" (Bayley 2009, 5). When the play is underway, in one of several abrupt stops, Mariam, "*Afghan woman, twenties*", also enters (Bayley 2009, 5). Mariam, it comes to be revealed in a conversation between her and Asha during one of the quieter moments in the container while all others are asleep, is pregnant. She is also the one that, having boarded last, is able to provide a location update to the others, who at this stage, have lost all sense of accurate locality. When Mariam boards we are at the very North of Italy, by the French border. It is Mariam who, in her quiet resolve, will also deviate from the thoughts and expectations of others as to the England she expects to encounter, simply, but also tellingly, responding to Asha's enthusiasm about England with the words "To somewhere safe" when asked where she is headed—as she is, otherwise, uncertain when it comes to a final destination (Bayley 2009, 15–42).

Mariam's presence in the container, as comes to pass in one of the most unsettling moments of what remains a disquieting experience throughout, is particularly transient; it will last less than that of the others, and it will be laden with even graver uncertainty as to the reaching of any potential destination. The final character of the play is The Agent—the man presenting himself as a go-between, and claiming to care for the migrants' safe passage all the while employing intimidation and violence tactics to debase those who are most vulnerable even further. Although each person in the container has paid for the ride, The Agent will, at some point, demand even more money to guarantee the continuation of the journey; to persuade, as he notes, the driver, who, being in charge of the vehicle, "knows he has the power" to carry his human cargo further (Bayley 2009, 15–42). Mariam is unable to pay, and no one is, alternatingly, willing or able to cover the additional cost. Mariam is forced to disembark the container, as Asha becomes aggravated, certain of Mariam's grim fate if she exits. No room for ambiguity has been allowed in any case; as The Agent coarsely puts this moment earlier: "You are refugee woman, you know how to pay" (Bayley 2009, 15–42). Disturbingly, Asha's words—some of the most poignant in the entire play—begin to ring true. In her earlier conversation with Mariam, she had remarked: "They all complain about this truck. But I like this truck. In this truck we are safe" (Bayley 2009, 15–42). To this, Mariam had responded: "For a while" (Bayley

2009, 15–42). In a context where time and space are as indeterminate and elastic as they are fractured and disjointed, this stretch of so-called safety can be even more short-lived than anticipated.

That there is safety in movement and risk in stativity may well speak to the heart and soul of the individual fleeing violent conditions and entering risk unnameable with the mere hope of survival and of "a future at once utopian and possible" (Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen 2018, 97). Despite differences and origin, this is the state that emerges as the refugee condition. If the references to a welcoming, idealised England are striking in their irony, then the following, delivered by Fatima to Asha in an attempt to quieten her as Mariam, defeated in her efforts to mobilise support, and surrendering to a cruel fate, exits the container, further amplifies this effect:

> FATIMA. (*In Somali*). Is dajji, Asha. (Calm down, Asha.) This is France. This is Europe. Nothing bad will happen to her! (Bayley 2009, 15–42)

But there are many Europes, and Mariam is not, we can deduce, about to experience the kindest one. In the beginning of the play, as the truck stops for Mariam to board, we hear Jemal's rude response to Fatima's query as to why the vehicle has halted: "I'm not the fucking tour guide, am I? I don't fucking know why we've stopped" (Bayley 2009, 5–15). This is not a leisure expedition, and, here, the dialogue reminds us how far the precarious migrants' experience lies from that of the privileged grand tourists, whose Europe was a site of endless wonder, a marvel of culture and access. Even Ahmad, from within the container, expresses a thought that is, in its own way, a performance of privilege when he says "We are not all the same. I should not be travelling like this", on the basis of his supposed wealth and privilege (Bayley 2009, 5–15). It is on such narratives of mobility and freedom that the myth of Europe as open and traversable, as welcoming and a beacon of all things noble is perpetuated. But the myth, in the reality of multiple-gears European experiences, citizenships and accesses, is contestable. Ahmad is not 'travelling'—the very word implies a form of agency; he is, rather, being transported, having paid handsomely for the non-privilege of receiving the treatment of commercial goods carried as cargo. This is not a journey through the continent; there are no sights to behold and no leisurely pauses to be taken. Nor is it true that, as Jemal proclaims elsewhere, "We're all Europeans now" (Bayley 2009, 5–15). Not everyone gets to experience a rite

of passage to this so-called European-ness. Mariam's journey ends here; her narrative will continue beyond the container, as her story merges with those of others whose traces are lost along the way.

The difference between Bayley and Schlingensief's respective containers lies in the spectatorial relationship to the event, but, also, to the work's self-framing within a public space, and to the framing of that very space. Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria* had a considerable life outside and beyond the container structure, and its legacy endures: it is difficult to imagine more meaningful, resolute and memorable disruptions of the art and life divide, or more affective interspatial fluidities between the real and the staged, between the theatrical and the civic. Schlingensief's extraordinary piece both opened up to and embodied the interspace. It did so while being creatively groundbreaking and deploying its public installation format to mobilise affect in a most impactful way (Scheer 2018). The Vienna Festival is a heavily subsidised event, both in terms of public and private funding; moreover, the container as a transient, immobilised space associated with cargo and mobility, was installed at a space as public as one might imagine, where a structure like this is most unlikely to be encountered. Means and method, then, combined to accomplish maximum intensity. Perhaps only an installation at Heldenplatz, the site of Thomas Bernhard's eponymous play (1988), which caused a stir comparable to Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria* and a tidal wave of reactions when first staged at the Burgtheater (Austria's National Theatre, by which it was also commissioned), might have rivalled the choice in terms of impact.

The unbridled aggression with which Bernhard's *Heldenplatz*—a staunch, lucid, historicised, caustic and satirical critique of Austria's difficult past and especially the remnants of *Nationalsozialismus*—was met was, to an extent, echoed in the reception of Schlingensief's. There are fascinating artistic legacies here, and, even though Bayley's container was installed in much less auspicious conditions, and the performance itself was most considerably smaller scale, in terms of treading on such a history, it is not possible, in my view, to consider *The Container* outside of the realm of prior work such as this mentioned above. There is also the self-lacerating attitude of the piece: as in Bernhard, as in Schlingensief, and, most certainly, also as in Jelinek, it is the 'home' culture, the country that is to receive—but not straightforwardly, or even at all, perhaps, welcome—the refugees that is the target of the most severe criticism. Public space accommodates transience: that in political movements and

public moods, that of lives rendered precarious and sacrificed to demagogy, whim and circumstance as instigators of xenophobia and violence. Somewhere, that figure, the embattled *xénos*, remains in transit, arriving, yet never quite being present.

Where Bayley's play differs substantially from Schlingensief and Jelinek's work in the subject of migration is that it may, as these prior-mentioned pieces, stage a group, but it primarily concentrates on the individual. Here, we notice the legacies of another artistic narrative: British social realism. During the performance of *The Container*, conversations take place; we come to meet different characters and their dialogues unfold with a fidelity to the rhythms and forms of 'real life' as we might expect to encounter it in any given social-realist dramatic plot and staging context. Despite its significance as a staging concept, *The Container*—precisely because of its production conditions—was always going to have been a comparatively more limited event in terms of attracting publicity and participant numbers. Subsidy structures between affluent European theatre cultures—such as that of Austria—and the UK remain, after all, very different. Bayley's work, to attempt an analogy, was not staged at the heart of Covent Garden, on the South Bank, or at Trafalgar Square; comparisons are, therefore, only tenable up to a certain point. Still, London, a global pole of attraction for privileged migrants (most often called 'expats'), as well as for those seeking a better life and setting out for the British capital under conditions such as those we witness in *The Container*, and given the currency of migration debates in British public discourse, could certainly have served as a site for a more emphatic staging.

The intimacy factor, however, might have been compromised in such a scenario, and in its play with sound, light and proximity, the affective intensity of *The Container* hinges precisely on these concerns. From the start, the play between the migrants' visibility and invisibility looms large; so does the interplay between mobility and stativity, for which the container serves as a both/and structure. The "twenty-eight spectators per performance who sat in close proximity to the performers" became part of the journey—and, so, in a suspension of disbelief, also transient (Rodríguez 2022, 148). For us to enter, the container must collect us; the suspension of disbelief is expected to occur instantly. This is no longer a static entity outside a theatre; this is, rather, transformed by sound and lighting design into an object attached to a vehicle, which has been, and soon will once more be, on the road:

> *A container, which appears to be empty except for some pallets. The drone of an engine is heard. As the play begins, the lorry is heard to come to a halt. Fatima, Asha, Jemal and Ahmad emerge from their hiding places* […]. *They whisper*. (Bayley 2009, 5-15)

Indeed, a lot of the impact of Bayley's text is carried through extra-verbal clues. No sooner have we encountered the play's characters and attempted to acclimatise to its staging conditions and its fictional context, than this is interrupted, reflecting the unpredictable disruptions to which a precarious refugee's journey is subject:

> *The doors are opened. The sudden light is dazzling. They all melt back into their hiding places*
>
> *Mariam enters*. (Bayley 2009, 5–15).

The accompanying directions for Mariam's entrance remind us that it is the full range of senses that is at play, especially in confined spaces of crammed, unhygienic conditions:

> *She stands, trying to see in the darkness, her hand over her mouth and nose, because of the smell in there. She retches. The doors are closed behind her*. (Bayley 2009, 5-15)

Later, we will hear Ahmad complain: "It's so hot I can't breathe!" (Bayley 2009, 5–15). Mariam, pregnant and "exhausted", and now in motion under the worst of conditions, will feel even more unwell; she will vomit, triggering palpable discomfort amongst the characters, and simulating a no less—however built on the imaginary—uncomfortable experience for the spectators (Bayley 2009, 5–15). As theatre scholar Verónica Rodríguez discusses, "the space is only illuminated by torches held by the actors in the dark; heat, smell and claustrophobic conditions that are part of the migrants' travelling experience become the spectator's experience as they all sweat, feel, see and smell in the same condensed space in close proximity" (2022, 150). The olfactory plays a role; the respiratory, also: the breath amongst, and the inhaling of the lives of others. As Rodríguez tellingly adds, "the container […] had holes because the actors and the spectators needed to breathe" (2022, 150).

One of the most significant contributions of the play to illegal mobility and precarious migration discourses is its depiction of the interflow

between time and space, contributing to a state of mental and physical disorientation. Medical researchers Morton Beiser and Ilene Hyman have engaged with the question of time perception in refugees by considering different stages in the migration process. They propose that "cognitive alteration of time perspective is a strategy for coping with adversity" and, through empirical study, go on to postulate that "[a]lthough time binding is probably natural under ordinary circumstances, time splitting may be a method for coping with adversity" (Beiser and Hyman 1997, 996, 997). Amongst the working hypotheses of the study, the one most directly relevant here due to the specific migration stage with which the play is concerned, is that "[i]f time splitting and cognitive avoidance of the past occur under conditions of adversity, refugees will show more present and future orientation and a greater tendency to split off past, present, and future" as a coping strategy and avoiding a more immediate mental health crisis—namely "major depression" (Beiser and Hyman 1997, 998, 1000). More recently, migration scholars Synnøve Bendixsen and Tomas Hylland Eriksen have argued that "[t]hrough the very act of acquiescent waiting, you show that you have accepted the loss of your control over your own time. Thus, waiting generates vulnerability and humiliation, and its distribution in society is a precise index of power discrepancies" (2018, 92). Moreover, and with striking relevance to the primary focus of this chapter—interspatial mobility—the same scholars note that "[w]aiting is a congested crossroads clogging the route leading from the present to the future, but it is also a somewhat itchy, unpleasant chasm between certainty and uncertainty" (Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen 2018, 93). Beyond this, here we are dealing with the injurious; with a corrosive chasm.

In Bayley's play, characters are spatiotemporally unmoored, so questions relating to getting their time and place bearings recur, including, when Mariam enters:

MARIAM. How long have you been in here?

Ahmad shrugs.

AHMAD. Is it three days or four?

Jemal nods.

[…]

AHMAD. How long have you been travelling?

> MARIAM. I was in Milan for a month. But I left my country three months ago. (Bayley 2009, 5-15)

Or, as the ride continues, at different timepoints:

> AHMAD. How much longer will we be in here?
>
> […]
>
> AHMAD. Let me out of here. Please. Let me get out. So many days in here – I can't stand it any more! (Bayley 2009, 5–15)

It is important to note the discrepancy and fluctuation concerning time perceptions. We (spectators) have come from the outside; we share time with the actors, who have likely not entered the container too long before we have—but we do not share this time with the characters thar the actors are portraying. And, above all else, we have chosen to be there, and to immerse ourselves in the performance; "enforcing slowness and self-awareness in a cultural world where slow time has become a scarce resource" is, in itself, a trope of our privilege: it is a process of "liberating potential only when it is chosen, which in the case of irregular migrants it is not" (Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen 2018, 99).

But when it comes to the dramaturgical world of the play, time is conceptualised differently: our own time, as spectators, is suspended—parenthetical time and space, as they have opened for and embedded us in the context of the performance, mean that we are now counting time differently. This is not only meant in terms of the performance having a finite duration, and, for the purposes of this, giving way to its specific time measures, but, also, in terms of accepting, and subscribing to the ruse that, for the purposes of this spectatorial experience, and, in the realm of the performance journey, time is infinite and indefinite. This is, reasonably, a further source of spectatorial discomfort and, arguably, anxiety, once added to the spatial discomfort of the performance site in itself:

> AHMAD. We don't know where we are. We could be anywhere. […]
>
> FATIMA. They say when you are in the bottom of a big ship, then you can't hear nothing. For days and days you hear nothing
>
> JEMAL. Don't be stupid. When she [Mariam] got on we were where we should be. (Bayley 2009, 15-42)

Here we observe how the spatiotemporal manipulation perpetrated by those in control of the vehicle, The Agent and the driver, and the coordinated gaslighting of the refugees that it produces, is a direct correlative of their emotional anxiety and inability to fully contextualise, working on deductions and assumptions as their panic at being turned back is also displaying itself in physical symptoms. But travel and home coordinates are both elusive, as in slippery; mutable—and illusive, as in a matter of perspective, a story to tell oneself as a narrativisation of the past, and a projection of the future are attempted. Still, "[r]everie is important in assessing one's current state and future possibilities" though "circumstance may determine access to reverie" (Beiser and Hyman 1997, 1001). We observe this reverie in some of the characters' visions of what the England promised to them might bring, and its lack in others, who resist its allure.

The right to a home, or even prospects of that home, carry as much currency, as the realisation that, on the basis of the trauma experienced and the conditions procuring this unsafe, and uncertain arrival, no outcome can be taken for granted. And then, in one of the more bracing moments of the play, we observe this manipulation of space, time and perception in action. It is delivered by The Agent—a descriptor with a double semantic sense that points both to the man's mediation and, by extension, to the fact that, along with the driver, he is the only one with any influence in the process. Here, he coaches the migrants on how to respond to the authorities' potential questions:

> THE AGENT. [...] You can't remember. Ten days ago, you were at home. Now, you are here. That's all you know. Non-stop travel. (Bayley 2009, 42–46)

The next minutes expedite the end of the play, which, as discussed earlier, closes on a note of utter uncertainty, as the migrants hypothesise that they might be in the Eurotunnel without any tangible indications, much less guarantees, that this might be the case. As Bendixsen and Hylland Eriksen note, "[t]he indefiniteness of liminality [...] indicates why the present is not experienced as meaningful, at the same time as it is indeterminate and potentially eternal [...] The present intensifies, like waiting at a bus stop for a bus that never arrives" (2018, 100, 103). There is a quality in vehicles, which strengthens their metaphorical intensity; in themselves, whether in their presence or absence, they are measures of time. They

are, then, “liminal spaces/states” (Rodríguez 2022, 149). At one point, singing the praises of the British capital, that so longed for destination, Fatima even exclaims: “You can drive in a car for three hours and still you are in London” (Bayley 2009, 5–15). To her, this is a marvel; to those who might experience it on an everyday level, it is a routine of nuisance. But movement makes time, and time is defined by movement. In stillness, in its uncertainty, time and hope draw to a halt. There are all kinds of levels of transit, of mobility, of privilege—one person’s traffic is another’s being trafficked. Or, indeed, sometimes that bus arrives—but, as the next sections discuss, this is far from a guarantee of reaching a destination; much less the kind that one may have hoped for.

Roadkill

All texts examined in this chapter carry a considerable degree of challenge, thematically, formally, dramaturgically and in terms of production. As concerns subject matter, affective dramaturgy, difficulty of subject matter, visceral effect and staging logistics, *Roadkill* arguably stands out. The text is site specific in the sense that it requires a vehicle (bus) and a domestic space (apartment) to be performed; but it is also adaptable, since, as is mentioned in its stage directions,

> *The original production of Roadkill began on a bus with audience members being driven to the performance flat. The play was also adapted from Edinburgh, where it played originally, to each city and country that the production toured to.* […]
>
> *Although the female characters are Nigerian in this play, the story is currently so universal that the authors see the play as potentially being adaptable to a different location and ethnicity of migrant/trafficked person in order to reflect the current climate in whichever country it is performed.* (Bissett and Smith 22–24)

The play not only has mobility—once more forced, injurious, corrosive—inscribed into the core of its dramaturgy, but, as its creators observe, it is socio-political conditions and catastrophic systemic failures that inscribe this universality and allow it to proliferate in the first instance.

The ‘global’ and ‘mobile’, as we have seen in Elliot and Urry (2010), apply widely as terms in conditions such as those that the play captures, but they are neither a matter of choice nor privilege. In this case study,

we are dealing with the most precarious of categories of mobile subjects that Elliot and Urry take on. It is a dominant category of a very different kind to the global business traveller, and yet it also appears to pertain to a global market, in fact to a para-economy functioning alongside the systems of capitalist legitimisation that create and sustain strata of privilege and abuse. The longer quotation here is merited to capture not only the map of trafficking, but, also, the equivocalness of the term 'network', far from the exclusive trope of professional esteem and advancement, as it has been appropriated into cross-field labour market jargon:

> Nigeria is a major source, transit and destination country of human trafficking [Idemudia and Okoli, 2020]. […] Nigerian women and girls were reportedly the most identified trafficked persons in the European Union (EU) in 2015, […also] identified in over 40 countries in 2017 (USDOS, 2018). The trafficking networks […] range from highly organized and structured criminal organizations to loosely structured informal groups (Carling, 2006). […S]everal intermediary actors play crucial interdependent roles. The first group of actors is the recruiters that contact the potential candidate or her family members to arrange her journey. The second group is the smugglers that facilitate the trans-border movement, which include complicit law enforcement and immigration officials in the home, transit and destination countries. Finally, there is also the madam or pimp who bears the financial costs of transportation and controls the trafficked persons at the destination country [Okojie, 2005]. […] The prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria is tied to the structural socio-economic and political conditions in the country. Despite the abundance of natural resources […], citizens are unable to derive any meaningful developmental benefits from resource revenues because of the widespread incidence of corruption and revenue mismanagement […]. (Idemudia et al., 2010; Okoli and Idemudia, 2020). (Idemudia et al. 2021, 451–52)

Environmental misappropriation provides us with a fertile metaphor for how the wounds of the land become the wounds of its people and vice versa. Ecologies are disrupted, human and non-human. Mobility is key; the ability to transport and conceal—but also to deliver and channel into a market is a requirement.

As Elliot and Urry note, "[s]ex tourism, forced prostitution and the global sex industry demonstrate how forced mobilities *and* extensive immobilities are also central to contemporary gender relations. The transnational spread of commercialized sex is a significant component of

neo-liberal globalization" (2010, 106, original emphasis). The rules of transport and consumption hinge on the exploitation of resources and on the draining of vulnerable lands and precarious economies by violating human rights and disrupting the very biorhythms of communities, and of entire countries—all peopled by individuals treated as expendable commodities. As others have noted, underlining the excruciating callousness of the operation, in the movement of human prey, market rules apply: "[f]or the transportation stage, an increase in the number of victims may greatly decrease the cost-per-victim associated with setting up and running the informal infrastructure (made up of safe houses and local agents), as well as acquiring the relevant knowledge about visas, trafficking routes and counter-trafficking measures" (Campana 2016, 73).

It serves this discussion to remain within the 'plain sight' aspect of human trafficking as a visible, yet strangely unseen and too often non-intercepted kind of crime; it is this very condition that the vehicular dramaturgy of Bissett and Smith's play highlights. *Roadkill* invites us to reflect not only on the situations we encounter on the specific bus within the delineated framework of the play, but also on all the collective modes of transport that we make use of, and in whose context we may find ourselves—far from unlikely—in the presence of victims. We are asked to consider, through the embodied experience of the transit interspace, how "victims of trafficking are rendered immobile once they have arrived" (Elliott and Urry 2010, 106). The following is an indication of how such transports operate, and how boundaries between everyday life of utmost routine and criminal activity of the highest order are erased. Here, criminology researcher Paolo Campana reflects on a specific network of events, which provides a representative sample within the context of Nigerian victims of trafficking:

> The overall number of actors involved in […] 16 trafficking events is 58, of which 25 are offenders and 33 are victims. On average, each event involved 5.3 offenders. […] The relatively small number of victims trafficked during each journey and the modus operandi adopted during the transportation phase sets this case clearly apart from the large-scale smuggling of migrants between, for example, Northern Africa and the southern coast of Italy. […] We can therefore estimate a yearly trafficking capacity based on the information available: everything else being equal, this capacity would be around 200 victims per year. (2016, 76)

Assessments such as Campana's are important not only because of the sheer factual intensity of data, but, also, because of the distinction offered concerning transport and scale when it comes to different forms of human trafficking. Such facts are especially significant in terms of understanding operations of smuggling that concern migrants vulnerable to sexual offences against them as part of broader criminal conditions of transport in the illegal migration practices of precarious individuals (as we saw in the previous section).

Discussing audience response to the production of *Roadkill*, Bissett places the impact of the play within the realm of quotidian life and mobility in the city, in a way that captures the theatre's capacity of embedding itself within its space and site, a point particularly important given the way in which the play becomes an embodied map of movement and habitation under the most excruciating conditions: an invisible life existing in parallel to that visible; so that, when they do cross over, the effect is revelatory, attacking complacency. "I've been overhearing people talk about the play and about sex trafficking on the bus. I've seen men and women crying on the journey back home. Not a very happy response, but at least I know that it's affecting them deeply", Bissett mentions (2010). In her review of the original production, Lyn Gardner captures the visceral intensity of the show starting from the unique proxemics created by means of the dramaturgical embedding of the vehicle into the play:

> The young black girl in the white dress sitting a few seats away from me on the bus laid on by the Traverse theatre is little more than a child. She is chattering excitedly about the sights […]. Her enthusiasm bubbles over. A few minutes later, […] now in a dingy flat off Leith Walk, we see the same young woman again. Now her white dress is torn and bloody; she shakes. […] Over the next hour, we watch like ghostly voyeurs as Mary's life turns into hell on earth […] It doesn't feel as if this is just a play. Just as Mary cannot escape from the shuttered basement room […] so Bissett ensures that we cannot escape the appalling truth of Mary's life, and all the trafficked young women like her. […] She's out there somewhere running for her life. (2010)

Even the way in which Gardner closes her review is angled through the mobility factor: a mobility very different; a matter of life or death.

Mary indeed ends the play by running. She is meant to be moved to another flat, where she will continue to be sexually abused; but, against

all odds, she has found a voice, and the strength to leave. So, in the very brief moment of agency, where she steadfastly confronts Martha—her trafficker—with the fact that she chooses to live, to protect her unborn child (conceived in conditions of forced sexual encounters) and to escape this life, Mary opens an interspace of freedom:

> *When she leaves the actual flat, we hear the door close.* […]
> *Huge video projection of MARY out in the street projected onto back wall, wesee her run out this street, then cross fade into many others, we see the city,familiar yet strange, MARY a tiny little figure running through it, not sure whereshe is running to but not stopping.*
> *Music swells.*
> *Curtain call.*
> *The usher leads the audience back out onto the bus.* (Bissett and Smith 2012, 76–83)

The site is disrupted; for Mary, a brief window opened and closed, leading her, potentially, to a form of salvation. For the audience, whose interspatial experience continues, there is a return to the vehicle that will now restore them to their everyday realities. But the parenthetical space, for which the bus has served as both a device and framework, and which has included the experience in the flat, will, as Bissett and Gardner note, hopefully deliver some form of lasting impact. That the dramaturgical force of the play can render this in different contexts, retaining, in its own mobility, a stable affective core, was corroborated by Sarah Hemming's review when the play moved to London, where the institutional 'home' was Theatre Royal Stratford East (2011). As Hemming observes, "by placing you in their environment" the production cultivates empathy even from the early stages, as the excited young girl, communicating her joy for being in London to fellow passengers, produces "a feeling of deep foreboding settl[ing] on the bus" (2011).

The interspace, then, can endure experientially beyond its practical spatiotemporal coordinates. A similar moment of freedom is perhaps the equally emphatic gesture of the closing of the door by and behind Ibsen's Nora (*A Doll's House*). But for all the debts and dependencies confronting that heroine, Bissett and Smith remind us that compromised agencies and confinements can come in all dimensions—and that some are infinitely more ruinous than others. According to the published playtext, we do not learn what happens next; in that same edition, however, amongst the

deleted scenes is also featured a monologue by Mary narrating the events following her escape. We read that "*The scene was originally played on the bus returning to the theatre*" (Bissett and Smith 2012, 79–81), and in this version of events the bus is commandeered as an active dramaturgical vehicle even more intently. In the version where we do not hear this monologue, however, the bus remains a dramaturgical vehicle, with its interspatial affect far from reduced: it is the site of interaction amongst spectators; of individual and collective reflection.

If we do hear from Mary in the final stretch of our journey, one which intersects with hers, we get to extract information as to the next stage in her own journey, which does not include us: "When I left, I ran. I ran down the street in the rain with bare feet and open eyes. I ran and ran and ran until my feet couldn't take any more and I couldn't tell the difference between the rain and my tears" (Bissett and Smith 2012, 81–83). Mary goes on to tell about heading into the first shop she came across; about the police being summoned; about how time has passed, and her pregnancy is advanced; that without documentation, proving her identity or anything else has been difficult. We also hear that she appears to be—along with many others in similar situations—in a structure that purports to take care of her, though she must wait for that very system to process her into a future; that she is in a Church that provides solace, and that her baby is growing. She closes by reminding us that expressions like 'freedom of movement' are relative; that far from empowering, at best, or, at worst, platitudes, they can be modes of concealment of the fact that, in the name of 'movement', and of the 'freedom' of some at the expense of the freedom of others, tragic crimes are committed, and destinations can far from be taken for granted: "I am the woman free from traffic, travelling an unknown road, doing my best to continue, doing my best to exist" (Bissett and Smith 2012, 81–83).

As researchers suggest, "[l]abouring in invisible and disenfranchised labour sectors, many will never be identified as trafficked and receive the assistance they need" (Kiss et al. 2022, 14). Additionally, it is proposed that "[e]ffective prevention will […] need to tackle the systemic conditions that makes [sic] trafficking of female adolescents invisible, profitable and inconsequential for perpetrators" (Kiss et al. 2022, 1). The geographies of freedom relate directly to the ecologies of care, and Mary is far from an aberration as an adolescent who has fallen pregnant as a result of her non-consensual labour as a slave in the illegal sex industry. A related

survey has shown that "[m]ore than one in four women became pregnant while trafficked, indicating that maternity services offer an important contact point for identification and care" (Bick et al. 2017, 2). It is, perhaps, the ultimate statement to seal the significance of the play's title: those eliminated by a brutal force, in transit, prey to the violent entitlement of others, disappeared and unclaimed, reclaiming, against all odds, some form of recognition of their existence; some form of testimonial and a trace of presence. This allows them to survive, rather than to perish, even if left for dead—or made to live as though they were dead. Like its generic, mass noun title reference, so the play is both specific and not in its locationality: site specificity is required, but it is also thrown into disarray through its very own transitoriness, that allows it to become rooted in different contexts.

It is difficult to imagine a more intuitive formal method to indicate that the issue at the heart of the text is both tangible and slippery; both located in certain contexts and alarmingly universal. This is especially important as an interventionist gesture at a time when, still, some years after the play and closer to our present moment than its premiere, "although the majority of citizens are generally aware of what human trafficking is and consider it to be a problem of crime (rather than a broader human rights concern), they do not consider it to be a problem that affects them directly" (Sharapov 2019, 33). Such attitudes appear to endure despite the fact that, as researchers have also argued, "[h]uman trafficking has received increasing global attention since the adoption in 2000 of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons", while international measures, campaigns and scholarship have further aimed to heighten awareness (Campana 2016, 68).

According to a UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) report, close to contemporary with the play's opening and, we might deduce, capturing the prevailing conditions during the play's research and development stage, "women play a key role as perpetrators of human trafficking. In Europe, […] women make up a larger share of those convicted for human trafficking offences than for most other forms of crime" (2009). A further, substantial contribution of *Roadkill*, then, to illuminating a problem that remains shockingly overlooked is the pivotal role of Martha, who rides with the audience on the bus from the early moments, and who is as crucial to the framing of the piece as Mary. As researchers in the field of women offenders in sexual slavery note,

> The representation of female traffickers in the data is a paradox within the dominant construction. On the one hand, the stereotypical offender targeted through official accounts is constructed as a predatory male with organized crime connections. On the other hand, the application of the legislation has resulted in females representing over a third of convictions, some of whom are prior trafficked victims. (Broad 2015, 1072)

The toxic circularity is exemplified in the play in different ways: there is, we must imagine, an invisible transport that forever plays out in ways not too dissimilar to those we witness in *Roadkill*; that involves vulnerable girls and women forever on the road; whose wheels continue to turn because of the actions of those procuring the financial conditions for the movement, and the inactions of those—systemic and individual actors alike—that fail to intercept them. The play hints at, but does not show us one of the most crucial stages in Mary's journey; the aftermath of her abuse; her methods of surviving trauma. The fact that the play begins and ends by situating its spectators also as passengers on a moving vehicle contributes a major artistic stride to the elucidation of an elusive issue that is even named after a type of movement and mobility: traffic. In so doing, the piece makes the intangible tangible and renders the vague and transient as embodied and located. 'Human traffic', then, is not an empty signifier, but a way of being together, and of sharing space; it is a state that most audience members are unlikely to experience at the darkest end of its semantic spectrum, but of which they can momentarily partake. In that interspatial moment, agency is heightened.

Circles

Cities come with complex spatial and emotional geographies and Rachel De-lahay has highlighted these states in both *Routes* and *Circles*. Although it can be claimed that all plays bear a special bond to the theatre that originates them, in this case this is especially accentuated given that the REP is Birmingham's most emblematic theatre and, especially, that De-lahay's play takes place in this very city, which becomes its notional set as it also provides the thematic canvas. Beyond a backdrop, the city is a presence and force at least equal to that of any character, and the play proves that environments are at least as powerful as human agents, if not more. The play presents the city as vast; familiar and unknowable at the same time. Its borderlines are long drawn up on the map, and, still, the

actors engaging with the city keep reinscribing them through movement that may often repeat, but is not quite the same.

De-lahay stages intuitively, but does not romanticise Birmingham—Britain's second, and, many would agree, embattled second city that does not enjoy quite the same flattering image as other urban centres of comparable or slightly smaller scale across the country. Another element that renders the play significant is that, unlike the oft-repeated idyl of the car, the lone rider, or the joyride through which we come to be introduced and guided through places and stories in many of the visual and/or fictional narratives that we encounter, in this case, it is a different type of vehicle that captures the imagination: the bus. Unlike its more exclusive counterpart, the car, individualised and adapted to its owner's identity and needs—even the contours of their very body—the bus leaves no margin for individuation. It is shared by default, an organum of collective transport, serving the many but unlikely to be considered as a trope of singularity by anyone. This is also where the ingenuity of De-lahay's play lies: in that she infuses emotionalism into that, which does not appear to invite, much less encourage it; that she makes private and personal that which is public, and shared; that she navigates the city's unwieldy environment through the only means that is respectful of that environment, that does not burden, but that relieves its atmospheric pressures, and, also, it would appear, those of its people: collective transport. In the best of plays, binaries of private and public are undermined in multiple ways dramaturgically to evidence that open space belongs to one, as much as to another; and, that it accommodates and is determined by, but, also, exists—and continues—irrespective of human agents, whose transience is superseded by the permanence of site. De-lahay's play, then, mobilises this transience as a dramaturgical trope, and finds the perfect vehicle—literally and metaphorically—for it: Birmingham's number eleven bus.

Histories, individual and collective, are important—essential to an understanding of how they contribute to deepening the impact of fiction. In this case, it serves to probe the importance of the number eleven bus to Birmingham, so as to contextualise its presence and plot-driving agency in *Circles*. A bus is, of course, steered by a driver on a route established by the authorities—but it acquires a life of its own as image and symbol, standing in for something greater than the human agents that determine its route; it becomes iconic in its own right, an intimate part of the city's ecology, a traverser and producer of its scape. Starting in 1926, the number eleven bus has run for almost a century—a vital part

of the city's biorhythm, witness and record to its immense changes and veritable touchstones, an affirmation of its local identity (Cardwell 2021). In summer 2021, the service, which has been distinctive for its circular route extending at a 25-mile radius that rendered it amongst the longest urban bus itineraries in Europe, was split into shorter routes, the outcome of roadworks at the city's Northern edge that led to severe traffic, delays and unreliable service (Cardwell 2021). Such narratives of congestion on the roads of Birmingham are not uncommon; what is, are accounts of the cityscape—and its iconic bus—that are idealising and even idyllic:

> Route 11 comes in two flavours: 11A (anticlockwise) or 11C (clockwise), each affording two hours or more of orbital delight as the bus circumnavigates the heart of the city known for chocolate, custard, commerce and culture. Route 11 never touches the centre of Birmingham nor the city boundary, instead maintaining a creative tension between the two as it tracks a circular trail through the suburbs. Culture comes in many guises in modern Birmingham and Route 11 touches them all. [...] This is a provocative orbit through Birmingham's edgy and neglected territories, a journey that plunges through deepest Yardley and distant Handsworth before returning inexorably and inevitably to the little Utopia that is Bournville. (Gardner 2011)

Reports of the precise duration of the route vary across different sources, with a two-hour duration emerging as the minimum standard; in Delahay's play, one character makes a precise statement as to the route's duration: "[t]wo hours, twenty-five minutes" (2014, 40).

The symbolic and embodied significance of the route and the bus itself to the city's ecology was emphasised when, after a major political event, the Brexit referendum vote, the BBC turned to number eleven bus passengers to capture the pulse of the city, conducting interviews on the vehicle. Birmingham had been one of the most tightly fought votes of the referendum, producing a 'Leave' result (Stewart 2019). In a major transitional moment for the UK, arguably capturing the different approaches to internationalism and to ecologies of co-existence more than any other in recent history, the number eleven bus emerged as the ultimate interspace. As the accompanying text to the video document notes, "[t]he number 11 bus takes two and a half hours to travel the city… passing through areas that voted Leave and ones that voted Remain" (Stewart 2019). The tension ground is laid out bare five years after the premiere of De-lahay's play and three years after the vote, registering fatigue as different lives

move within and compose the diverse landscape of the city, evidencing the playwright's capacity of identifying the transitory site as a space in its own right, worthy of documentation and artistic representation.

Reviewing *Circles* as part of its subsequent Tricycle run, critics commented that "[h]ome here is a metaphorical prison, peopled by failures and policed by mothers" (Sierz 2014). The need to escape, if only to be rotated around the familiar site of belonging and disappointment and returned to the same site of domestic grievance, emerges vividly. The everywhere and nowhere of the bus becomes the only destination, a means and purpose all unto itself. As is additionally noted, the text "shows clearly and forcefully the cycles of violence in both personal relationships and in the wider society" (Sierz 2014), and, I might concur, the grounds on which these play out. The vehicle, therefore, becomes both the set and dramaturgical device for the story. The same reviewer comments that "[o]n this trip to nowhere the stories of violence, and tales of stabbings, begin to suck the characters into another kind of viciousness. Gradually, the ripples of violent incidents spread out until all the characters are tainted in some way" (Sierz 2014). Circles within circles begin to open as the same journey—but differently played out, enhanced by each encounter—unfolds and the play's plot develops.

The violence observed in the above commentary, and which another reviewer, reflecting on the Birmingham REP production, describes as "victims of domestic abuse […] becom[ing] trapped in a carapace of self-loathing" (Hickling 2014), with loops repeating, refers to the parallel plot unfolding on the bus. In its opening stage direction, De-lahay's text positions its action firmly in Birmingham, noting: "*We're either on the top deck of the No. 11 bus or in the living room of a two-up, two-down terrace house*", while "*Two moveable benches represent bus seats and a home sofa*" (2014, 14). There are key pieces of information contained here: that irrespective of subsequent productions, and although the play itself is an itinerant creative entity, it is always rooted in one specific locality; that the attention that the playwright pays to the city as an ecosystem for the plot of the play through its specific scape that both conditions and is conditioned by the action, is a priority; that the life of the bus is set in parallel to domestic life, as the vehicle accommodates temporarily, and perhaps even shelters, but does not provide a home as such; it only offers passing relief from it. Moreover, De-lahay's directions immediately implicate the audience: the first person plural is crucial. We, the community of spectators, whose own local community may or may not be the city of Birmingham

depending on where we are encountering the play, are, for the purposes of the narrative, also 'located' in Birmingham; and we are also embarking on a journey across these characters' environments and experiences, as they take us along for a ride.

The collectivity of public transport, De-lahay reminds us, is, for all its potential awkwardness and undesirability, a component of everyday lives and, as such, carries agency, not only stalling action as it holds bodies in situ but also catalysing it, on these same grounds. The locations that De-lahay specifies are the ones that house the trauma of abuse, even if experienced indirectly, and of chronic systemic inequalities, embedded in the tissue of everyday life performances, and a motivation for seeking escape, however in passing. Whether we are dealing with fixed or mobile sites, the text flirts closely with temporariness and permanence, which it views as a non-binary, the one forever producing the other. The very fact that it is the same objects on set that flexibly serve to represent both spaces—the bus and the home—and the flow between them suggests this interrelationship.

The two spaces intersect more explicitly at the end of the play when the crossover character, fifteen-year-old Demi, enters the house of Phyllis, her grandmother, also finding her mother, Angela (Phyllis's daughter) there. Demi has finally left the bus, both literally and metaphorically. It would appear that she has done so having fulfilled a mission, not at all an aimless rider killing time, as we might initially assume. Demi's time on the bus has served two purposes: to avoid the abuse that her mother sustains at home at the hands of her partner (Demi's stepfather), and to strike up a friendship with a boy one year older than her, Malachi, recently a habitual commuter on the bus on account of his car being repaired. We are given this information as part of a call that Malachi is having when we first encounter him, riding the bus, when he and Demi meet—she is seated some rows in front of him. On his call, Malachi also mentions Bullring. Birmingham's main shopping centre and, arguably, a core part of the urban biorhythm, this is not the only site to be namechecked in the play; several others—from shops and schools, to neighbourhoods and suburbs—follow. But the significance of Bullring is considerable: in itself indicating a circular shape, and, by the etymology of its name and its commercial function, a site not only of recurring visitation loop but also of encounter, it also opens and closes the main circle of events in the play, being mentioned, once more, towards the finale. Here, Malachi, having grown familiar with Demi through their repeat encounters on the

bus, narrates to her an incident of how, as a favour to his cousin, and with the rationale of protecting his honour as part of a retaliation process towards a group that had targeted him, he was complicit in an attack that involved luring an old acquaintance to the city centre, where he would be confronted by a group of youths. The event escalated into violence—and a stabbing. It would appear that the elusive boyfriend that Demi refers to in her conversations with Malachi in fact exists—and is, as it is eventually revealed, that same person.

In the space of a week, Malachi's car remains unfixed; Demi has made an acquaintance that she has cultivated into something bordering a romantic beginning; and an encounter has been arranged, on the site of the bus, where, Demi, speaking to Malachi, ensures that he remains on board for that precise moment when her boyfriend and his friends will enter to confront him. The outcome of this encounter, which will take place in transient space, on shifting ground, and will rewrite the narrative of the bus in the play from 'safe' space away from dreary lives and violent homes to a site of danger and exposure, is unknown to us. When, in the final scene of the play, Demi visits her grandmother, Malachi's narrative does not continue. What has happened to him remains uncertain, but what does appear certain, despite the bus opening a parenthetical space in Demi's life on that same week that her mother opens the same parenthetical space in hers, deciding to walk away from her partner and from domestic violence, is that the cycle of violence will likely continue. As Demi makes a plea to her mother for them to return home, it is implied that, despite the interval, the pull of the site that exercises control, the permanent structure that embodies the force of gravity of systemic injustice, will prevail. The interval, then, has already been the event. We have heard, earlier, Angela confront Phyllis with "I don't want her [Demi] here in this house with you. You're polluted. You'll infect her […]... you're not 'safe'" (De-lahay 2014, 46–48). The reference is to Phyllis's own tolerance of domestic violence, and what, to Angela's eyes, is likely to have been a tacit perpetuation of the motif that, through this behaviour, has resulted in a pattern that she herself is now reproducing. Once more it emerges that the bus has been the only 'safe' space for Demi—but that space is transient, and its disruptive, centrifugal pull is not stronger than the centripetal force of the 'home'.

As we have seen in Urry, mobilities are profoundly classed; moreover, they are not only an expression of contemporary societies, but also a constitutive factor of these. Discussing how spatiality frames the human

experience, including as concerns metaphor—a consideration directly relevant to the title of De-lahay's play, which, as previously, refers to the bus route as much as to behavioural loops—Urry considers nomadism and references Rosi Braidotti (Urry 2000, 28, Braidotti 1994). "[M]obilities, as both metaphor and as process, are at the heart of social life", notes Urry (2000, 49). Nomadism might be linked to longer itineraries, to distances greater than those covered in De-lahay's text. But, I argue, the characterisation also applies to the play's young protagonists, who are navigating their city while also navigating an age of transition in themselves, both drawing on experience of the cityscape and discovering as they make their way on the bus. Let us consider, for example, Malachi's so-called tour of Birmingham, where he reacts with surprise to Demi's lack of familiarity with certain parts of the city—an unfamiliarity that is strange for a wanderer like her, and which, given the ultimate revelation of the play as to her purpose, also functions as a precursor.

We have seen previously the concept of the tour guide being engaged with in *The Container* in a critique that reveals it as trope of privilege; the kind of service that a disadvantaged subject does not have access to. The number eleven bus in *Circles* serves as the means through which transient observation can take place; a non-tourist tour of a city that is revealed through intimacy but with no sentimentalism, at the same time as it is shown that the bus serves as a transporting device, but that the idyl is gone. That is, there is no lust to see a place or to engage with the surroundings, because they are not awe-inspiring, or even attractive as such. Once more the concept of the grand tour is rendered null and void—if not a relic, then, at least, the trope of those privileged enough to have a choice. Malachi's tone here captures the sentiment:

> I'll give you [Demi] your very own tour guide. [*Putting on a voice.*] On the right-hand side we have Handsworth cricket ground. A very popular resort in summer, famous for its well-kept grass and West Indian food kitchen on the side.
>
> […]
>
> Venture there at this hour mind and you're more likely to find crack addicts and runaways, along with one Rasta named Bob who reckons he's training for the Olympics.
>
> Over to the left we have the student halls for UCE. A perfect selection of our future doctors, lawyers and bankers. If you look carefully you can

> probably see them philosophising away over herbal medicines in the back seat of that tinted-out Corsa.
>
> As we continue down the hill we head towards the shopping destination of the rich and famous. Our very own 'ONE STOP'. You want it? ONE STOP has it. All under the one roof! (De-lahay 2014, 32-35)

Urry references Braidotti's "'special affection for the places of transit that go with travelling: stations and airport lounges, trams, shuttle buses and check-in areas. In between zones where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present'" (2000, 28, Braidotti 1994). In *Circles*, the corresponding site would be the bus stop or the depot; but the circularity of the route that De-lahay focuses on, which troubles the meaning of a clear endpoint, or destination, as well as the embodied usage of the bus by Demi and Malachi, which suspends its pure utilitarianism for the purposes of an elastic time furnished by the public transport vehicle that serves as interspace of encounter, renders it both the space and means of travelling, and of its own suspension. The durationality experienced by characters and audience, or, no less significantly, its very impression (vis-à-vis the limited duration of the play itself), further serves this effect.

Urry discusses extensively the emergence of mass transport, historicising its impact at the level of the organisation of everyday lives (e.g. concentrating on rail networks) (2000, 49–76), as well as the resulting relationship between mobility and environment. Part of the analysis juxtaposes this with the car's own transformative effects:

> car drivers are located within a place of dwelling that insulates them from the environment that they pass through. The sights, sounds, tastes, temperatures and smells of the city […] are reduced to the two-dimensional view through the car windscreen, something prefigured by railway journeys of the nineteenth century. The environment beyond the windscreen is an alien other […]. (2000, 63)

The hypothesis is tested in *Circles*: Malachi only rides the bus because his car is in the garage; still, his knowledge of the city and the state of being attuned to it is such that proves that he is far from desensitised to his environment. Driving and riding, respectively, are indeed indicative of class and status: in early conversations, Demi dismisses Malachi by saying: "Pedestrians aren't my type" (De-lahay 2014, 19). Cars themselves, wherever they are mentioned in the play, stand metonymically for

their owners, and for a gendered power performed excessively. Demi's boyfriend drives "A Mini Cooper S, in gunmetal, with the black roof", as she emphatically notes (De-lahay 2014, 20). Malachi escalates the antagonism, if only as a way to keep talking to Demi, and to present himself as a worthy prospect. He asks: "That not sting? […] Knowing your man's driving a Mini Cooper S with the black roof thingy and yet you still have to catch the bus!" (De-lahay 2014, 20). The car is the desired object, the measure of worth; the bus is diminishing—or so it would appear, until Demi reclaims it as a space, and as part of her self-performance: "I'm an independent woman. I don't need no man to pick me up or drop me off no place" (De-lahay 2014, 20).

Elsewhere, and with considerable dramatic irony given that Malachi is unaware both of the violence awaiting him at the hands of Demi's boyfriend and of the histories of domestic violence inscribed against the women in her family, Malachi teases Demi "Don't snap at me'cause you're getting beaten by your Mini-Cooper-driving boyfriend" (De-lahay 2014, 35–37). The bus, other than a space of peace and community, versus a site of gender performance of machismo and competition, is also formative in terms of Demi claiming access to the collective and, as it were, taking up public space as a young woman. We root for the agency that the bus affords her, and that she affords the bus, a temporary but significant carrier of her selfhood-in-formation, a vehicle literally and metaphorically, to be true. There is, of course, also the alternative deduction, which is that her boyfriend is recovering from a stabbing—so he is not in a position to drive. Demi's access to the city is now other; she observes more sites (if not quite sights, as above) and registers these through fresh eyes, unlimited by the isolationist conditioning of the car.

Urry expands upon the problematics of cars, the spaces they imply, and the ways in which they are reciprocally anticipated by spaces. By reference to Marc Augé, he delves into "car-only environments – the quintessential non-places of super modernity", adding that "[s]uch car-environments or non-places are neither nor rural, local nor cosmopolitan. They are sites of pure mobility […]" (2000, 193). Such is the fundamental difference between the collective and individual vehicle: that the former connects, whereas the other separates. But there are intricacies in the pattern, and sites not categorisable under this neither/nor hypothesis, because they are both/and: both intended to be inhabited and peopled, and remote and unreachable, except by a vehicle that takes on a tremendous route, almost disproportionate to a city's standard contours (let us remind ourselves the

number eleven's erstwhile status as the longest bus route in Europe). The bus, then, and the peri-sites that it traverses in the city, are not non-places: they are interspaces that both accommodate and transport; that both invite a dweller and do not yield to their access needs.

Urry also develops the concept of 'dwelling' proceeding from Martin Heidegger, noting that "contemporary forms of dwelling almost always involve direct forms of mobility", with "certain components of such mobilities, such as maps, cars, trains, paths, computers […] powerfully reconstruct[ing] the relations of belonging and travelling" (2000, 132). Continuing to engage with Heidegger (here the concept of "the bridge"), Urry proposes that "people dwell in and through being both at home and away, through the dialectic of roots and routes" (2000 132–33). This latter dialectic becomes corporeally performed in *Circles*, where we see it in action. The city carries its stativity, and "remain[s] heavy with time" (Urry 2000, 139), however much it is seen in motion.

De-lahay's characters are both mobile and fixed; both on their way, and deeply entrenched in their context. The city's weight compels as becomes obvious in their engagements with its scape throughout, and not least when Demi recollects, upon encountering a familiar spot:

> DEMI. Ha! Look! My leisure centre! You see those swimming baths over there? That's where I had my first kiss.
>
> […]
>
> DEMI. It's closed down now. They're rebuilding it. Do you know a kid drowned in there? Slipped and banged his head on the top diving board before falling off. Can you imagine that? Ridiculous. Like something from an Ian McEwan book.
>
> […]
>
> DEMI. But imagine, something awful like that happens and all memories can be erased with a clean slate. Fresh start. It's perfect. (De-lahay 2014, 48-51)

Spaces regenerate and cities continue, but they build upon their pasts; the layering, as we see from Demi's narration, does not so much erase as it augments these histories. The bus itself is a historical witness of transitions, retaining the inner life of the city. Then, the passenger as witness and observing agent—here Demi—is also a record, with the invisible flow,

the soft space between site and observer, the locus of memory as an inter-spatial and cross-temporal interconnector. The only possibility of escape from these narratives of the past of places and of past selves is transience: movement that carries forth, even without delivering onwards.

Demi and Malachi live (in) their city, while also being forever transported around and away from it. *Circles* performs this both/and in mobility in action. "[M]obility systems are organized around the processes that circulate people, objects and information at various spatial ranges and speeds. In any society, there will tend to be a dominant process of circulation" write Elliott and Urry (2010, 19). Here, also, is the significance of the way in which De-lahay imagines the interspace of the number eleven bus: the vehicle both operates as part of its prescribed network circularity, and is used by the agents, Demi and Malachi, that do not determine its route, but that effectuate its function—an interjection, a pause, a precipitation of events; ultimately, an encounter beyond the realm of linearities—in a disruptive way. They both make use of, and intervene against the vehicle's anticipated performance, staging, in its temporal crevices, an alternative series of moments.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on three plays: Clare Bayley's *The Container*, Cora Bissett and Stef Smith's *Roadkill*, and Rachel De-lahay's *Circles*. The shared space of the three plays is shifting ground: for each of them, even though they also take place in moments of fixity and grounded site specificity, it is a vehicle and its resulting movement that becomes the strongest plot pivot and distinguishing element. As this chapter has shown, when it comes to engaged spectatorship, all plays invite us along a difficult ride: the sights include vast darkness and human rights violations under the guise of a better life, one that has been paid for handsomely, with no guarantee of deliverance or delivery, as in *The Container*. The sights also include the darker corners of familiar cities, where a destination is eventually reached, one that reveals to us that our moments of collective transport transience may well be shared with human slaves, and traffickers—and that our quotidian routines of travel and traversal of a city may also well be the defining moments of a precarious individual's own life—as in *Roadkill*. The sights, no less, might include cities that never move, rooted in their spaces, but that forever proliferate, as in a loop, with images generated through the window and windshield of the bus,

as in a View-Master, reproducing, and replicating, histories of violence moving cyclically—as in *Circles*.

These plays, and this chapter, have revealed that the vehicle is the interspace in which communities meet, gather and share, sometimes in ways that are mundane; sometimes in ways that are tentative; while, at other times, in ways that are threatening. The plays discussed employ the mobile interspace as the schema through which to query which communities, precisely, we are talking about; how these come to be constituted on uneven structures of privilege; how public space, and its corresponding transport, are accessible, or not; and how such space is, in fact, signposted and mapped by the rights of some to experience it freely, and by the ways in which others are kept contained, at a distance, observing but not accessing; being both within and without at the same time—whether we talk about space or authority. The speed of movement disorientates—and the ecologies of mobility, contributing to the broader ecologies of the environments that we call our cities, depend on the collective looking, rather than the mere gazing; however tempting it may be to deflect—to direct the eyes beyond the bus window, beyond the darkness of the container, out onto the impersonal transitoriness of the street, that which is both ours, and not.

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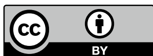

CHAPTER 5

The Limbo: Liminal Loci and Timeless Travels

Limbo is often regarded as an undesirable state, one that might land upon a person, without having been selected by them; but limbo can happen to non-human entities too, also to places. Like people can be left in states of anticipation, repetition and uncertainty, so objects and sites might remain unused, uninhabited, abandoned—waiting for their turn, (re)purposing or (re)discovery. Sites might transition through time visible only through the actions of human agents, even though it is they that both endure and outperform the very transience of these agents. Limbo is, arguably, the by-default condition of stativity. This chapter, acknowledging such historical and contextual connotations of the term, takes, however, a different approach to its understanding and contextualisation as dynamic, and of the state and, more importantly, the space, it produces, as one of opportunity, intervention, interpellation and interjection. Limbo, that is, is examined in this chapter as a state and site that might be desired, and even chosen; likewise, it is also examined as a condition that might be, even if not chosen by the agent it concerns, one that is dynamic, active and motional. In the overall discussion of this book, this chapter seeks to understand limbo as a mental, emotional, conceptual and, also, physical interspace, that might exist separately from traditional—and confining—time/space measurements and parameters, and that brims with potential rather than being thought of as a form of punishment, or a Tantalic context of perennial abjection. The three plays that this chapter engages with in pursuing these concerns are ~~*Not*~~ *the End of the World* by Chris

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Bush (2021); *The Sewing Group* by E V Crowe (2016); and *The Glow* by Alistair McDowall (2022).

Within the context of 2016 as more broadly a year of watershed political change and social flux from the Brexit referendum to the American Presidential Election, it is essential to note that *The Sewing Group*, directed and designed by Stewart Laing, opened at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs on, arguably, the most dramatic of weeks: specifically, on Thursday, 10 November, a mere two days after the US Election. Questions regarding the historical agency of women, and of women's communities, were emerging in the foreground powerfully, with tangible fears of regression into past, institutionally sanctioned subjugations of women, vis-à-vis women's role in society, their access, their strides and their futures. While we might think that, as international communities involved in such developments we may have, once more, transitioned from moments like these, in 2022, as these lines were being written, the legacy of the administration that emerged as a result of this very election continues to shape events. In 2022, that is, the US Supreme Court overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling by a majority vote constituted by Justices appointed by Republican administrations, of whom three by the Trump administration. Yet another page in the ongoing narrative of the policing of women's bodies was therefore written, delivering a blow to abortion rights and women's jurisdiction over their own reproductive systems (Totenberg and McCammon 2022). History, then, as such examples, but, also, as the plays examined in this chapter show, moves cyclically, and, sometimes, indeed, in ever expanding, mutually contained, concentric circles. A woman's choice—personal, professional and both combined—of where and how to exist also emerges as a major interconnecting thread across the three plays.

All three plays examined in this chapter perform a spectacular deep-dive into time, which is shown to be anything but linear, ordered, controllable and predictable. Their combined engagement with temporalities and histories is remarkable, spanning the year 1348 to (plausibly) the current moment, or, at least, since the time point of the plays' final segment is undefined, our present moment in the theatre at the time of performance. At the heart of each of these plays, we encounter women: thinkers, labourers, dwellers, travellers and members of communities of peers in their ever-shifting contexts and possibilities, with transit emerging as a particularly relevant concept in all three texts. It is not only the span of time that is exceptional in how these plays work dramaturgically; it is also

their combined possibilities in parallel unfolding plot actions and thematic weave. Amidst all the possibilities in the relationship between individual and time, as well as between individual and fellow human and non-human agents, the plays also take on the major issues of sisterhood; motherhood; and, in the most significant intersectional dramaturgy that connects all three, questions of community, ecology, environmental erosion/corrosion and climate crisis.

If *The Sewing Group* premiered in that specific momentous week of 2016, *~~Not~~ the End of the World* and *The Glow* opened within mere months of each other in the autumn and winter of 2021–22 to a world in tentative recovery from COVID-19, as theatre spectators began to return to auditoria with varying measures of self- and community protection in place. It was a good occasion to revisit time in itself, in terms of appreciating the historical agencies towards our animate and inanimate contexts and environments, not least given our present viral predicament, while, also, asking how that very crisis might serve as a filter for the revisiting of the past, and of behavioural (personal and social) patterns towards the development of better ways of being together, cohabiting the world and forming part of each other's—and the universe's—ecologies. Both productions were, further, steered by two major directors, Katie Mitchell (*~~Not~~ the End of the World*) and Vicky Featherstone (*The Glow*), each with their own histories of impact in the institutions that hosted the premieres (the Schaubühne Berlin and Royal Court Theatre Downstairs respectively). The premieres, in emblematic spaces and featuring prominent artistic teams, then, served well to signal a meaningful theatrical return thematically and socially, with the concept of 'return' and (re)tracing one's steps resonating between the works, all the while in tandem (more than juxtaposed) with the concept of flow and transit.

The three texts featured in this chapter are, ultimately, exemplary of the dramaturgical turn that Chris Megson captures here:

> the moment is conceived […] as the locus of subjective origin and awakening, the vertiginous site of encounter where present and eternity become mutually enfolded, and the utopic point of embarkation from crushing social realities into a more liberated personal imaginary. […T]he theatrical demarcation of the moment opens up, however fleetingly, numinous dimensions of experience that intimate the possibility of self-realization or transcendence within alternative worlds. Indeed, one of the striking

> features of new writing for British theatre over the past two decades is its arbitration of moments of dramatic intensity that ‘pause’, rupture or entirely reconfigure the flow of stage action. (33–34)

Today, such thematic and formal pluralism also serves as indication that, post-COVID-19, a certain maximalism was needed and expected in terms of beginning to come to terms, as a theatre and citizen community, with the extraordinary challenges that we had been experiencing as a result of the pandemic for a nearly two-year period.

Attending the productions of *~~Not~~ the End of the World* and *The Glow*, the former with an obligatory face mask, the latter also with a mask, but, this time, as a means of acting (in a minority) upon discretion in an audience—and institution—that had freshly adopted the UK government’s removal of the requirement for an indoor face covering, the sense of one’s own community was heightened. Agency, embodied and performed in the spirit of community preservation, felt newly charged, adding layers to the forensic journeys on agency that both plays undertake thematically and as we feel time splitting apart and reopening to accommodate new moments, and new fissures. It is difficult to imagine, in recent history at least, a moment of social transition more corporeally felt, or more in step with the plots of the plays themselves, given their own emphases on temporalities in motion and refolding. Such factors do not only interconnect the two more recent plays, but, also, build yet one more bridge to the earlier one, in terms of how we might re-read it today: *The Sewing Group* revolves around voluntary confinement, sanitised relationships, task and responsibility distribution for the purposes of carrying out a mutual service to the community. Its distanced interpersonal tones and the repercussions of failures being as pronounced as they are, the play not only reads well some years after its premiere, but also actively encourages revisiting post-COVID-19.

The Sewing Group

Crowe’s play is the most contained of those discussed in this chapter both in terms of the space in which it opened and of the locality within which its action is set. It is also the most unusual of the three plays, and perhaps of most plays discussed in this book, in that its scenic world is, to the greatest extent, determined by one person—here Laing, serving as both director and designer. This is especially significant given its stark

image and eventual, equally striking, reversal. As one reviewer comments regarding the overall atmosphere of the play, it "talks through images, and through the lighting of Mike Brookes. In between the brief candlelit scenes there is a blackout so total that actors, unable to see anything as they whisk around into new positions, have reported feeling unnerved, in constant fear of sitting on each other. The disorientation seems to have fed their performances. All of them suggest wariness exceptionally well" (Clapp 2016). Others note that *The Sewing Group* "looks like an extension of [the playwright's] fascination with closed communities but […] turns out to be a puzzling if intriguing piece about the influence of technology on the human mind" (Billington 2016), therefore oscillating between two worlds. Both reviewers emphasise space, its sharing and enclosure, refraining from naming the surprise reveal in the play, which, as above, is a matter of space and environment. As it happens, these characters that we may have assumed to inhabit "*1700s rural England*", of which the set is "*suggestive*" (Crowe 2016, 15), in fact share the space and time of the audience, as the play's plot, for all its immersion in history, actually unfolds in the present moment.

There is a form of dialogue between *The Sewing Group* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Welkin* (2020), with the latter actually being set in the kind of spatiotemporal locality that Crowe's play emulates: they are both concerned with deep time, and with the timelessness of certain crises and patterns in community behaviours historically conceptualised—particularly communities of women as labourers within the spaces they occupy. Michael Billington's review raises important questions, resonating with both texts: "[i]s the past an artificial construct? Have we created a false image of a paradisal, pre-industrial England? Are we any happier for living in a hectic modern world, where the brain is bombarded by incessant data?" (2016). In Billington's view, at under an hour and a half, the play does not allow enough space for these—otherwise worthwhile—questions to be handled fully, which, he further observes, is owing and amounts to "the play […being] too compressed to deal with so many big issues and set[ting] up a questionable binary choice between a confined past and a limitless present" (2016). Before taking on Billington's critique, it is worth noting that he does acknowledge the fact that the play functions on "several levels" (a comment made in the context of praise for the staging), not least recognising the important function of the character of C/Maggie, who operates as the go-between, effectively embodying and thereby establishing the interstitial spatiality of the play as its action

ground (2016). Billington describes the state as that of "the disruptive outsider [that] successfully straddles two worlds: she both inhabits the measured milieu of a village community and embodies the feverish restlessness of the present" (2016). It is this both/and that concerns me here, and that, in my view, serves a case against the binarism that Billington observes in the play in the earlier quotation cited.

I agree entirely that the play crafts an interspace that hinges on C/Maggie: she exists between elsewhere and here, then and now; but, at the same time, the action of the play occurs within a liminal locality that goes deeper than that: it is the experiential site of Maggie in limbo. She wishes for herself an elsewhere that she at first procures by becoming embedded in what appears as a historical setting but in fact proves to be an expensive staged immersive experience. Subsequently, as the experience draws to an end, she seeks to retain it, uncertain regarding her overall bearings and rootedness in her present-day context. Even the final moment of the play, where Maggie is about to enter the elevator to leave the site of the so-called Simpler Times experience is marked by Crowe's script in a meaningful way: "*The lift arrives like a time machine*" (2016, 54–66). The elevator, too, is one of the ultimate 'in-between' spaces, both transitional and expediting, transferring and confining, opening up and claustrophobic. It, too, produces limbo, but in this context its function is further heightened: even as the lift doors open, Maggie will continue to be in transit; we do not leave her rooted anywhere. Rather, she is in perennial motion in an unsatisfactory present with no certain context of arrival at a next stage or destination. With the ruse of the 'experience' revealed to the audience, as the company (in the sense of both actors and employees of the contractor delivering the 'experience') prepare to stage a new event, and as Maggie inspects the scene of transformation into a cowboy setting (the environment for the 'experience' of one of Maggie's colleagues), Crowe's direction is most revealing: "*The past looks beautiful. The clock counter resets to zero*" (2016, 54–66). It is the same clock that has been counting the time of the experience. As it turns out, time was finite all along, both for Maggie, for whom it may have felt durational and even infinite, and for ourselves as spectators. The latter juxtaposition cross-occurs in the three plays examined in this chapter.

The disorientation that Susannah Clapp identifies in her review is crucial (2016), not only as a trope for the actors and characters, but, also, as a general theme in the play. Disorientation, producing a radical defamiliarisation of space, spatiality—as in one's own locationality in a

given context—and perception, can be linked to limbo. It is an uncomfortable state that can, however, be rendered dynamic if it is to generate a re-evaluation of one's own surroundings brought forward by the moment of disruption and discontinuity. That Billington's review opens up more widely to reconsider constructions and perceptions of time and the troubling of the relationship between temporalities past, present and future not only as a trope pertaining to Crowe's protagonist, but, also, as a national characteristic, is significant (2016). It points to the social interventionism of the play towards the disruption of the singular capitalist labouring experience, as well as of dominant national narratives based on rural idyls that may have never existed. The latter is also underlined in *The Welkin* through its visceral exposition of uneven domestic labour tilting heavily on the side of women.

Still, however imperfect and a construct, the limbo locality that the past produces is the space in which Maggie, in the character of C within the dramaturgy of the specific 'experience', appears to wish to remain. Those revealing stage directions ("*The past looks beautiful*" and "*The clock counter resets to zero*"), returning to Urry's "clock-time" (1994, 135), are even more meaningful on a larger scale. That is, there is now utter discord between so-called objective time and Maggie's deep time temporality, enhanced by immersion to a 'past' that has rendered her aware of her embeddedness in a lager time-space continuum, comparable to that of The Woman in *The Glow*, or to the one negotiated in the academic debates of ~~*Not*~~ *the End of the World*. It is for this reason that I take another view to Billington, whose overall assessment of the play I find, however, layered and nuanced. That is, as the review itself acknowledges, the "both" / "and" in terms of experience is possible (Billington 2016): the intervention of the play is not in answering, but in asking questions from a perspective of gender and privilege, in order to evidence the universal interconnectors of different women's embodied ecologies as labourers and agents across time, and in different, yet experientially overlapping environments. I appreciate the ambiguity of Crowe's stage directions, which may well be interpreted as authenticating the past-present binary that Billington expresses reservation about. In my view, however, the limbo that C/Maggie perceives is a way of diving into the potentialities and dissatisfactions in both past and present, precisely because they are seen as a continuum that lasts indefinitely, despite the orthodoxy of attempts to categorise time in neatly self-defined and contained clusters of 'experience'. Time, as the play shows as, is cross-referential. The

interspace that Crowe builds is precisely a way of dismantling the binary towards proving this hypothesis.

The year following the play's premiere, Crowe named *The Sewing Group* as a most challenging play writing-wise, because of actively working to "let the play come in waves through a concentric shape, building to a point of overwhelming, rather than launching a guided missile and watching it travel through three acts and arrive at its inevitable target" (Thompson 2017). It is telling that none of the three plays examined here, in their shared preoccupation with time and space as fluidities adheres to a three-act structure. The exploratory process that Crowe describes speaks to the discoveries of the play itself in terms of the relationship of human subjects to being and time, not only their own but that of others with whom they need to co-exist, co-produce and co-create. The immersive process is deep, hence non-linear. Crowe additionally identifies the observation of women's agencies and capabilities as a central force in the work: "[h]ow good women are, how many different women there are, the limitlessness of what women can perform [...]. Their fearlessness, work ethic, skill, wit, stamina, fortitude, resilience" (Thompson 2017). The diversity in women, explored not only through different characters, but, also, through the diversities contained within one and the same person is a theme carrying across *The Sewing Group*. It concerns both the literal taking on of parts in the staging of the experience, and the equally debilitating and empowering emotions that C/Maggie experiences in the arc of the play. The diversity in the female actor (in the broadest sense of the term), and, likewise, the proliferation in the possibilities of one singular character, interconnects this chapter's case studies.

In the same context Crowe notes that a motivating force behind *The Sewing Group* was to account for standing on the precipice of an immense shift: the playwright describes this as imagining "that the start of the Industrial Revolution might have felt similar to now, a time of massive change, where entire cultural value systems were demoted, eclipsed and replaced with the mechanised and the new" (Thompson 2017). The immensity of the moment as event, its weight and its far-reaching implications emerge clearly, as does a concern with technological advancement and its capitalist appropriation. It is the latter that produces and maintains the intricate relationship between innovation (as product in itself), the economy and time—and especially our counting of, and our relationship with it, both macro- and micro-conceived: from the distribution and organisation of time into chunks and periods, to the digital clock leaving

no margin for stretching, both creating the limbo space and demolishing it, at least on practical terms.

The characters of Crowe's play, in the order they appear on the playscript, are introduced as E, C/Maggie, A, F and Mac, B and D/Sally. According to Crowe's directions, all are female except for F/Mac. The set is "*A room made solely of untreated wood*" in which we see "*Five low, wooden stools*" and action unfolds under "*Candlelight*" (Crowe 2016, 13, 15). F introduces C as having arrived from a neighbouring village and Crowe's direction that "*C stands adrift, unsure where to put herself*" is revealing (2016, 5). To C, this is a new and fluid space—'adrift', she finds herself in-between; in limbo. The re-routing has to be immediate, because she has already landed somewhere and there is no luxury of time, except to attempt to place oneself in an already, likely long unfolding narrative and entrenched structure. As Crowe's extraordinarily short scenes (an important similarity to Bush's play) begin to unravel, C attempts to mine information: through references to and questions about the land, she attempts to locate herself, as much as others. "What kind of crops do you farm?" she asks; but A denies her any certainty, focusing on the durational task at hand—the sewing (2016): "The stitches, they catch if they get too big, she says" (Crowe 2016, 15–16). C's adjustment period is expedited and uncomfortable: she moves to open a window; she changes her stool—and her space/time perceptions are quickly revealed as different from those of her peers when she attempts to establish another middle space where activities can be combined, clearly driven by the compromised attention spans of the modern individual accustomed to multitasking and varying distractions. She interrogates the "*while*" as a multitude, only to be told that it is durational and mono-dimensional: that is, nothing else transpires during the sewing but the sewing itself (Crowe 2016, 16, original emphasis). Reflecting on the play's eventual revelation of the sewing group as a package experience, the disorientation that we detect in Maggie in scene seven is significant:

A. Did you sleep well last night?

C. I'm confused now.

A. How are you this morning?

> C. My mind's gone blank.
> *They sew slowly*. (Crowe 2016, 17)

The spatiotemporal fissure of the in-between context becomes all the more poignant when considering that, in scene six, it has been preceded by C's question: "Is it really, really noisy or really, really quiet? I can't tell" (Crowe 2016, 17). Boundaries blur, senses fuse; the interspace takes hold.

Crowe astutely intermixes contemporary capitalist jargon appropriations (e.g. B's comment "Sewing is an exercise in self-development") with what might have otherwise been genuine tutelage for skills and perseverance as regards the time-demanding singular task (Crowe 2016, 18). The stage directions are playful, emphasising the durational: a note indicating that the characters are sewing, for example, is repeated throughout, not only reinforcing the act, but, also, querying why we might expect that anything else might be happening—why that should not be enough to fill the void by itself; to create, occupy and populate that space (Crowe 2016). By the time we come to scene thirteen, C appears to be settling in—even to be ready to, to use another term that has been appropriated by resource management discourses in workplace contexts, assume responsibility. She argues for a "stronger design [...with] Double the detail" (Crowe 2016, 20). Suddenly, the durational appears a burden to seasoned members of the group, who protest: "It will take us twice as long" (A); "At least! Our arms will ache" (B), or, later, even "Our arms will fall off" (also B) (Crowe 2016, 20). The physical strain of labour, the deep association of time with it and the body as the only medium for the delivery of the output are fleshed out further. But C is settling into this new time/space arrangement that is now taking hold in her frame of perception, becoming somehow old, and somehow familiar: "I can see how the pattern works now", she says, in a statement that can be interpreted as meaning directly the sewing artefact, or the distribution of power in the relationships amongst workers—and how this is proliferated through time and routine (Crowe 2016, 20).

Scene fifteen consists merely of reflective silence, before F makes a very brief remark; we begin to feel the lack of clarity between silence and noise—the density that both can equally create as they fill and punctuate the space. By scene sixteen, as more characters enter, group dynamics become more complex and labour intensifies. C begins displaying physical symptoms of fatigue, which she attempts to have validated in the

experience of fellow community members—seeking, perhaps, a form of empathy. As the play progresses, the clues that we are, actually, in the present land with greater frequency, as do the signs of dissatisfaction on C/Maggie's part, which will, eventually, lead to her desperate endeavours—including the hiring of the sewers/actors ad hoc—for the prolongation of her time in the scenario/experience. In scene twenty-eight, when C/Maggie's time in the scenario is almost up, the words '"immersive experience'" are actually used verbatim by F, who indicates to C/Maggie that the community will now release her (Crowe 2016, 35–38). It is an anti-climactic moment that, for over-achiever Maggie, does not sit well with her overall performance expectations, including the mark she is about to receive for her labour; so she attempts to introduce new strands to the performance—both hers and others'.

But Maggie is unable to revive C, because C is a construct—and Maggie has been through a learning experience that for her is interwoven in her overall working life. The latter is the real limbo that she is unable to extricate herself from, because there is no 'elsewhere' to return to: her life is all about production, all the time. She recognises the jargon herself so when, in the quilt making process, F praises her for, amongst other qualities, "high compassion, and human understanding", she accepts the compliment, but appears weary (Crowe 2016, 33). But for all her efforts to become incorporated, to lead, to create change, to reconnect, or, as E puts it in scene 32, confronting Maggie with the end of the road in the sewing group, "You wanted to be part of a community"; "You wanted to rediscover your soul"; "improve team work" ultimately, Maggie is not sustainable as part of the community (Crowe 2016, 46–53). She needs to return to herself and her real company, which, as she now appears to understand more than ever, are both capitalist constructs. Prone as she is to patterns, C/Maggie attempts to stay in the so-called safe space as so described by F—the term being another contentious phrase that speaks as much to vulnerability-free zones, as to capitalist appropriations of otherwise neutral/positive vocabularies for the purposes of boosting productivity (Crowe 2016, 54–66). C/Maggie is conditioned to performance reviews; a lesser mark is simply not acceptable—and so she tries to break with the clock-time that she otherwise so productively serves, so as to prove her value to yet another context of labour, however artificial.

Against the deceptive minimalism and simplicity of its form, Crowe presents us, then, with a rather complex play, which keeps revealing new layers even when we might think—like Maggie, perhaps—that we are

in control of the narrative. One of the compelling tropes of the play is the way in which it presents a certain environment—we might imagine and describe it as rural, or pastoral—itemised in small-scale representations, or rendered present through references to landscape. It is enough to encourage spectators to conceptualise of the larger world out there, but it eventually becomes apparent that this, too, is artificial, calculated and contained. *The Sewing Group*, therefore, lends itself to a reading as an environmental play and, more specifically still, as a play that works to deliver an intersectional critique combining environmental, gender, class and economy discourses.

Early on in the play, A and B marvel at the wonders of nature, commenting on the flight of the birds, or "*blossom in through the open door*", as B also "*finds some on the floor and holds it out to C*", while "*C inhales the smell*" (Crowe 2016, 18–19). It is that kind of blossom that, not entirely metaphorically, much later in the play, C will be confronted with the inability of appreciating ("take time to smell the blossom so to speak")—in a gendered dialogue with F that also reveals this kind of problematics, she will be told that she is "A very successful young woman", who has, however, "grown cold to the world" (Crowe 2016, 35–38). The world, as in community; but the world, also, as in environment. The criticism in Crowe's play rests with the fact that, in an anthropocentric approach to the world, we might imagine that it is always a matter of choice to engage in, or disengage from our surroundings—including in terms of practising, or not, our environmental agency.

The play's intervention rests in showing that there is not, necessarily, a great big world out there expecting us to engage with it at our leisure; that the margin of choice is closed—or rapidly closing—because choices have already been made. Consequently, we can only engage with fragments: the boxed blossom prop that is scattered as part of the 'immersive experience' for example, because nature itself has been depleted. Tellingly, when Maggie attempts to cling on to the staging, and to limbo as escape, E appears prepared to concede that "If she wants blossom for five minutes …", to which Maggie—or even C, once more—responds with gratitude, then this could be given to her (Crowe 2016, 46–53). The cynicism in the compartmentalising of nature, the illusion of control, the cold detachment from that very world that supposedly this entire 'immersive experience' was meant to reignite Maggie's interest in, is poignant. Nature comes in decontextualised chunks, because there is no "river", or "fields", or "dragonflies by the meadow" (Crowe 2016, 17, 23–25,

25–27, 33–34, 46–53, 54–66); the only space that exists is that of the company, and, in its darker corners, deep within the same building, a limbo experience that plays out within the quotidian limbo experience, serving the same purposes of employee 'mindfulness'.

Once it is announced that Maggie's immersion is over,

> *The lighting cue finds its moment. It widens out once more to reveal the depth of the room and the reality of the office block basement; a fire hose, an exit sign.*
>
> […]
>
> *Blossom swirls in the air.* (Crowe 2016, 54–66)

The critique of capitalist time sets in strongly, as the 'experience' is now fully revealed to be a materialist trope precisely along the lines of the extant structures whose injuries it has purported to heal ("healing" is a term expressly used when C is advised by E as to the reason why she has been brought to the sewing group (Crowe 2016, 25–27)). Maggie's profound conditioning in such processes of labour and monitoring, target and production, as well as task and observation, has already been logged throughout in the astute way in which Crowe's text plays with the word "watch": a marker of (work-)time, as well as (cross-/self-)surveillance, and, therefore, a prime capitalist device (Crowe 2016, 15, 23–25, 25–27, 35–38, 39–42, 42–46). The word recurs across the play, both as stage direction for the sewers and reference to timekeeping (including C/Maggie's luxury watch that goes missing, and that serves metonymically for the capitalist temporalities thrown into disarray as part of the so-called immersive experience). C/Maggie's missing accessory prompts a conversation as to how watches might even exist at all in a temporal context that simply does not keep time mechanically, but relies on cross-sensory community co-presence rhythms. Time is, in the fictional context that the play sets up (the sewing group), presented as irrelevant—slow and shared, rather than fast and individualised. It is, in fact, proven to be precisely the opposite, as the 'experience' staging company are themselves performing a task that is financially compensated (likely handsomely) and that, as the digital clock that measures its duration reveals, runs under extreme precision.

When C reaches the end of her—'objective', or limited and fixed, rather than 'subjective', or stretched and meaningful, time in the group,

she protests to F: "You can't put me in the 1700s, I sew, then 'five'" (Crowe 2016, 35–38). Despite the 'experience' and any depth that may have been generated from it, the language used here is that of capitalism: numerical. Time, therefore, is running on a fake promise of unmarked durationality, when it is, actually, as monetised as in any other capitalist labour context; this is not, in other words, 'glacial', as premised, but, rather, "clock-time" (Urry 1994, 135). The 1700s, symbol of deep time and pre-industrialism, have, here, been rendered merely an empty signifier, and, further, a container, like any other board room, for activity towards boosting employee 'creativity'. C/Maggie is protesting as to a performance mark, or perhaps, a productivity rating—another evaluative process of many that she is accustomed to. This is what the five, not a high enough mark out of ten, indicates to her: an average contribution that leaves her unsatisfied; worse yet, an unremarkable worker.

Crowe shows us that even if one is thrust back in time, under whichever circumstances of nostalgia, one can never, really, return to that longed for, constructed purity: to seek such an experience is a fallacy, not only because the community idyl of unburdened pastorality is unsustainable, but also because we are too far gone down a path that has instrumentalised people, objects, and, of course, nature itself. As C/Maggie enters that lift in the finale of the play, we share yet another interspace with her: how one emerges on the other side remains to be seen. As COVID-19 most recently showed, disruptions do come about; time fissures and halts to processes of production and labour do occur; novel means, or a return to basics, might very well need to be implemented mass-scale as part of coping strategies with a new dramatic situation. It takes the counter force of a virus (literal) whose power is of equal magnitude to another (metaphorical: capitalism) to reshape time and reorganise environments. Then it rests with the individual to reflect on how these changes might inform the collective future. Time, Crowe's play shows us, is, despite the efforts to compartmentalise, itemise and market it, indeed, on occasion, durational—and we form part of a longer, larger narrative, whether we are willing to perform our agency, or not.

~~Not~~ the End of the World

One of the most exciting voices in contemporary British theatre, what distinguishes Chris Bush when it comes to the climate crisis as the driving topic is the sharpness of language, as well as the way in which the work

captures the awkwardness in action. The latter is presented as a symptom of being overwhelmed with information and feeling uncertain as to one's options, experiencing a debilitating effect that in turn leads to a sinking feeling. Bush imagines this condition with compassion towards ecologies human and hon-human without, at the same time, becoming sentimentalist. This is a considerable challenge given that Bush's play takes on additional topics in the orbit of the environmental emergency that are charged in their own right, let alone in their cross-combinations: motherhood, grief and legacy. Legacy is in itself treated as an interspace in the play, existing between the private and public realms, the site where intervention and agency are also negotiated.

~~Not~~ the End of the World works intersectionally to deal with gender, the environment, access to rights (motherhood, research, employment) and to institutions (universities and more broadly scientific organisations); critics have, likewise, highlighted the text's simultaneous emphasis on "capitalism, colonialism, privileges" ("Kapitalismus, Kolonialismus, Privilegien") (Adrians 2021). Somewhere between science and agency, a path opens—sometimes mystical, sometimes pragmatic—always electrified, literally (the bicycles) and metaphorically (the atmosphere of the performance). This is where we tread, as spectators, in Bush's dramatic world. Reviewers, likewise, have been recognising both the challenges in the representation of the environmental catastrophe that Bush's play contends with, and the dramaturgical innovations that serve to capture the spectators' imagination (Laudenbach 2021). The limbo in the play—the forever opening of the door (literally) to proliferations of the scenario of Anna and Uta's job interview encounter, punctuated by the deliverance to the stage of the plants and flowers by Lena, the character of Anna's (future?) daughter—perhaps funereal, perhaps celebratory of a life, perhaps a symbolic form of emphasis that we return to the soil, fertilising and expanding the circle of life, seen here through the flora proliferation that begins to displace the human by the other-than-human on the stage—is also commented upon by the critics (Adrians 2021). Given the constant interchange of one setting with the other, the matter of testing the audience's patience recurs. But, then again, there is the point of the seamless thread between audience and stage: this is the way of creating a flow between performer and beholder. It materialises by establishing, then multiplying, that same shared feeling of growing discomfort, of feeding back—through our reactions, feelings and thoughts—into the same loop.

We never arrive anywhere, and neither do the characters; but we are very much on a journey together.

The *Exberliner* review of the piece further helps frame the context of this discussion, relaying the image that we encounter upon performance start: "[t]hree women open three doors and enter the space, flanked by two more women riding stationary bicycles" (Sarala 2021). The cyclists, who take a bow with the cast at the end of the show, themselves occupy and establish an interspace, part of the play's life as well as part of the thread between the dramaturgical structure and the world beyond it, in that they are not only a theatrical device, but, also, a practical one: without them, the show not only fails to communicate its environmental imperative affectively, but it also fails to run. Likewise, the community and agency that is enhanced by the play to take hold in the space beyond the theatre is exemplified in the community of that final shared bow that interconnects the theatrical with the civic, placing the cyclists—as environmental actors—in the forefront. The moment exists in in the inside and outside of the theatre simultaneously, fusing both sites, revealing them equally and reinforcing that we have shared a space of oscillation and will continue to do so in our environmental uncertainties past the play's finale. Spectatorship and citizenship is bolstered as a both/and condition. These cyclists, non-actors in the performing of the script sense that might, perhaps, have been any one of us in the audience, have embodied the play's very experiential essence: the circular pattern, the loop, the movement with no reaching of an end point, which the stativity and motion of the bicycles at the same time convey. As the play shows us there can be movement, yes; but it is also, more often than not, constrained by feedback loops that keep structures firmly in place.

The world of the play, or, as another reviewer phrases this, the "academic multiverse" is, quite immediately and unambiguously, both inhabited and led by women (Llŷr Evans 2021). And while their conversations traverse a broad territory of humanity as well as life beyond the human, there is no doubt that the landscape is gendered. The review uses wording that is especially relevant to my analysis: the space is entered, because it is the space that is the permanent site; individuals are transient. But the space compels, and it contains—it forever propels and reproduces the action and serves as host and agent for the "feedback loop"—or limbo—that largely characterises the play's plot. The emphasis on the stationary bicycles, always rooted and serving the same site, producing

motion—including for the purposes of powering the actual show kinetically—without ever actually moving beyond their spots is, in its literalness, the perfect vehicle for the localisation of a play in a space that accommodates proliferation without transitioning its characters to a next stage, or site.

This physical fixity persists despite references to future events that occur in the dialogues such as, for example, when in relatively brief and isolated segments in the play the respective deaths of Anna and Uta are probed by the third performer, who alternates the roles of Lena (occupying the literal in-between, the middle space on the stage and in the plot—therefore in the play's environment in all its iterations) and Lilly, the institutional auditor that seeks to confirm the circumstances of death. And although there are references made to Berlin localities when it comes to addressing Anna's route to Uta's office, for example, or other aspects of the characters' everyday lives, it is the site of the office, an entity unto itself, that retains the utmost significance, serving as gravitational force and perennial destination for the entering, re-entering, and constant performance of space that we witness.

The glaciality or durationality of time in the context of a heightened sense of agency towards a narrative larger than ourselves, and particularly, in narratives of care towards fellow human beings and the non-human environment emerges not only as interconnecting thread, but, also, as the primary theme in Bush's play. The production fleshed out resolutely the play's loop theme, paying heed to the dramaturgical structure by keeping the short scenes separate and punctuating this separation, slowing down the time of the play vis-à-vis the playtext, so that its temporal depth emerged optimally. As the *Exberliner* reviewer additionally reflects, perhaps in response to a perceived Beckettian aesthetic, while, at the same time, allowing the multiplicity of the play's structure to feed into the variability of its interpretation: "[w]hat should we do? Something? Nothing? Exit, enter. Start again. It's exhausting: so is climate change. It's not exhausting, but it's super smart direction, an excoriating rendition of Chris Bush's play, hard to imagine it done any other way" (Sarala 2021). The Guardian critic meanwhile referred to this experience as a staple of how a "remarkable text melds a ruthless structural concept with exquisite lyricism, exploring the tensions, contradictions and hypocrisies that characterise our understanding of this ecological moment" (Llŷr Evans 2021). The critics' seemingly equal admiration and frustration, arising respectively from the thematic wealth and formal astuteness of the play and the

uncontainability of the issues it contends with is, I would argue from my own experience of the premiere production, a most adequate summation of its feeling and atmosphere. This concerned the play as an accomplished piece of artistry and a statement on how we may or may not locate our agency, as well as how we may or may not intervene—but also all degrees in between.

In Bush's script, short scenes are separated by an indication of two consecutive stars following each one; we have 239 overall, arranged over the play's seven parts, which are titled "Introductions", "Children", "Pink Snow", "Motivation", "The Anthropocene", "Privilege and Sacrifice" and "Anna's Death" (2021). Pluralism and depth apply to both form and content, from the number of scenes to the topics negotiated and the varying iterations and implications of the events explored. And then, there is the figurescape of the play, proliferating into infinity as numbers are constantly 'dropped' into the script: Uta has two, three, six or zero children; two nieces; one dead son; Anna has one son, at least one daughter, or no children at all; we hear about the "hundreds of miles" that polar bears have the capacity to cross in their search for food; 1492 as the crucial timepoint that Anna names in her interview with Uta—and one hundred million, as to the explanation on why 1492 matters because, since then, this is the estimated number and overall 95% of indigenous individuals whose death—homicide or otherwise—has been accelerated by factors relating to nature exploitation and climate injustice (Bush 2021). There are, furthermore, the two minutes that Anna is given to discuss Uta's death; the one and a half degree that is required in a rising temperature for 90% of coral to expire; the two degrees of catastrophic rising temperature that will require extraordinary mass action to be prevented; the Paris Climate Accord of 2015; the further 150 million dead that compromised air quality would generate in a scenario od two-degree temperature rise; the fact that the global financial systems would be 20 trillion dollars poorer for it, or 551 trillion dollars poorer with a 3.7 degree of temperature rising; the 250 million dollars which British Petroleum channelled into the concept of the Carbon Footprint—and their daily extraction of four million oil barrels; the 97% decrease in flying as an outcome of COVID-19; the five point seven degrees of temperature increase that might materialise by 2100, on the basis, at least, of certain data (Bush 2021).

And then, also necessary to consider in terms of capturing the multiverse of the play's dramaturgy and its cataclysmic data impact, which

hinges on figures that serve as triggers for journeys into imaginations of different scenarios, as well as into histories of destruction: the 10.000 years of age of the world's oldest tree; the 72.6 years of the average human lifespan, which still is "ten or twenty years shorter than that of a blue whale, two to three hundred years shorter than the Greenland shark, about 62 million times shorter than the the [sic] earth exists", as it is also "half the lifespan of the world's oldest known lobster" (Bush 2021). In a sentimental moment that is almost an aberration for the play, Lena, functioning at a different spatiotemporal zone and a physical and dramaturgical schism/chiasm at the same time, remarks upon "the billions upon billions of other Anna Vogels floating around the multiverse, but only one of them was my mother" (Bush 2021). This is likely the version of Anna Vogel that, earlier in the play, we have heard Uta express misgivings about, using more numbers still: "a thirty-year-old childless woman […]? I might get what – two, three, five years out of you, maximum, before your biological clock starts ringing […]" (Bush 2021). Even in academia, then, and, indeed, in one of its most enlightened scientific pursuits—environmental research—time is relative, and it is also (adversely) gendered.

To return to Urry, this is the way in which the capitalisms that define time also define space and existence that, across history, are dictated by numbers: most of these linked to, or arising from processes of monetisation and exploitation of human and non-human entities. In the temporal and spatial fissures that the play opens, therefore, we see the troubling of orthodox spatialities for women: the sites, whether work, personal, or both, that they are unable to inhabit not because of absence of talent or vision, but because so-called productive time is measured on exclusionary terms, and moves at the expense of women. Lena's long monologue as we approach the play's finale, in which she reflects on different versions of Anna Vogel who were never able to 'occupy space' because of society's inflexible strategies, compromising anyone that does not readily conform to an increasingly exclusive norm, is one of the most emphatic statements regarding this condition made in the play, quoted here selectively:

> Not featured in my eulogy is the Anna Vogel who won a Nobel Prize […or who] was awarded the Order of Merit […] the Anna Vogel with cystic fibrosis, with motor neurone disease, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, who missed her interview due to a flare up, a caring emergency, a mental health crisis […] the Anna Vogel whose life expectancy did not make

> post-doctoral study feasible, whose individual carbon footprint is shameful, due to the variety of energy-guzzling contraptions keeping her alive, the plethora of medicines produced in exotic far-off places, who is too incurious to investigate the working conditions or environmental practices of the Bangladeshi sweatshops producing the small molecule inhibitors treating her carcinoma. (Bush 2021)

But then again, there is also the Anna Vogel

> who never gave up, who was never given her due […]. Who made a difference. […] Who wanted to do more. In a world of uncertainties, these are my concrete absolutes. […] She is gone now, but she was here, and she mattered. This is my comfort. (Bush 2021)

In the site of Bush's play, "comfort" is a term that resonates in the absence of 'resolution', or, perhaps, 'peace'. It is climate comfort, courage comfort and collegial comfort—not because issues are resolved, but because they are at least attempted; precisely as certain fissures of change do open up, in what otherwise appears like an endless loop of limitations. Here, women are allowed to enter, proliferate and occupy space—in fragments, which prove the point as to the value of parenthetical space towards the disruption of dominant narratives.

Such is the 'hyperobject' that the play repeatedly refers to (Bush 2021): a form of dominant, composite narrative so unwieldy that one might feel powerless towards its dismantling. It is significant that the term 'hyperobject', unlike 'narrative', for example, implies a physical fleshiness of immensity. In Timothy Morton's discourse the hyperobject is associated with an overwhelming force fitting for the fluid, loosely defined, subject to swift changes overarching conditions and hypercrises of our time (2010). As Anna notes, in different iterations of the hyperobject discussion, it is difficult to even know where to begin to intervene against

> Something so big it's impossible to comprehend in its entirety. So you try to take it piece by piece – break it down into manageable chunks – but there's nothing manageable about it. […] The Environmental Hyperobject. […] There's no escape. (Bush 2021)

Elsewhere, Anna argues that it is Uta who embodies the 'hyperobject'; or, likewise, we hear Lena—not unrelated to the probing of Anna's death, which will come later—attribute it to "the hyperobject thing. It was

everything. She died from everything" (Bush 2021). And even though the play is concerned with mortality, as we see in its probing of the deaths of Anna and Uta, this enquiry, too, materialises in the context of probing and registering individual agency—and empathy; towards fellow humans, as well as the non-human world. Or, as Lena phrases this, "There are environmental hyperobjects', "And societal Hyperobjects too. Colonial Hyperobjects, imperial hyperobjects, patriarchal hyperobjects, stretching throughout time" (Bush 2021).

In the last sentence we notice the function of linear, clock-time and space towards entrenching these conditions—as Anna puts it, "Not just you in this room right now, you in all rooms forever [...]" (Bush 2021). It is unclear, given the interjection of the one-sentence scene, whether Anna refers to Uta as her institutional role, or, perhaps, to Lilly in the context of the auditing interviews that are perfunctory, a matter of due diligence with no care incentive. But it is clear that these 'rooms' that represent the hyperobject, the institution, the imposed order (as Anna also goes on to expand), are not the sites of disruption if played out linearly in form and content, if taken as chunks advancing the action in a realist way—because this does not create sufficient space for questioning (Bush 2021). And so the play creates liminal, durational, proliferating tempo-spatialities, which, in the awkwardness and incompleteness that they ascribe to experience, firstly reveal that no immediate resolution is forthcoming, and, secondly, the absurd domination of debilitating conditions that leave the individual frozen; unable to act.

In resistance to these, the play thrives in multiplicities that both create and fill space, overbrimming with alternatives and possibilities. It is in the dialectical approach to time and space that the possibility for intervention opens up, even if it only flares up and disappears—that, too, is a form of honesty towards a convoluted contemporary experience that increasingly fractures and closes the margins for disruption. It is difficult to imagine that, in a contemporary play that strives to develop novel representational means so as to engage audiences afresh in crucial debates, the point as to the intimate relationality—but, also—relativity of time and space could have been more imaginatively made. There is no singular escape, then, but there needs to be a form of a way through. This is why, ultimately, the limbo that the play presents us with is both emblematic of the contemporary state of feeling entrapped in the uncertainties and, by opening up smaller, looping, interjecting units of space and time where the action occurs, is rendered the dynamic site of mutuality and

intervention. Given the dominance of the hyperobject, only an alternative site—including theatrical—that does not conform to the rules of the time-space continuum and can therefore countermand its hegemonic structures, might be affective. Escape is not a linear narrative, because neither is the complex hypercondition from which the need for it stems.

And even though the play makes a compelling case for the fact that time is gendered, alongside its case for the fact that female agents are invested in a deep, glacial temporality—also literally, through the situatedness of their research and expeditions, which takes them to that very site that the term 'glacial' emulates, and in which they, arguably, become embedded, forming a literal, tangible part of its narrative in their site-specific deaths, there is yet more nuance to Bush's play. In the respective research of the women (earth and climate science approached from different perspectives and specialisms) space and time blend—the glacial is both location and measure. Their research and its fervent pursuit becomes a form of resistance to the practicalities, hastes and monetised temporalities of capitalist, as well as male hegemonic time; but it is still expected to operate on and become legitimised or sanctioned by institutional terms.

But Bush's play does not naively predicate gender as a unifier either; there are considerable qualitative differences between the two scientists and their multi-iterations, both when it comes to accessing space and to mining time. In different parts of the text/versions of the encounter, Uta might be not particularly supportive of Anna's research or its framing, and Anna, likewise, is not necessarily reverential when it comes to Uta, especially given their generational difference—as individuals and academics—which exacerbates the difference in agency at the level of the institutional and the climate crisis alike. One generation has failed to intervene; the next has to live with the consequences and manage a crisis as best as possible. Time, once more is part of space: one generation stakes out its territory, however liminal, however uncertain, by claiming its agency in scientific discovery—Anna, for example, names the phenomenon of snow recoloration that she has been researching "millennial pink" (Bush 2021). Here, then, is another interspace: the intersectional site between generations who still have the capacity to intervene and who, in this case at least, strive to mark their territory, even as, or perhaps precisely because, the play itself is trapped in a limbo 'feedback loop'. Such is the deep dramaturgy of Bush's play, which sets up the two women not as antagonists, but as truth seekers—compelled by a cause greater than themselves. Their differences are as worth noting as

their similarities, which do emerge on occasion, including in moments of mutuality, admiration and agreement.

What Bush shows us, ultimately, is that even if the environmental cause is a point of intersection, the approaches to its pursuit are variant. After all, the entire play is predicated on an encounter both individual (Anna's interview by Uta) and cosmic (the taking on of the larger issues). There, already, we see the women's different perceptions of space and time: for example, of how long certain distances will require to traverse in a city, and how to negotiate them; of the modes and vehicles at one's disposal to cross that space, so that they might find themselves in the common space of the event; of the options and duties one has as to how to navigate that space in a context of broader universal energy crisis. Divergences mount: for example, when Uta attempts to inscribe her own perception of time on Anna and the generational space she occupies, she also delivers an affront towards Anna's research: "You call yourself 'Millennial', but [...] you are first-generation Anthropocene", Uta asserts (Bush 2021). Or even:

> UTA. With respect, Doctor, I've been fighting this battle since you were a child.
> ANNA. Then perhaps it's time for someone else to take a turn.
> UTA. I welcome it. But if perhaps we could be serious for a moment [...] More carbon has been released since your birth than in all of human history before you. (Bush 2021)

Whereas Uta's approach appears single-disciplinary and even streamlined, Anna's is transdisciplinary and intersectional: if Uta is interested in that which can be measured as far as data is concerned, rather than in systemic lack of justice, Anna defiantly presses for the equal consideration of the latter along the former (Bush 2021). Therefore, she merges the environmental with the socio-political as an equal moral and scientific imperative.

The interspace where the action of the play occurs, then—the site of educated disagreement—becomes the event itself. If we are in limbo with 'no escape', in different versions of the singular moment that multiplies, this is because it is this very multitudinous moment that engulfs the space of potentiality, even if we do not get to see 'action' as such in terms of its traditional definition. The limbo occurs precisely to emphasise the gravity of the event; and the event acquires gravity because of the limbo—of the

relentlessly durational, the weight of which, like that of the crises it takes on, becomes, in performance, viscerally felt.

The Glow

Durationality persists in the all-around ambitious play that follows, one that crosses time and space dimensions with remarkable ease, delivering yet another iteration of the interspace: Alistair McDowall's *The Glow*. Even if, in my view, the premiere production—despite many scenic moments that captured the imagination and spoke to the tone of the text—did not, necessarily, fully respond to the scale of the text's ambition, it did communicate rather effectively the key fact about the play: that its central character, The Woman, is at once a body and a site; an agent and a vector—that she becomes the interspace, a site between times and places, interconnecting and amplifying them. The critics' responses to the play's premiere were indicative of both its range and its challenge: the *Arts Desk*, for example, describes it as "bizarre, beautiful and breathtaking", "dazzling in its imagination and dizzying in its theatricality" (Sierz 2022). Like the *Time Out* reviewer, the *Arts Desk* calls the play "haunting" (Lukowski 2022; Sierz 2022), a reference to both its content and form, and a nod, also, to the aesthetics of the production; and, like the *Arts Desk* reviewer (Sierz 2022), the *Time Out* critic also finds it a moving experience, calling it "beautiful", and an "elegy for humanity" (Lukowski 2022).

Discussing his approach to theatremaking—and even more specifically, to playwriting—McDowall, striking an analogy with comic books, observes: "'[a] comic is two panels and a space in between; everything that happens exists in that gap. You fill in the blanks. It's the same with theatre: it's all created, not on stage or in the audience, but somewhere in the air in between them'" (Trueman 2014). In addition to this note, we might consider a comment that an interviewer of McDowall's makes, framing their own interest—in fact as a planetary scientist—in the playwright's work: "I'm generally speaking in the business of thinking about liminal spaces. About the very edges of things; what happens there, and why" (Halton 2016). In plays like McDowall's, where the interspace is also a plot device, a thematic concern, not least as part of a probing of the unerodable bond between space and time, a condition that encourages the consideration of the interspace as a powerful, dynamic site, the liminal becomes a political, interventionist trope. The opening up and

deepening of this space, which transpires in *The Glow*, is very much the result of such an intimate and insightful understanding of place in its synergy with time. As McDowall notes, "'[t]o not consider time as a proper element within the writing of the play', 'would be like not considering character or scene structure'" (Tripney 2022). Discussing his play *X* (2016), McDowall notes that the objective was "how I could get that sensation that […spectators are] there [in the auditorium] for this really inordinate amount of time" (Halton 2016).

In *The Glow*, the feeling reaches new dramaturgical dimensions. The significant intervention of *The Glow* in terms of how it establishes the intimate interrelationship between space and time rests with the fact that, through the limbo device, McDowall succeeds in capturing both, because limbo is both durational time and durational space. As one reviewer put it, it is "a world in-between time", where, as Merle Hensel's set design allows, "walls close in, time contorts, and the characters begin to glitch and overlap" (Wyver 2022). And even though McDowall captures the correlation of time and space by tracing the journey of one person forever unfolding, bouncing forwards and backwards—or, as *The New York Times* critic observed, through a compelling lead (Ria Zmitrowicz in the premiere) that "rivets our attention throughout, even when the play she inhabits is ricocheting every which way around her" (Wolf 2022), it is important that the play also invests effort in not merely representing, but also foregrounding, how time and space are experienced by non-human entities, whether human-made structures (buildings) or human-impacted environments (nature).

Further discussing his approach to playwriting and the fact that not everything—including scientific frameworks—requires a full exposition and explanation on the stage, not because it is insignificant, but because audiences can be entrusted to contribute a certain amount of prior knowledge, McDowall uses Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2002) as example. He notes: "*A Number* doesn't spend any time explaining how cloning works. They've done it and now what does it mean? I think we're kind of locked into thinking that there's a certain amount of iconography that you need in order to make it work, which maybe people are starting to realise isn't necessarily true" (Halton 2016). *The Glow* does not attempt an explanation of time travel, or of socio-spatial liminality—we are simply thrust into it, and each context that the play presents us with acquires its own gravitas in the script, without laborious explanation either in dialogue or stage directions; it is in this way that we become immersed

in The Woman's limbo experience. But there is a further point: when it opened in London, *The Glow* played concurrently to *A Number*, which was being revived at the Old Vic. An older and a newer play, premiered twenty years apart, emphasised, in their concurrence, the different ways of engaging spectators in community discourses covering both the human and non-human, as well as their mutual implication and environmental cross-embeddedness, tracing transgressions in deep time, and thereby rendering them transparent.

In framing *The Glow* as "indictment of the way women have been treated through the ages", the *Evening Standard* critic captures two important elements of the play: the timelessness and timeliness of the play's enquiry and the fact that this concentrates on the systemic oppression, repression and suppression of women (Curtis 2022). History is deeply differential and durational in that sense, evidencing a forever repeating moment: a limbo of epic proportions for female-identifying persons. The casting of Zmitrowicz as the lead in *The Glow* establishes a connection to another play discussed in this book—Lucy Kirkwood's *The Welkin*, where the actor also held the role of Sally Poppy, a character discussed in detail further on. In a very different way, Poppy is another far from straightforward persona—but despite their vast differences, the two women share their marginality and liminality: between private and public and between life and death. The women also have in common the profound pressures of a system that fails to accommodate them, incapable of treating difference in any way other than to isolate and diminish it.

Mrs Lyall, the medium who supposedly rescues but, in fact, recruits The Woman (in this part of the play, taking place in 1863, she is named Sadie) from the asylum where she is kept so that she may be utilised in her line of work as a medium, or the nurse, Ellen (both played by Rakie Ayola), in whose life The Woman (then as Brooke, in 1993), makes a sudden entry, are completely different. Still, both exist outside of norms and dominant narratives: mothers in conflict with their offspring (Mrs Lyall) or bereft (Ellen), without partners—and with institutional structures failing to acknowledge their contribution, whether in spiritual investigation, or in professional care. The gendering of the play is well-articulated in its intersectionality, because the relegation of women to the margin, as *The Glow* shows us, cross-checks as a hypothesis across different socio-political-geographical contexts. So much so, that one woman needs to forever travel across space and time, both thrust in this condition and compelled by it, to rectify the injustices—to set matters right by

augmenting agency, hers and others'; to cultivate empathy without herself being infallible. As one reviewer comments, in what is a rather emotional, but also quite accurate, response: "the Woman becomes a metaphor for loss and loneliness, a symbol of the spiritual homelessness and uprootedness of humanity, a mythical wanderer who can terrify or inspire. Her pain is humanity's pain; her anguish our anguish; her love – humankind" (Sierz 2022). It is this woman that attempts to not merely, as typical representations of warriors go, conquer and tame the world (like her one-time male companion does), but to actually sense and understand it. Her agency is humanitarian as much as metaphysical—she is both attuned to and in tension with her environment(s) and through her McDowall formulates important questions as to roots and responsibilities.

As the *Arts Desk* reviewer notes, "elemental imagery includes the water motif, both in the name Brooke and in the evocation of streams and lakes. […T]he Woman, like Jesus, is also a figure that carries the light of the world. The glow" (Sierz 2022). The way in which the review highlights the intimate and engrained bond of The Woman to the world—in its richest and most spiritual iterations—helps us appreciate the scale of McDowall's play. Writing in a similar vein, the *Time Out* critic emphasises the lyricism and compassion of McDowall's text, observing that "The Woman has been alive for an extremely long time, and suffered immensely. And yet 'The Glow' isn't really about her pain or her powers, but about the connections she forges with other people on the way" (Lukowski 2022). The same applies to connections with landscape, even in spite of herself and her foregone transience. The non-human world is equally important to the human because The Woman, in a way that Mrs Lyall rightly identifies, is, indeed, both receptor and carrier: she both assumes and *is* (in the sense of embodying) the weight of the world, she is *of* it and *for* it at the same time; she both finds herself in, and *becomes* the site of encounter. When she receives the name "Brooke" by Haster in 1348, his justification is that "It means- / River / … It is true to what you are" (McDowall 2022, 81). A flow, then, through time; an interspace that bears the traces of all sites The Woman inhabits.

Although the play was widely reviewed following its premiere, and, for the greater part, benefits from insightful reviews, it is, in my opinion, *Arts Desk* and *Time Out* that are most attuned to its inner thread. As a segue to the next section of this analysis, I would like, then, to close this part with a reference to the most incisive comment that the *Time Out* critic makes,

namely that “the play’s premise revolves around the protagonist’s extraordinary abilities, and the way they separate her from a world that she would like to find a place in. And ultimately she does seem to find a sort of peace, in the remarkable, tragic, accepting, awesome speech that closes the play” (Lukowski 2022). As The Woman is both of and outside of the world she is inhabiting, both embedded and forever in motion, the attachment is both permanent and lacks the reward of permanence. But permanence, McDowall’s play appears to be telling us, may not be the most desirable, or noble pursuit after all. It may be in selfless agency, intervention, fervent and recurring pursuit, where the meaning lies—so that what we might perceive as limbo is in fact a deep immersion; and what we might see as suspension, is, actually, a fluid, overarching kind of rootedness. The limbo produced by the not finding, and the revisiting, reformulating and reproducing that The Woman experiences—both as site and agent—is, arguably, more important than a linearity in which she would be grounded and settled, however desirable this might appear at times, for example when in love (as with the Haster) or in harmony (as with Ellen). The Woman’s gendered agency is of a different kind, one that disrupts linearity and is not—unlike *The Sewing Group*—product- or result-orientated, but process driven. Through their deep-dive in the embodied experience of limbo, however, what the plays share is a critique of output-centred transgressive economies, whether pre- or post-industrial, and their impact on human communities, as well as on one’s communion with the non-human environment.

I would like, then, to consider the speech that the reviewer, as above, references. Although this is indeed how the play ends, it is not the last piece of text that we encounter in McDowall’s script. Women do have the last word in either case, but one of them is The Woman, and the other is a woman theorising and historicising The Woman’s existence: Professor Helen Cullwick (not a real person). Professor Cullwick is, arguably, another character in her own right—though we do not see her on the stage, or at least not in the premiere production. That she provides, as another woman, a framework for The Woman’s existence, a space in history where she may be contained, even though, as we have seen through the events of the play, she is uncontainable, is significant. This, too, is an intervention. After centuries of a male-dominated academic interpretative canon, in McDowall’s play it is a woman that writes about another woman, enhancing her visibility, documenting facts and creating a record. Of course, these are, still, the words of the (male)

playwright. Nonetheless, it is the playwright writing about themselves as written about by an academic; the intertextuality itself proliferates the story, narrativising the legend of The Woman, of which the play becomes a mere episode. In that sense, the play itself bows to a force greater than itself: “a woman orphaned by time, traipsing up and down the country searching for a home” (McDowall 2022, 112).

All this in 2020 as the ‘academic’ essay informs us, a point in time when suspension and limbo became the ultimate state globally because of COVID-19. Isolation, loneliness, lack of spatiotemporal definition and co- and parallel existing in manifold different contexts while, at the same time, being immobilised, became the human condition. *The Glow* may not be a COVID-19 play thematically as such, but of course it can be taken in tandem with the era that defines its creation and staging due to the text’s profound engagement with body, mind, distance, precariousness, exposure, as well as isolation and obstacles to attachment and connecting. “Alone, I waited”, The Woman opens her final monologue (McDowall 2022, 98). She continues:

> Whilst land and water were at war, I watched-
>
> As mountains swept the earth in rolling tides,
>
> The ground beneath my feet a churning mire. (McDowall 2022, 98)

The limbo is stated emphatically—the act of walking is fleshed out, but there is no such place as a destination: “And I walked alone. / And waited” we hear (McDowall 2022, 98). The Woman both expands and repeats—such is the very nature of limbo: an amplification and deepening of the experience, and a continuous re-performance of it, even with somewhat different variables. Above, we see The Woman emerge as a voice for the recognition of a powerful nature that supersedes the human; she is both impassive in this context, both in physical movement and an emotional and critical observer, and she does not claim to wield any power over nature—she is a creature that is at one.

At the same time, The Woman speaks of humanity, even without naming it; of its mistakes, its failures, its hopes and even its kinder moments. All the while, she is “Waiting. As time stole all I knew from me” and she travels to moments past, willing to cede ground to nature, even to “[…] let the insects make their homes within my flesh- / And

feel my skin fuse fast into the rock" (McDowall 2022, 99). Soon after, the longest consecutive segment of The Woman's long monologue lands, this time delivering the most explicit references to visions of a climate apocalypse that the play has offered yet, as The Woman continues to reflect on her traversals of time and space:

> And I emerge, beneath skies of puce and rust,
>
> To walk across a sea of bones bleached white
>
> As what few living things remain come circling,
>
> Seeking comfort s their faltering hearts
>
> Slow gently to a halt. I sit and watch
>
> The withered trees and plants retreating fast,
>
> The final structures tumbling into ash,
>
> […]
>
> The sun colossal, drawing nearer still,
>
> […]
>
> As gases flare and burst up through the ground
>
> In colours never visible before- (McDowall 2022, 100)

This segment of The Woman's monologue runs considerably longer, until she, eventually, begins to settle into the final moments of the play, where she recounts "[…] brilliance infinitesimal / Drifting about the void we're held within" (McDowall 2022, 101).

Here, then, is the resolute statement on durationality, on its depth and inescapability, on its attraction and the agency that it enables—even in its deprivation of progress: the dynamics is in the recognition of the void; in the willingness to inhabit it, to embody it and to engage with it, so that the bond between human and non-human might continue to be probed, even in its perennial, cyclical failings, forever beginning again.

Ultimately, for The Woman, it is "This light and I. Alone. Together" (McDowall 2022, 101)—an interspace, two solitary qualities co-existing, cradling and being cradled in one another; if the pursuit continues, then so must The Woman; or, the pursuit continues because The Woman is there to kindle it. The honesty in the statement of the play is that resolutions may not exist, and that our crises may well be insurmountable, but what is compelling is the engagement, and the effort—and that force is greater than isolationist individuality, even in the face of distancing, of separation, and of enduring loneliness. The play ends on this powerful uncertainty, as The Woman closes with:

> And I cradle the glow.
>
> And wait.
>
> And wonder. (McDowall 2022, 101)

The play, as our experience, is dialectical—that dialogue far from rests on human agents, as the play in its totality, and its very final lines emphatically, but at the same time thoughtfully and intimately, reveal.

As reviewers also note, in the final part of the play The Woman displays what we might call a radical empathy: a feeling of 'being together' with entities human and non-human that by far surpasses any insular individualist gravitational centre. The Woman's inclusive individualism, on the contrary, is one that takes us back to the roots: to the symbiosis between human and non-human as propagated by thinkers, for example, in American transcendentalism, who envisaged a human-nature continuum. The final monologue is The Woman's most vulnerable, and, at the same time, also her most confident, and lucid, moment. Throughout the play we have witnessed the process of probing and discovery that leads to, and produces, the final monologue. The limbo, then, is far from aimless, or fruitless. If the greatest human tragedy is, as Mrs Lyall says to The Woman, the very act of existing, "Trapped within one's self in a cage of flesh", which she envisions to "transcend" through action whereby Mrs Lyall dictates the terms and The Woman is to be a mere receptor, the claim to immortality that Mrs Lyall makes, namely, that in commanding The Woman's mind and body is "when the world knows me as the woman who tore the veil between worlds", is, in fact to be accomplished by The Woman (McDowall 2022, 34–35). It is she whose existence proves that

the body is transcendable because it is only part of one's home—the other part exists outside and beyond it. Unlike Mrs Lyall, The Woman's path is not ambition, but sentience. And while McDowall's play is remarkably rich in its thematic range and nuance, mindful of spatial limitations, for the purposes of this part of the chapter I will concentrate on concerns of community and/with environment, so as to complement, but, also, expand upon the discourses formulated in relation to this chapter's prior two case studies.

That space both inhabits and is inhabited—a state for which The Woman serves as a perfect embodiment, projected and projecting onto environments, is already obvious from McDowall's opening stage direction that the text is "*To be played on an almost bare stage, as much as possible conjured through light and shadow*" (McDowall 2022, 4). It is in the play's engagements with deepest history that the magnitude of the stage direction fully takes hold, as the stagescape of the play is dramatically transformed. For example, "*There's a flash, and we're suddenly in a scorched battlefield, the ground soaked with blood. Fires blaze nearby*" (McDowall 2022, 29). The wounds of the land are the wounds of humanity, and vice versa. The fractures in human communities that generate environmental destruction, imposing a break in the relationship between human and non-human, which only deepens through time as conflict persists, resources drained and the earth destroyed, are shown as part of a durational historical event rather than as isolated occurrence. As the play already reveals through its leap to 1348, the relationship between landscape and its inhabitants is historically fraught, tied into narratives of power and appropriation leading to contexts of ownership and authority: in other words, of property, a term that extends over the animate and inanimate equally.

In Part II of the play, for example, titled "Fisher King", where The Woman encounters Haster, she is promptly instructed that if she inhabits this land, she is the King's "property": or "of his land […] his to own" (McDowall 2022, 45). The Woman resists; she is no one's to be allocated, and she intervenes against the narrative of human ownership over nature, undermining the assumption, through her own intimate understanding of durational spatiality versus fleeting forms of life, that any entity, human or otherwise, is anyone's to own. Time and transience have taught her that. In The Woman's most meaningful encounter, the one with Ellen, we are given more evidence of this resistance to human primacy. When Ellen dies, a debt collector finds The Woman [Brooke] on the neglected site of

her home, immediately assuming that she may intend to make a claim on it following the bereavement. But for The Woman, identity is not about property, and a home is conditioned by relationships as much as by its location and material bearings; so she refuses to disclose her name, and disappears. When we see her next, it is 1360. Each time a flash, leap, or transition creates a new spatiotemporal moment in the play, we are reminded that there is no such thing as a fixed site in *The Glow*; there are only fluid interspaces. In their constant proliferation, these are more emphatic in signification and representation than any linearity could be.

Elsewhere, and as The Woman reflects on love, reading about a tale of mutual surrender in a couple so complete and in harmony with the land and its elements, we are reminded that the couple, too, is a community. Consequently, such a community, too, can become dispersed as a result of land devastation. There is no divide, then, between human and non-human ecologies; one kind is not more resilient than the other. That The Woman is alone in time, as the final monologue makes emphatically clear, is very much the outcome of the failed synergy between human and nature. And so the vessel of this devastation, whether the land or, in this case, The Woman, stands both deeply inhabited by people and love and devoid of them. When The Woman conjures the scene of love and rapture, nature awakens: we hear "*The sounds of wildlife as dull light creeps through a canopy of leaves- / We are in a forest*" (McDowall 2022, 30). But the moment conflict beckons "*The spark dies, the Man and the forest vanish*" (McDowall 2022, 31). The spark may be a reference to the light in The Woman's hand, but, arguably, also a reference to romantic love. In what we might read as both a literal and symbolic stage direction, McDowall evidences not only the symbiosis between human and nature, but, also, that all positivity, all warmth—also represented in The Woman's light, cradled with care, and at the same time so fragile—is precarious in the wake of greed and transgression.

This is where McDowall's text connects to the deepest roots of humanity and to its oldest tales: from the lone hero's choice between Vice or Virtue to Pandora's box and the individual's inability to resist material temptation, the choices beckoning for the play's characters are shown as morally porous, revealing humanity's both/and rather than either/or nature. Or, as Evan, an inquisitive student recently expelled from his institution because his approach to history and human agency did not suit conventional methodologies puts this in 1979: "You go back far enough

and everything turns to myth" (McDowall 2022, 52). In another conversation with The Woman, Evan, who, unbeknownst to him, finds himself in the same room as the subject of his controversial research, describes her as "a symbol"; "how she's depicted tells us the mood of the time"; a "Prometheus" of sorts (McDowall 2022, 69). Prometheus, of course, has been depicted in all kinds of manner: but the fact remains that, chained to the rock, he is of himself and of the landscape at the same time—the congruence between flesh and stone a perfect symmetry, until the beholder can no longer determine where one ends and the other begins. The body is vessel and material—both itself and outside of itself, and so it melds with non-human nature and becomes a symbol, in, arguably, the most enduring tale of how the element (here fire) can serve as both sustenance and doom.

In another moment in 1348, and as The Woman finds herself with Haster, we hear (from the character of Catch) that legend has it that The Woman has "lived longer than the mountains. / Longer than the rivers have run. / […] Once her strangeness was known, they put her on a fire to burn. / […] Never felt the flames", to which The Woman responds: "… I heard different" (McDowall 2022, 61). Where, ultimately, does utility end and hubris begin, the play appears to be asking, while also probing what kinds of casualties may be anticipated along the way—and how such histories may be interrupted from running on feedback loops. Other metaphors related to the element of fire apply here, too: illumination, enlightenment. We might, likewise, be reminded of both Joan of Arc and witch hunting when it comes to histories of pioneering, unconventional female agency, women's bonds with the land, and their challenging of social order in their pursuit of a natural imperative on a higher plane by attuning to elements; by unreservedly performing their difference.

The root between human and nature goes back to the start—The Woman is always present and in her uniqueness in this play she reflects the shared path, the being *of* and *with* simultaneously. Contention begins when man (indeed in McDowall's play transgressions are largely male-gendered) attempts to rule over that which is greater a force than can be reckoned with. This is when nature's own tools—here, fire—are weaponised against humanity by humanity itself, but also by an exhausted nature that now performs the results of its own depletion: this is where the fracture happens, with the most receptive and the most vulnerable, the ones most pacifist and least prone to rift, bearing the emotional and physical consequences. The Woman is presumed immune to catastrophe

and trauma—but she suffers both, as we hear her state in the above quotation. The trauma runs deep; the link between human and environment is broken in the assumed primacy of human institutional hegemony and transgressions repeat themselves. Still, The Woman is also a sign of hope: healing the schism between the human and non-human through her resilience, her durational experience affords her not only the burden but also the gift of the light: a mission ever to (re)affirm the link, as well as to revisit, relive and recreate. The burning flame may be a mere spark of unity, which can, however, grow stronger and even provide warmth. As she says to Haster, "No one can take it [the light] away from me. Many have tried" (McDowall 2022, 71).

In one of its late scenes, when, in 1998, shortly before her death, Ellen walks with The Woman on a beach, the play produces a rare image of serenity: to Ellen's suggestion "let's go home", Brooke responds with a kiss—almost one of daughter to mother—that communicates, at once, gratitude, kindness and tenderness (McDowall 2022, 95). The earlier statement of Ellen to The Woman, who proclaimed she had no home, that everyone does have a home, is, then, verified: faith is rewarded, perhaps, and indeed in spite of the hurt one has previously experienced. Here, for example, we may be reminded of the one-time rejection by Haster of The Woman's claim that he is her home. Not all experience of limbo must be without breakthroughs; without disruptions of the pattern that may, actually, take hold and produce a sentient shift to the world's balance. The affective impact of the dynamic developing here is not only to be found in the 'adoptive' maternal/filial bond, but also in the way in which the individual—and, here, their demise—is reflected in/by their environment—in this case, an overgrown garden. This is how Ellen's passing is visually communicated. In Ellen's absence, not only nature proliferates, existing because of, though no longer nurtured by her, but, also, The Woman's deep time. Cycles keep on; care is one of those gestures that require circularity and repetition. These facts are conveyed by the metaphor of the garden, as well as by Ellen's nurturing of The Woman, and the mutuality in the gesture. The Woman resumes her flow because loss, or the return of the body to the earth and the cycle this maintains, releases her once more—arguably free of rather than captive by time, and therefore more unbound than its opposite. Home, ultimately, has been the landscape in which Ellen and The Woman were walking; their relationship; the harmony of individuals in community with each other, and with nature. As the two women "*are walking on the beach together. The low afternoon*

sun shimmers on the waves as they wash onto the sand", another interspace opens: that of hope and possibility; then, suddenly, "*The sound of the waves has stopped*" (McDowall 2022, 93, 96). The parenthesis closes. Time opens up again, to somewhere else; the narrative continues; The Woman resumes the path, and vice versa.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on three plays: E V Crowe's *The Sewing Group*, Chris Bush's *~~Not~~ the End of the World*, and Alistair McDowall's *The Glow*. It has examined the concept of the interspace as explicitly spatiotemporal, highlighted through the conceptual framework and experiential reality of limbo, and what this might represent. Here, limbo has been a dramaturgical device, a thematic trope and a condition in which the spectators are invited to partake in plays where narrative and clock linearity are not only undermined, but suspended. In each of these plays, limbo is shown as a creative disarray: as a way of casting the so-called natural progression of time and experience into doubt so as to probe the possible, and the more meaningful ways of connecting, as humans, to both out human and non-human communities and environments; of discovering contingencies, causalities and affinities towards a heightening of agency. In visiting and revisiting different historical moments—in personal and collective histories—these plays make space for intervention through the staging of worlds that exist temporally parallel to one another in a past that contains the present and vice versa only to be revealed as intermeshing. In different ways, the three plays analysed in this chapter are concerned with crevices that open within the spaces of the economy as in *The Sewing Group*, of science as in *~~Not~~ the End of the World*, and of history, as in *The Glow*. As part of these liminalities that disturb and disrupt materialist, environmental and civic complacency, the playwrights have imagined formal lacunae as powerful sites where different worlds are cross-visited, inter-checked, made possible—but, likewise, also impossible.

All the while, these plays resist value judgements or facile assessments as to one way of being and co-existing holding more validity over another; as to what constitutes camaraderie and what constitutes transgression, and, finally, as to how a human actor might identify, and pursue, more, and mutually enriching ways of being together with the non-human. In so doing, the texts show, equally, that there is no guarantee; that suspension

may lead to release into despair—but that, again, it might deliver an elevation: of conscience; of humanity. There is, ultimately, a deep spirituality in each of these plays, and an intellectual endeavour in direct dialogue with history—but especially with its plurality, as in histories. This problematises and does not absolve human agency, even at times of irony, of playfulness, or what might even appear as desensitisation. These are, therefore, three highly sensitised and sensitising plays that stage the deep, intersecting narratives between natures, environments and their dwellers, and the density in experience that claims a place within which to exist, and to transform. At the same time, all three texts reveal that temporariness is the only true perennial, and that the singular moment carries infinite weight.

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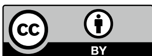

CHAPTER 6

The Deviant: Unruly Spaces and Errant Experiences

The three plays on which this chapter concentrates mark three key respective timepoints at the beginning, middle and end of a decade that was formative socially and politically. In 2009, when Rona Munro's *The Last Witch* opened at Edinburgh directed by Dominic Hill, Britain was reeling from a recession affecting both the national economy and the public spirit. Conjuring alternative ways of being in the aftermath of a startling collapse was not out of place as a topic—not least when it came to assigning the role of the disruptor/instigator to a woman, at a time when all-too confident, all-too dominant male authority had failed so spectacularly. Equally importantly, the play reminds us how that which might be branded 'the Other' is isolated; vilified; eliminated. In 2009, these were not the primary discourses in Britain, but tensions were quietly brewing. A few years later, and certainly by 2015, (self-)isolationist trends were increasingly taking hold, leading to the Brexit referendum and its own well-documented aftermath. Further, the fact that Munro's stagescape is filled with a visceral sensation of the rural land and natural elements is equally crucial. Already in 2009, that is, the environment formed more than a mere canvas: it had become a force that determined and compelled emerging dramaturgies. The timelessness of Munro's piece, as well as its sensory emphasis on nature, links it to Matt Grinter's *Orca*, opening in November 2016 at the Southwark Playhouse in a production directed by Alice Hamilton. A play where the landscape looms heavy, as water abounds and the elements are dominant, alluring and unaccommodating, *Orca*, similarly

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to *The Last Witch*, also prioritises the experience of marginalised women, while exposing the very machinations of the marginalising practices at work. If 2009 was a particularly unfortunate time for the economy, 2016, as already mentioned in these pages, proved to be an especially difficult period for counteracting hegemonical, patriarchal forces and arising contexts of remoteness and entrapment. When Grinter's play began its run, the American Presidential Election was mere days away; by the time the play closed, later that same month, the election had delivered the result already discussed in the previous chapter.

Creative (re)engagements with history/-ies, the folklore, and the primal have often served to provide the space in which stories with contemporary resonance and impact can unfold; inherited, or familiar—sometimes utopian and others dystopian—narratives and their retellings, especially in the opening up of potentialities and spaces for action, can deliver significant interventions. In the hands of intuitive playwrights, Lucy Kirkwood amongst them, binaries and boundaries can be undermined, revealed as holdouts for divisions that can no longer hold. In her 2020 play *The Welkin*, directed by James Macdonald and premiering at the National Theatre (Lyttelton) as the Trump Presidency was drawing its last breaths and as the world was, unbeknownst, about to be thrust into its next major crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, Kirkwood delivered one of her most emphatic works to date, taking on systemic failures on an epic scale. Kirkwood's play queried prevailing practices of legislation and jurisdiction over women's bodies developed and proliferated by heavily male-constituted institutional structures, attacking assumptions of authority and insight, while confronting the legitimisation of the nature versus nurture dichotomy. This chapter, then, takes on three historically-motivated contemporary plays, investigating how deviations from the norm have the capacity to upset the established order. In so doing, it considers how "[t]he quest for transcendence within scenarios of physical and psychological extremity is a recurring feature of the new writing for theatre [...]" (Megson 2013). Tracing how person and landscape are co-constituted synergistically and with mutual impacts forms a considerable part of the enquiry, facilitating the consideration of how space, spatiality and lived experience figure in the function of parenthetical sites against dominant conditions, allowing the potential for disruption to emerge as a possibility.

The Last Witch

Rona Munro's engagement with history—especially that of Scotland—has been plentiful. In her theatre, we detect not only a desire to explore historical fact, but, also, to create a space for disruption in the presumed linearity of narratives, especially where these may involve gendered assumptions, and the passing down of stories intergenerationally so that they become accepted wisdom. Female resilience is key to such disruptive storytelling. Critics have highlighted how, in *The Last Witch*, "a sturdy charismatic woman keeps her dignity amidst the stench of masculinity. Yielding not to the insecurities of man but the depth of her motherhood" (Corr 2018). This is the story of Janet Horne, "the highland widow who pays the ultimate price for being a woman able to out-think and overpower her weak spirited male counterparts" (Bosanquet 2009). When the piece was revived in 2018, critics additionally praised the text's continuing resonance, as well as its range of female characters not only when it came to the impressive lead, but, also, to the character of Janet's teenaged daughter Helen, or her neighbour, Elspeth Begg—wife of the man whose accusations cause the tragic spiral of events leading to Janet's demise (Connolly 2018; Cooper 2018). The—almost—decade between the two productions also delivered, in many ways, forms of progress in terms of public condemnation of systemic abuse, as well as of the emergence of community mobilisation and protest, but still, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, rather a lot to be concerned about when it came to female civic and personal agency lingered. The Dornoch of 1727, where the real Janet Horne was executed as a witch, and the Scottish Highlands of witch hunting (certainly far from the only site of such crimes), driven by ignorance stoked by intolerance towards the different and marginal, would continue to resonate as paradigm well beyond the immediate geographical and cultural context.

The play enhances the visibility of injustices against the chronic repetition of discriminatory patterns, whether this repetition is enabled by means of active hostility or passive condoning. At the same time, communities of women, however embedded in problematic patriarchal structures that limit their agencies, also emerge as powerful networks in Munro's theatre. In *The Last Witch*, it is another woman that saves the daughter of the one (Janet) sacrificed to the altar of religion: within small spaces of intervention, an act of mercy becomes possible. And so Elspeth invites

the young woman, attempting to rescue her from the surrounding impact of Janet's demise, to.

> Take my name. Helen… listen… listen… sweetheart… This will save you. You're Elspeth Begg's wayward girl that ran off with a sailor. That's why you've nothing but the clothes on you. That's why you're lost. You're Elspeth Begg's but she never wants to see you back again. You know nothing of Janet Horne and her trouble. You can never go home again because of your mother's tears and your father's anger. (Munro 2009, 77)

Motherhoods, in all their iterations—real, imagined, adoptive—abound in the plays examined in this chapter. And even though we may not detect sentimentalism, we do encounter acts of solidarity and care reflective of a higher sense of moral duty; the spaces that enable and accommodate them are tentative; their duration limited. And yet, it is in these contexts that the most impactful gestures materialise.

Even though this book does not have the remit of delving into Munro's record in detail, it is purposeful to identify core elements that have characterised her playwriting sensibilities. In her two articles on Munro (2006, 2009), theatre scholar Kathy Smith identifies gravitational centres in the playwright's theatre, while also pinpointing—and querying—the noteworthy lack of scholarship on Munro (Smith 2006, 243). More recently, some gaps have been filled through work by, especially, Gioia Angeletti (2018), Ian Brown (2016) and Trish Reid (2012). Still, it remains the case that Munro has not received as much attention as other contemporary Scottish playwrights, despite a rich and substantial body of work. Smith's two articles predate *The Last Witch* in terms of writing (one is published in the same year as the play), but still arrive at observations that resonate here. Reflecting on Munro's *Iron* (2002), one of the playwright's most internationally staged texts, Smith identifies the thematic centres: "first, the representation of the mother/daughter relationship; second, the notion of feminine violence—crime, punishment, incarceration—and the idea of feminine as 'other' and finally, aspects of memory: loss of memory, recovery of memory, remembering, forgetting and the significance of memory, both individually and culturally" (Smith 2009, 255). I agree with this assessment; the final point pertaining to memory, considered against historical fact as to the real Janet Horne's mental state, is particularly astute. Smith's other points, specifically the importance of the mother/daughter bond, and the systemic handling of

female transgression within penal systems run on patriarchal codes, also resonate strongly in *The Last Witch*, as we come to see in Janet's treatment when prosecuted, incarcerated and, eventually, expired at the hands of the representatives of the state.

In her earlier article (2006), which offers a rounder assessment of Munro's work, Smith observes her "creative use of language and imagery, in the weaving of the contemporary and the mythical, result[ing] in a theatre which is both magical and truthful, powerful and painful, simultaneously strange and strangely familiar [...] both hard-hitting and poetic" (244). Elsewhere, Smith comments on Munro's capacity to create verbalscapes "drawing on images reminiscent of dreams" and identifies the important relationship between myth and history, on which Munro draws across her work (2006, 246). As Smith notes relating to other work by Munro, her theatre bears witness to the playwright's "interest in history, and although there is a certain timelessness about it, there are indications of a period piece" (2006, 248). The point could likewise be made about *The Last Witch*, which, given the interests of this book, I propose occupies and produces a spatiotemporal in-betweenness, belonging both to history and transcending any direct rootedness to resonate more widely as a metaphor. This dramaturgical (formal) in-betweenness cultivated by the play is matched by the character (thematic) in-betweenness as experienced and performed by Janet, who is both of her community and extrinsic to it.

The Witchcraft Act, which had been in force in Scotland since 1563, was abolished in 1736, nine years after the murder of the real Janet Horne (Goodare et al. 2003). In Munro's text, other than character names, which imply certain historical events, no reference is made to the actual time setting of the play. This is how Munro troubles narrative linearities in historical re-engagements: an artistic dialogue with history still allows margins for the imagination, and for troubling orthodoxies—especially patriarchal (Smith 2006). In other words, to tie Munro's Janet Horne specifically to historical fact is to give flesh to what is a tragic story of a persecuted woman; but it is, also, to risk missing out on, to use Smith's description, Munro's poetic intervention, which ultimately is the primary material on which the play's rich dramatic tapestry is woven.

Women in Munro's plays—in themselves, and in their relationships with others—are a concern that Smith prioritises in her two aforementioned articles. A primary bond that develops in Munro's work, as already raised, is that between mothers and daughters. In *The Last Witch*, it is

the latter—Helen—that is implied to actually be a witch, rather than her mother. Helen encounters, and spends time with, a man called Nick, who appears to be presenting the traits of the devil. It is Nick that, as a favour to Helen, later kills Janet with a knife at the burning stake, before there is time for her to feel an even more excruciating death in the flames. In the incident, Nick emerges unscathed. Helen occupies a space of in-betweenness in herself: in her antagonistic relationship with Janet, which proves to be very tender; in her place in society, in which she is both an outsider and suffering the effects of her mother performing her marginality considerably more than she does. Referring to mother/daughter relationships, not least in the presence of male authoritarian figures, Smith identifies "complexity and ambivalence", as well as "the fundamental ambiguity of motivation" (2006, 243). Such are the moral interspaces that Janet and Helen Horne inhabit both in their relationship to the world, and in their relationship to each other.

The latter is, arguably, also the outcome of the women's own sense of ambivalence as to their place and position in the immediate environment of their community. For example, we are given ample reference to attempts (including successful ones, for Helen) at flying: the body is not of the space to which it was given to dwell; flight—as in elevating oneself, also as in fleeing—is compelling. Smith raises issues of "anger and disturbance, the association of violence and femininity, and [...Munro's] writing/representation of the feminine body in performance", or, always in Munro, "women as [...] central characters" in the context of "explor[ing] notions of anger, violence, frustration, disturbance and 'otherness' in relation to femininity" (2006, 244, 250). Certainly Janet is an Other to the confined society in which she lives, and it is as Other that she is also eliminated. Helen is on her way to becoming marginalised in the same way, so she takes to the road, rootless, untraceable and forever mobile, in order to remain one step ahead of danger, and take her life in her own hands. At the end of the play, and as she flees her local community, her in-betweenness mobilises her transience. The feelings that Smith lists, then, are experienced by women towards their communities—ones that claim to be inclusive and supportive, while utterly failing to accommodate any sign of difference. External hostility can also manifest as an active performance of a heightened difference in response to one's own exclusion; at the same time, a community's exclusionary practices are an act of self-harm against its own agility, ignoring

the fact that this ought to draw on diversity rather than uniformity. Violence against those Others, then, is ultimately violence self-directed.

I find Smith's work on Munro lucid and inclusive, not least in its consideration of geo-embodied factors. Regarding delineations of space and their cognisant crossing by women, Smith observes in the distribution of spatial experience in Munro's work "a kind of 'spilling over', where boundaries are disregarded, [...] female characters acknowledge dangerous spaces, both physical and psychical—spaces outside of those designated by a patriarchal culture—and for this they pay a high price" (2006, 250). It is a comment that, as we will go on to see in the next part of this chapter, resonates profoundly with Grinter's *Orca* as well, and the ways in which women interact with landscape—in that case especially the seascape—and suffer punitive and exclusionary consequences because of this perceived transgression. The following comment by Smith is even more striking in that respect: "[f]emininity, sensuality, intimacy, childbirth and motherhood are as much a part of the landscape here as rain, snow, wind or sunshine" (2006, 248). These entities and processes are cross-inscribed; the primal and durational exists in all of them, precisely, also, because of the ways in which they form part of a durational, deep narrative—personal, social, environmental, natural (in the sense of both reproduction and landscape) that is, in this case too, reminiscent of Urry's definition of "glacial time" (1994, 135). It is, ultimately, for such dramaturgical reasons that plays like *The Last Witch*, but also *Orca* and *The Welkin* so successfully and purposely oscillate in temporal, and not only in physical, interspaces, in terms of how they conceptualise and root their plots and actions. This is also why characters in these plays exist *as* and *for* themselves, but, also, as archetypes; primal sketches of complex humanities attuned to a level higher than that of earthly life.

Smith additionally observes a "sense of stylization and dreamworld combined with real relationships and meaningful interactions [that] permeates" with "characters [that] operate on levels which are both archetypal and specific, offering [...] a sense of 'external' and 'internal' worlds" (2006, 248). These worlds, we come to understand, are not either/or, but both/and, and all three plays examined in this chapter operate on this expansive interstitial level. Women are both 'here' and 'elsewhere', and precisely because the 'here' often becomes too restrictive, they either co-construct, co-create, or co-imagine that 'elsewhere'. As an early stage direction in Munro's play notes, in a shared, quiet moment between Janet and Helen that is not to be taken for granted as we might

at first be inclined to believe—and which reveals their similarities, and intimate closeness—both conditioned by their openness to a power greater than themselves, one attuned to the landscape and its forces, and therefore uncontainable: "*A beat. They* [mother and daughter] *look together over the hills, the distant sea*" (Munro 2009, 9). Then Janet asks: "Why are you so restless?" to which Helen answers: "I'm hot" (Munro 2009, 9). It is the perfect metaphor for being uncontainable, for dreaming of—and conjuring—the great beyond as, at least, a possibility.

As Janet has shared earlier "I am on this road…see…walking dark lands, seeing wonders…" (Munro 2009, 18); and as Helen will say later, when she sets on her own solitary path:

> There's a wind coming. A warm wind out of the south. You can smell the honey on it... It'll blow the ice out of the air. Turn all the frozen ground soft with water. One warm day to keep us breathing till the sun is fat and yellow again. I'm calling it... Blow that reek over the silver sea. I remember. I remember. My mother could charm the fish out of those waves. She could. Here comes the wind. (Munro 2009, 84)

References to the wind in different iterations abound across the play: it is a conditioning, carrying, liberating force; one that transforms and re-situates; but also an interconnecting element between those that are unrestrainable. There is no greater community, the play suggests, than that between a mother and daughter—and their shared communion with the earth, in its unpredictability, its roughness, its allure. To ask questions that extend beyond the immediate context of rootedness, to feel oneself too expansive for one's environment, and to conceptualise one's home as the great beyond rather than any human-made structure, is, ultimately, an elevating force; a resistance to oppression as great as any. The two plays that follow are, likewise, invested in the hypothesis of the world's expansion in the very moment that women, interrupting their mundane experience, lift their gaze out- and upwards.

Orca

In Matt Grinter's quietly affective piece, the eponymous animal functions metonymically to stand in for an entire community, human and non-human. The creature serves as both itself (again metonymically denotative of its entire pod), and as grounding reference for its human co-dwellers in

the remote seaside site that forms the setting of the play, and for whom it constitutes, alternatingly, a symbol of freedom, of ferocity, of danger—and even a trophy. Two of the play's main characters are young girls: Fan (14); Gretchen (16); and one is a young woman—Maggie (18) (Grinter 2016, 2). The remaining characters are Joshua (early 50s), the father of Fan and Maggie; and a man in his 60s, only known as "The Father" (Grinter 2016, 2): a title that functions to denote his symbolic role in the community as its forefather and pillar, but also his character role in a ritualised performance of whaling that recurs each year. The premise of this event is that a young girl, performing the recurring role of the Daughter, sacrifices herself in the vicious waters and at the mercy of the wild animal to save her benevolent community when the whalers encounter difficulties in the open sea. So goes the legend that is re-enacted annually; so follows, also, the reality of a crowd of girls who suffer their plight quietly, so that their community—whose importance emerges throughout the play as insurmountable—may continue with its biorhythms unperturbed. In the process, however, the biorhythms of vulnerable people and animals become profoundly disrupted; the ecologies of place and its inhabitants are rendered toxic; and the place, landscape and overall environment is installed as the locus of deep-seated trauma. Further to the characters we see, there are numerous others, of no lesser importance, that we do not—but whom the play allows us to imagine. Moreover, the 'orca', whether as singular or as pod, as well as the seascape itself, form equally pivotal presences in the play; dramaturgically, their significance to the narrative is crucial.

The seaside community of the play, then, is long established on a culture of vulnerability and complicity, and of inward- rather than outwardness; the sea is conceptualised as barrier rather than as bridge. The play's most vivacious character, Fan, is also, unbeknownst to herself, the most precarious one. Although we might initially think that any tension in her relationship with her sister Maggie is the outcome of mundane sibling grievances in the context of an age difference that is largely insubstantial but also sufficient to aggravate disagreements, some way into the play the overarching plot comes to be revealed. It is not so much that Grinter's play operates on suspense when it comes to plot unveiling; it is, rather, that there is a feeling of anxiety because spectators, reasonably—as much as those characters whose care and experience alerts them to what follows—sense what gradually emerges as inevitable. The sacrifice of Fan will indeed take place, but neither to the elements, nor to the mighty

whale: rather, she will suffer at the hands of the leader of the community that she so strives to impress, so that she may be welcomed by all, unlike her sister, restoring her family's standing.

Literary scholar Graham Huggan considers the literal and symbolic function of whales, taking a nuanced and often sobering approach, which has value in both revealing and debunking myths regarding one of the most recurring figures in human-targeted animal life (2018). "Most stories of cruelty have heroic and melancholic versions; and so it is with the history of human encounters with whales", argues Huggan (2018, vii). Elsewhere, Huggan addresses the fact that humans' understanding of cetaceans has been largely contingent on representation rather than direct knowledge—which is why it has been particularly important that "representations have often organized themselves around specific *narratives*" (2018, viii). Huggan's italicisation of the word emphasises that narratives are stories, depictions, but also tales and constructs; beliefs that become concretised and instituted through storytelling and proliferation rather than, at least in some cases, evidence. This is especially relevant to *Orca*, where *doxa* surrounding the animal are passed on across generations rather than being the outcome of empirical fact. Within the range of stories told about whales, Huggan notes, there tends to be a pull towards the "either explicitly or implicitly allegorical; for whales, whose existence long predates ours, have frequently been associated with mythical stories of human origin as well as apocalyptic presentiments of planetary demise" (2018, viii). Huggan adds that the ferociousness with which whales have been pursued by humans is effectively incomparable to the aggressive pursuit (for example for resources; in hunting) of any other animal (2018, viii). It is such historical trajectories that (re)produce the melancholy, as Huggan observes, or "the violence we have done to whales over the centuries is a violence we continue to visit upon ourselves. It is also a violence that haunts us" (2018, xi–xii).

Such comments, as well as Huggan's reference to "cultures of whaling" (2018, xi), emerge as particularly relevant to *Orca*; the latter phrase very much reveals that whaling is also a cultural, community trope rather than merely a monetary necessity. That the animal's demise is seen as essential for the human's survival creates a narrative of interweaving and ontological cross-implication. The folklore element of Grinter's play enhances this. It is, further, significant that the same group of men, led by one specific figure, that proliferate the violence against whales, is also the same one that preys upon human members of the local community: vulnerable

girls. As the violent hunt of the non-human creature becomes established as a gendered, cross-generational staple, with the whale vilified as a major threat to the community, so the cross-generational narrative of abuse becomes another staple. Those who (attempt to) self-defend, or protect others, reactions observable amongst the young girls and the animal itself, are, likewise, vilified.

Misrepresentations, after all, take hold as easily as it is difficult to dispel them. Huggan notes, for example, that even though the orca is widely known as a murderous whale, in fact it hails from the dolphin family (2018, xv). In Grinter's play references to the animal serve for showing how narratives of exclusion come to take hold; how pariahs are constructed; how campaigns of elimination and extermination are carried out. Such is the case in the community where *Orca* is set, with any voices of dissent silenced, including the long-erased mother of the two sisters who come to experience abuse at the hands of 'The Father'. Grinter's play, in all its containment and staging modesty, is important because it sets an environmental preservation agenda—of creatures as much as landscape—alongside the anti-abuse, anti-toxic-masculinity agenda. In that vein, the text also exposes the difficulties that follow such endeavours of reversal and counteraction. Or, to return to Huggan, "many of these losses, both human and animal, will prove to be irrecoverable; thus, while saving the whales should remain an urgent priority for all of us, it may never be quite enough to save us from ourselves" (2018, xvi). Interventionist drama, however, tends to function on the premise that it might, at least, attempt a disruption—along the principle that literary theorist Marco Caracciolo proposes in noting that "negotiation of uncertainty invites readers [and spectators] to transition from an anxious anthropocentric outlook on the future to a more hopeful affirmation of more-than-human interconnectivity, which involves a sense of human responsibility toward nonhuman life" (2022, 90).

The contained scenography (by Frankie Bradshaw) of the premiere of *Orca*, responsive to the minimalism of the text itself, drew on, as well as served and enhanced, what Huggan refers to as "the *spectrality* of the whale", which may be both reality and simulacrum of itself (2018, 86, emphasis original). As Huggan notes, the specifics of the animal pose a challenge to its depiction; meanwhile we encounter

> reflections on whales as projection screens for human desires and interests, but also as spectral figures whose literal as well as figurative elusiveness

> ends up troubling the process of representation itself. […] simultaneously substantial and insubstantial – […the spectrality] helps turn it, not just into a quintessentially unsettling figure, but also into an all-purpose symbol for entangled histories of disappearance and loss. (2018, 86)

It is in this vein that engagement with the whale as symbol and physicality is structured in Grinter's play, while, at the same time, recognising that the true volume of the animal can never be fully captured in representation. In that sense, allusion becomes a potent dramaturgical tool. The way in which—beyond the actual title, which itself, of course, also plays a major role—Grinter's text serves to establish the whale as inextricable part of the landscape and to presence it as much as possible evidences this.

Specifically, the orca is a constant reference—the very gravitational pull, we might argue, of the characters' existence. At the same time as it defines the identity and livelihood of the whaling community, the orca is conceptualised by that same community as major threat against its survival. The relationship is entirely paradoxical, not to mention that the power balance tilts heavily on the side of the human, rather than the animal, even though human-constructed binarisms might have this the other way around. The 'interest' is evident—for the humans it is in the killing, for profit and for claimed self-defence. The 'desire' is one of conquering when it comes to the patriarchal whaling cultures—and broader community cultures—that are firmly in place: but, also, of freedom, and of the counter force of the animal as longed for, one might say, by the female members of the community who have been preyed upon themselves and who have sought to break the cycle of abuse. The "entangled histories of disappearance and loss" (Huggan 2018, 86) apply both to the animal, forever at risk of being exterminated to the point of extinction, and to these women: vanished mothers and daughters, sometimes hidden in plain sight, because they contravened the rule of the same men that hunt and kill the animal. Not least, and of direct relevance to Grinter's play, an animal with a ferocious mothering and survival instinct.

Huggan's theorisation of whales more broadly and orcas specifically is too wide-ranging and nuanced to capture fully here. My references prioritise certain areas of applicability to the specific play, but, also, to the broader conceptualisation of how narratives concerning the whale as outsider are structured, and to what extent these might apply to any other creature, human or non-human, that might be labelled extrinsic and threatening. It is also the case that once one is treated as an outcast

one might, as consequence, begin to embody these characteristics: to self-isolate; to perform their projected difference; to self-defend and to even become excessively aggressive, or violent. These are traits that we are also observing—with their nuances and differences—in Kirkwood and Munro's respective plays examined in this chapter. In this spirit, it is relevant to foreground Huggan's framing of humans' emotional projections onto whales, presenting by means of these very narratives of disappearance and loss that trigger both guilt and trauma (2018, 88). Huggan reflects on how "personal identification may be experienced subjectively or projected onto something/someone else; […] historically based or future-oriented, as in the apprehension of vulnerability as the imaginative foreshadowing of future pain" (2018, 88). Elsewhere, he notes how "whales not only bring together different worlds but also become metonymic stand-ins for the world itself" (Huggan 2018, 109). And even though there is value to the point that other scholars put across, namely that "the orca stands as a metaphor of the tension between gentleness and terror […] an elusive creature [for which…] seafarers [who] encountered the mysterious beasts […] conceived of stories to make sense of what they had seen" (Schutten and Burford 2017, 259), ultimately the argument that Huggan pursues in favour of metonymy seems to more intuitively capture the magnitude of the animal itself, as well as that of the tension in its relationship with its human would-be capturers and/or observers.

When the play opens the collision course between myth and reality is already set up: Fan is telling Maggie about all that needs to be prepared for her costume so that she may perform her dance in front of the fishermen, and be chosen as this year's Daughter. The selection is to happen later that night. There is a darkness: Maggie advises Fan not to be disappointed if she is not chosen and through her elliptical speech we come to understand that there is some distance between their family, the village community and its lead: 'The Father'. Fan declares, innocently, that she wishes for herself the appearance of a mermaid; the reference reveals both an affinity for the sea and a lack of distinction between human and animal. Fan has not yet been corroded; even though she has absorbed—and repeats, and performs—the community's narratives regarding the orca, she has not become indoctrinated in the culture of treating the animal as an enemy. Her ideal projection, therefore, is to appear as a creature of the sea, showing an appreciation for the in-between state of human animal/animal human; a deeper connection to nature; a responsiveness

to the interwoven ecologies between human and non-human element: here water.

Fan wishes to earn the admiration of 'The Father' through her dance; Maggie advises her that to capture his attention is difficult, attempting to deter her sister from approaching him. When the girls' father (Joshua) enters, it is clear that his relationship with Maggie is fraught. The latest incident appears to have been Maggie's sabotage of Fan's garland (essential for the performance) by advising its manufacturer that the family is unable to pay for it. Joshua accuses Maggie of lying constantly; we will understand later that this is not the case, and the antagonism is not between Maggie and her family, but between her and the village. If she is unable to extricate herself—and the sister she cares for—from its toxicity, at least she will attempt to impede their reach and influence. And while everyone else appears willing to adopt the narrative of the orcas encircling aggressively at the first sign of sea unrest, already from the start Maggie confronts the prejudice that has enabled such narrativisation and the manipulation of natural phenomena for the purposes of upholding the division, separating human from animal, and retaining the established whaling/patriarchal order.

The culture of silence—with whales and the sea as the only witnesses—is one that Maggie is unable to condone and perform. On the one hand, she is driven by the need to preserve her sister's happiness; in the absence of their mother, it is she who has assumed this role. Fan's relationship to Joshua, unlike that of Maggie, is entirely harmonious; but this does not mean that Joshua is able, or, even, ultimately, willing to protect her. There is, we come to realise, a load that Fan also carries: through her 'proper' behaviour the family may become reconstituted in the community; reincorporated following the so-perceived aberration of Maggie's hostility to the locals—a trope also associated with her mother—that has led to marginalisation. Hints as to what has transpired land early, even though it takes some time for the play to fully gather momentum; this is achieved when Gretchen, the mysterious character that appears emotionally detached and communicatively evasive in the beginning—quite literally—finds her voice to share her own traumatic experience.

Returning to Urry's community framing, already from the start in *Orca* we notice the exclusionary modes of a community that takes pride in its coherence and cohesion. They materialise doubly: firstly, by marginalising the human outsider (Maggie and her family); secondly, by vilifying the

animal outsider (the whale). Human and non-human outsiders, then, seen as the deviants, come to occupy the same interspace of both part of and extrinsic to the community. Their existence is narrativised as parasitical by the dominant local agents to conceal the fact that it is their practices that are, actually, the devious ones. Meanwhile, the interspace of what we may call the incorporated margin is established as dynamic, potent—it is there that the disruption of the dominant and its entrenched biorhythms might begin to take shape and garner strength. In the work of Amanda Kearney we observed how space becomes an agent in itself, impacting the life quality of both human and non-human entities (2018). It is important to once more return to Urry's "glacial" time (1994), where temporality becomes spatialised through metaphor: to be attuned to time, then, is to be attuned to the landscape, and vice versa. The process is defined by a more profound sense of interconnection and mutuality, which produces intimate ecologies between spaces, their biorhythms and their inhabitants. The fissure, then, opens, against the hegemony of ordered time, which, in the case of a context like *Orca*, is controlled by those in positions of power in the community.

Grinter's play demonstrates this further in the repetition of the Daughter/Father/Orca ritual that re-runs annually on the very premise of the orca's villainy and its narrativisation as set in place by those agents in control of the community's financial, civic and emotional economies. Imagining the landscape as ally rather than adversary, and feeling un-installed in her limited village surroundings, Maggie attempts to disrupt the repetitive pattern and interfere with its inevitability. Against ordered, patriarchal "clock-time" (Urry 1994, 135), Maggie endeavours to carve out an interspatial opening, existing outside the spatiotemporal narrative of her cultural context. In order to illuminate this understanding of the interspace in *Orca*, I would like to further nuance Urry's "glacial time" (1994, 135), considering his discussion of the intersection between leisure and "hegemonic clock-time" (1994, 131). I especially focus on Urry's troubling of the binary between these two notions of time, with a view to understanding that it is their fraught co-existence that Maggie seeks to disrupt in *Orca*, and it is in that locus that she attempts to open up a space for independence, acting to reveal how both these spaces, presented as separate and distinct, in fact serve to maintain the extant orthodoxy.

The fishermen control the village's economy, as well as its most popular common 'leisure' activity: the Daughter dance, which leads to the selection, by 'The Father', of the girl sacrificed to preserve the economies of

power of a land that both relies on her and treats her with contempt. The dance is only in place to proliferate the structures of power and perform it practically and symbolically. Fan's meticulous engagement with the story of the Daughter, as well as her dedicated and rigorous rehearsals, but also her emotional investment in the process, intersecting with the symbolic and financial significance that a favourable impression of her performance will yield for her family in the village, evidence the hight stakes and the extent of labour involved. There is nothing pure, or spontaneous, about the ritual; if leisure and hegemonic times converge, the hope is in the exposition of the fact that both serve the same exploitative economy and ought to be supplanted by a redistribution of the spatiotemporal field. As Urry notes, a meaningful shift does not necessarily imply a more relaxed understanding of time; it does, however, suggest a mode of operating more attuned to and in concert with non-human elements (1994, 133). Still, however, the determination of tasks even before capitalist-driven temporal assignment was a matter of cultural as well as religious patterns, which served to frame the natural, inscribing it with culturally-conditioned signification (Urry 1994, 133). Here we come to understand the extent of the challenge Maggie is facing, as, in her context, nature has been co-opted and presented as adversary by the dominant culture in the village, its adherence to its own arbitrary laws, and its quasi-ritualistic repeat performance of these. The interspace that Maggie is seeking to create, then, runs against a corrosive and extensive structure, which has to be counteracted in its entirety.

When Fan, who is too young to have a clear memory of her mother, is attempting to connect to her, she also displays, like the other females in her family, an intuitive connection to the non-human, and to landscape. The following exchange is indicative:

> FAN. […] I was reading one of Maggie's books, and it talked about a palm tree and I thought, if I never live anywhere but here, if I never go anywhere else then I'll never see a palm tree. I'll never, all the things in the books, I'd never see them. I felt sad about that. I love it here, I love our village but… I don't know.
>
> JOSHUA. You're young, Fan, your mind will reach out to far off places, because you think that they're better or more beautiful. Your mother thought about things like that once, like palm trees. You learn as you grow that palm trees are just trees to some folk. The ocean is still the ocean no matter the shade of blue. […] That's something your sister could learn,

> there's no better place than another [...]. If you find a place that lets you stay, once they know who you are... That's the best you'll get... (Grinter 2016, 16–44)

Like Maggie, Fan is also, in her own way, imagining an interspace and the possibility of a different life for herself, on different terms. Whereas Maggie is traumatised and therefore contained in what she dares to desire, Fan is still unburdened and innocent. Consequently, she allows herself to be moved by a greater ideal, exemplified here in the image of the palm tree, another fragment of nature, which, like the orca, also functions metonymically: it stands for the elsewhere, the possibility of having roots without feeling confined and without being considered deviant for pursuing this state. This is a context that would position identity as a fluid rather than polarised and exclusionary concept. What might seem like modesty, or self-sufficiency on the part of Joshua, is another way of retaining the patriarchal hegemonies that have long squashed female freedom, punishing those that have dared to imagine it for themselves. The girls' mother, in renting a boat so that, even momentarily, the family could be transported to another world—unafraid of the elements and feeling at home in the sea, was found guilty of precisely this kind of visible agency and expansive imagination.

It is nature that grounds the experience into fact: in the absence of her mother, Maggie might have forgotten the event were it not for the fleshy image of the "tiny red strawberries" "on my dress", or the way "the water felt on my hand, cool" (Grinter 2016, 16–44). Then, a startling conjunction occurs, one of the most impactful moments of tying the human- to the non-human maternal. Maggie recounts how she "was scared because I thought the orca might come and sink us"; and yet, not only did this not happen, but, in fact, as her little sister was crying, their mother breastfed her on a boat in the open sea, no longer concerned as to how she might be judged by the people on the island, because they were no longer under their jurisdiction (Grinter 2016, 16–44). It was another environment that was now dominant, and there, in the water, in the space between, the girls' mother was not only free, but at peace. The image of bare motherhood, protective of the child, moved by a primal instinct and with no regard for any human prohibitive agent, is, in my view, purposely paralleled in the play to the orca's behaviour in its own natural element—unrestrained. The text appears to be taking on the animal as broad category, establishing correspondences on the premise

of immediate ease within the natural environment and of uncontainable striving for freedom, thereby attacking the human/animal binary as reinforced by the oppressive community that the girls' mother longed to escape. Even the way in which Maggie describes her sister as a "funny fish" enamoured of mermaids and imagining them in the water, equally mesmerised by the sea and frightened of the whale's aggression, further points our attention to the play's fascination with hybridities rather than binaries (Grinter 2016, 16–44).

In the darkest moments of Grinter's plot, the parallel between human and non-human is presented in allegories, showing how these can be weaponised to cultivate fear and suppress freedom instincts. As 'The Father' warns Fan, referring to a mother orca with the pod under pursuit by whalers, "the thing she loved would be the thing that did it for her"—as in care and resistance renders one vulnerable to exposure and attack (Grinter 2016, 45–51). Protecting the pod was the cause of the orca's own capture, while an equally strong maternal force, it is implied in the context of the conversation, caused the girls' mother to speak against the abusive male hegemonies in place in the community—for the purposes, we gather, of safeguarding her children. This led, then, to another form of relentless 'hunting' pursuit, this time with a human victim. Moreover, when 'The Father' recalls Maggie's stint as the Daughter he reminds her of how "the pod appeared and she looked straight at you", adding a particularly bracing undertone to the metonymic function of Orca and pod: mothers and daughters at sea, persecuted, attempting to escape, eliminated (Grinter 2016, 16–44). In the next play examined in this chapter, the term "pod" also features, an early sign, perhaps, of a human pregnancy; the kind of natural cause that would, in that case, save a convicted murderer from hanging (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121).

In Grinter's play, the orca stands as permanent reminder for the ferocity of the motherhood lost; the sea, likewise, stands as protective environment, the space of solace between vulnerable women and girls and the village—an element that can provide support and defence, if one may conceive of embarking upon an escape. Throughout the play, Maggie is working against the clock: the dance is looming; Fan is about to become exposed to the collective trauma that Maggie has experienced first-hand. The only source of hope is the possibility to intervene and disrupt what appears as a foregone process that will perpetuate systemic abuse. But the temporal margins of hope also operate on oppressive 'clock-times' dictated by the very structures that female agents like Maggie seek to

disrupt, and any intervention is not only tentative, but also highly precarious. Through institutional *Symplegades*, the passage must be swift and strategic; or else, one is crushed. The condition persists in this chapter's final case study.

The Welkin

Kirkwoood's dramaturgical trope of placing the death of a female child at the heart of the plot is important, especially given the way in which the play establishes the importance of the interventionist interspace within a judicial framework, encouraging intellectual involvement but discouraging emotionalism. It largely achieves this by retaining a balance between the human and non-human, elevating its plot beyond the room, to the skies. A child born to a family of privilege has been murdered; a woman born in precisely the opposite conditions shows no remorse and is unequivocally guilty. When, during the matrons' deliberations, as they are summoned to establish whether she is pregnant and may escape hanging, Sally Poppy, the perpetrator, describes how she first came to encounter the man that instigated the abduction and murder of the child, and as whose accomplice she acted, her words carry a distinctive tone of the metaphysical. Here, desire is framed as a cosmic experience:

> and I wanted and I wanted and I wanted and then the wanting rose up around me like milk boiling like clouds boiling and then opened my eyes and saw a streak in the sky, a sort of dull blaze. And soon on the horizon I saw a smudge. And the smudge came closer and soon it became a thumbprint and the thumbprint became a smear and the smear became a hovering swarm and the swarm became a mechanical and the mechanical became a man [...] I knew I was adrift and would do whatever he asked of me. (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121)

The only other event, beyond this encounter, that instigates emotion in Sally, is her longing to see Halley's comet. In the above description, both states of rapture merge, where the wonders of nature are projected onto a human and vice versa. And so, the next stages in Sally's life and death become interwoven with that of the comet. To Sally, whose life has been dull, colourless, classed and thankless, shiny objects, especially ethereal, are a source of fascination. The murdered child's very hair, golden and still plaited, a trope that Poppy has kept (as the image on the cover of

the published text clearly foregrounds), is not all too dissimilar from the golden shape of the comet's tail; except the former is tangible, and the latter is not. But to Sally, they are both something to behold, and even to capture.

The correspondence is further bolstered by the celestial tone delivered by a landmark scene in the National Theatre production of the play's premiere, which occurs immediately after the interval. The scene serves to create an interspace in nuanced ways: physically, notionally and temporally. The events of the scene transpire, with a dreamlike quality, on a time plane entirely separate from the standard action time of the play itself; the segment is an interruption and fissure in temporality and in the otherwise realist pace of the judicial part of the plot. At curtain rise (for the play's second part), Sally is seen playing 'airplanes' with the child; she lies on her back on the floor, the child balanced on her hands, facing her, eventually lifted up in a movement that implies Sally has pushed her upwards to heaven. Here is the moment of transition between life and death, as the 'sky' above the stage space opens to take in the child. The child is seen as happy; so is Sally. The only moments in which she appears connected to her world in any joyous way, then, appear to be the ones where she faces the heavens. The title of Kirkwood's play is perhaps nowhere else more viscerally felt than in this moment, although, certainly, by selecting an archaic word for 'sky' or 'heaven' in naming the play, Kirkwood emphasises its preoccupations with heavenly phenomena and higher layers of existence already at first contact with the audience.

There are further levels of discourse in terms of how the celestial/comet setting serves to create interspaces in the play. These include a form of time travel, presented in the play's Act Two. Although a visual record of the segment exists on the production scenographers' website (Brinkhoff/Mögenburg 2020), the scene was not staged in the premiere production, insofar as one may extrapolate from the archival recording. The segment is short and impactful: its strategic placement in the playtext's finale underlines that the plot concerns are durational, applying across different cultural and historical contexts, towards a universal interconnectedness for the experience of women across time. The play opens—in production as well as playtext—with a verbally silent scene that features the matrons performing household tasks of manual/physical care and labour. It is titled "Act One, Housework", mirroring "Act Two, The Comet" (Kirkwood 2020, 8, 122). The two serve as bookends for the play, and the circularity that they convey, reflected in the circularity of the

comet's (re-)appearance, evidences that for women the narrative is not a linear one, but one that repeats across time.

For the better elucidation of the connection, the longer quotations are merited. In *The Welkin*, then, this is the status of women's lives in 1759:

> *Charlotte Cary is polishing pewter*
>
> *Emma Jenkins is soaping her husband's collars*
>
> *Hannah Rusted is carrying pails of water on a yoke*
>
> *Helen Ludlow is mending a dress by candlelight*
>
> *Ann Lavender is changing a screaming baby*
>
> *Kitty Givens is scrubbing a floor with sand and brushes*
>
> *Peg Carter is sweeping the floor and ceiling with a besom*
>
> *Judith Brewer is using a smoothing stone to force creases from linen*
>
> *Sarah Hollis is beating a rug*
>
> *Mary Middleton is kneading bread as she rocks a crib with her foot*
>
> *Sarah Smith is plucking a pheasant*
>
> *Elizabeth Luke is drying washing at a wringing post*
>
> *The baby cries, the brush scrapes, the water slops, flour rises, feathers fall, silver squeaks, t*
>
> *he broom and the carpet send up clouds of dust.* (Kirkwood 2020, 8)

Meanwhile, in 2061:

> *The Matrons are working.*
>
> *Charlotte Cary is wrestling with a bin bag and putting a new one in.*

> *Sarah Smith is on her knees cleaning a carpet with a Dust Buster.*
>
> *Hannah Rusted is carrying two heavy bags-for-life home.*
>
> *Helen Ludlow is breastfeeding as she replies to emails on her phone.*
>
> *Ann Lavender is using a sewing machine to make a Red Nose Day costume.*
>
> *Kitty Givens is cleaning an oven.*
>
> *Peg Carter is folding laundry as a washing machine whirs.*
>
> *Judith Brewer is ironing while she watches TV.*
>
> *Sarah Hollis is cleaning a toilet.*
>
> *Mary Middleton is chopping leeks and anxiously watching a video baby monitor.*
>
> *Emma Jenkins is defrosting a freezer.*
>
> *Elizabeth Luke is a nurse visiting a primary school, treating a child's head for nits.*
>
> *Elizabeth sees it first. Looks up.*
>
> *One by one the others look up too.*
>
> *The Comet is returning, passing overhead.* (Kirkwood 2020, 122)

Kirkwood's opening segment serves to underline how women's existence is forever occupying and proliferating (in) an in-between space, in which women function as agents between private and public domains—the latter becoming emphatically obvious when they are summoned to their judicial duties. The housework, captured here so viscerally, audibly, texturally through the stage- and audioscape of the production, is shown for the unseen space of committed, everyday labour that it truly is: a performance of that which is chronically essential and invisible at the same time.

In the finale, the circularity is accentuated by the fact that the same women—or more likely their future iterations, depending on how

metaphysical an interpretation one may pursue—are again described as matrons; we have seen (versions of) them before. They exist in an elastic, in-between space that stretches diachronically beyond synchronic differentiations. They are forever peers, each other's judge and community at the same time. As Clare Wallace notes, the women's "silent labour frames the play's overt agonistic scene, suggesting a systemic objectification that overspills the immediate setting and points to the policing of women's place more generally" (2022, 34). As spectators, we serve at/as the in-between site of observation all along, mediating in different historical moments, invited to reflect on precisely what this policing entails, and how it might be disrupted. Moreover, as Act Two highlights, we—or our own future iterations—will continue to operate in this role. Our agency is conceptualised as actors in historical narratives of whom at least some empathy, but ideally also mobilisation against institutional wrongs and systemic failures, is expected.

In the space of a play having transpired, our familiarity with Elizabeth (Lizzy) Luke, the midwife who drives the action as much as Sally Poppy in *The Welkin*, is such that the fact that Kirkwood gives more prominence to her perspective by means of her being the first to observe the comet's return is merited. Lizzy is the fore-matron in the events of 1759; she is the one who coordinates the deliberations of the women who have been summoned to evaluate the evidence and establish whether Sally is indeed in the early stages of pregnancy. There is a link to *The Last Witch* here, in that the bond between mother and child is shown in its full range of life-and/or-death iterations. Once more daughters emerge as systemically vulnerable, with motherhood the ultimate condition of care, tested against all adversity. In Munro's play, a mother sacrifices herself to preserve her child from prosecution; in *The Welkin*, a (perhaps) mother to be is to be (possibly) saved by her unborn child, but, for that to even be plausible, she first needs to be saved by her mother, Lizzy. This is the same woman who, in attempting to save her daughter the first time around by giving her up for adoption, when she gave birth to her as a teenaged mother as a result of rape, unwittingly—and without fault given the limitations of circumstance—did not succeed in providing her child with a better future. The events of Lizzy's early maternity are revealed at an advanced stage in the play; that Sally is her child is not a fact widely known amongst the matrons until then, therefore the impact of the revelation is considerable.

The comet, then, is the absolute schema for such states of recurrence, circularity and embeddedness. Additionally, and directly linked to the above, the analytical rigour in the comet's monitoring mirrors the (at least predicated) meticulousness of procedures of juridical nature. The spaces of observation and adjudication that open and close, whereby the natural phenomenon serves as schema within which to situate the human condition as not separate from, but pertaining to planetary ecologies in itself, invite an engagement with relevant scientific literature, as considered in this book's first main chapter. Taking into account that *The Welkin* is a modern-day historical play, I am interested in proceeding also synchronically, bearing in mind the sources that relate to the comet's appearance and recurrence originating in the timepoints where the events of both text (fictional) and phenomenon (actual) occur, and therefore probing the play's deeper threads and imagined, but also real, histories.

"I wanted to see the comet when it came", Sally answers her husband in one of the play's early scenes, "Act One, The Night in Question", returning to her home after a four-month absence and interrogated as to her whereabouts in the intervening time (Kirkwood 2020, 9–12). This is that other crucial interspace harbouring the action that we do not get to see, except in a split fragment, in the spatiotemporal fissure of the 'airplanes' scene; this is also the parenthetical space that leads to yet another liminal space, that of the judicial process. Confronting her husband's ignorance, Sally adds: "It has been predicted by Mr Halley, / don't you read the newspaper?" (Kirkwood 2020, 9–12). Elsewhere, in an early dialogue with Coombes, the bailiff who comes to summon Lizzy to the jury, Lizzy's (other) daughter Katy also appears to be mesmerised by the comet, inspecting the sky for its arrival during housework. Coombes remarks on her being fixated; she retorts that she has long awaited the comet, already three months late as "Mr Halley said it shoulda come before Old Year's Night" (Kirkwood 2020, 13–22). She does not blink when Coombes returns with a humorous remark—the rudeness in the comet's lateness—quipping back: "I dassent miss it. I'll be dead before that comes round again" (Kirkwood 2020, 13–22). There is dramatic irony here in that one of Lizzy's daughters will indeed die, in fact much sooner, but this will be Sally.

Further on, once the matrons' deliberation begins, frequent references to the comet's expectation land, punctuating the discussion as much as the references to Sally's crime, or the contested status of her pregnancy. As one matron comments, "I do think it's very queer that we know more

about the movement of a comet that is thousands of miles away than the workings of a woman's body" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). A remark made by Lizzy at a crucial point in the deliberations process, namely that Sally "has been framed by a comet" in the sense that the comet's sudden, forceful (and unobserved by others) arrival may have played a role in the events of the child's death, producing a mistaken assumption of guilt for what was, perhaps, an accident, cements the overall dramaturgy of Kirkwood's play (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). Human and celestial bodies, that is, are conceptualised in tandem, with the comet functioning as compass and gravitational force when it comes to the action. Even though it never appears throughout the events of the play, the space of anticipation that the comet sets up, corresponding to the space of uncertainty for Sally's fate, is the play's crucial interspace. It is an act of waiting that is urgent, super-enhanced beyond the realm of the earthly. As life continues during the waiting, so it is also suspended.

This, then, is the interspace *par excellence*: fluid and elastic, taking substance within and in spite of measured and accounted, institutional/judicial and systemic/domestic time. The parenthetical space, that is, becomes the event, in a perfect union between science and nature: the in-between space is identified by scientists in the context of the comet's framing; and the comet itself frames the interlude in which the events of the play transpire, mirroring, in its slow progress until a sudden visibility, the stages of a pregnancy. Both comet and pregnancy are events of monumental significance given their impact and consequence, and they also share a precariousness in their tenuousness in terms of visibility, temporariness, and the ability to be believed sight unseen.

When it comes to appreciating the intimacy between space and time in the context of *The Welkin*, I return to Urry's mention of "glacial time, where time has almost entirely slowed down" (1994, 140). As Urry expands upon, "the emptying of time and space establishes something of a single world" (1994, 140). In *The Welkin*, we are dealing with time- and agency-pressurised space that the matrons have been interpellated into; here, they face both an immense responsibility and the realities of their chronic marginalisation in a profoundly classed and patriarchal society. Proceeding from Urry, such realisations are interwoven with the development of a non-anthropocentric eco-conscience that, reflecting the interests of this book, co-exists with the burgeoning possibility of the interspace as a fissure to linearity and continuity, and as the space where intervention and change are possible (Urry 1994, 140). In the case of

the matrons, the two co-exist naturally: they are the ones who labour in domestic chores, forever in contact with the land, and in an intimate conversation with the broader world around them—their daily labour is both of and preserves the cosmos. It is an interactional ecology that also fully explains the engagement and fascination with the ultimate cosmic phenomenon of the time: Halley's comet. As the matrons have been looking out for it, attempting to anticipate and trace it, and as they also look up in the future moment of its reappearance, so they have been mindful of, and preserving, through their daily care and attention, a richer universal/cosmic economy.

For Lizzy, a midwife well aware of the cyclical narrative of life, nature is the great equaliser. When she is first summoned, reacting to the news of the wealthy Wax family having lost one of its children to brutal murder, she exclaims: "They've a house full of decencies to put between themselves and the rest of the world but now the world has got in nonetheless" (Kirkwood 2020, 13–22). The world is both controlled by class and privilege and transcends these at the same time. Disruptions occur. Or, as Lizzy puts it, reflecting on Lady Wax, "perhaps the experience will sweeten her, like frost on a parsnip" (Kirkwood 2020, 13–22). Urry discusses "a re-evaluation of nature, which becomes increasingly viewed as not simply disposable, for humans have an especial responsibility for its preservation. And this entails taking a very long-term perspective, extending way beyond the lifetime of anyone presently living" (1994, 140). Additionally, "to presuppose a glacial sense of time, [is] to feel the weight of history" (Urry 1994, 140). The 'very long-term perspective' is precisely the commitment that the women make to the future of the world; to the ecologies of womanhood and personhood, because, to them, time is durational—there is such a thing as a long game, because their own experience as daily labourers is one such. With this comes the double appreciation that, firstly, the moments of interruption, interjection and intervention, especially those that hinge on and invite collective action, do not occur frequently, and, as community endeavours, ought to be recognised and taken advantage of. Secondly, because it is the everyday labour that teaches duration, that interconnects women themselves as invisible agents and that hinges on care and preservation, and, indeed, on principles of non-disposability, it is essential to extend the same courtesy to nature and to human beings alike.

As Wallace argues, "female bodies feature as the sites of agonistic dialogue about beliefs, rights and duties" (2022, 26). Mindful of the

momentous weight of responsibility, Lizzy further comments on the clash of time and task, seeking to prolong it, to stretch that space for change, to highlight the cosmic implication: "You [the judicial authorities] give us an hour to make a decision that must be lived with for an eternity" (Kirkwood 2020, 22–28). As she also remarks in an impassioned statement, some considerable way into the deliberation:

> Because every card dealt to her [Sally] today and for many years before has been an unkind one, because she has been sentenced by men pretending to be certain of things of which they are entirely ignorant, and now we sit here imitating them, trying to make an ungovernable thing governable [...] I ask you to hope for her, so that she might know she is worth hoping for. And if you cannot do that for her sake, think instead of the women who will be in this room when that comet comes round again, and how brittle they will think our spirits, how ashamed they will be, that we were given our own dominion and we made it look exactly like the one down there [the courtroom, the angry mob, though arguably, also, a nod to the audience and their agency]. (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74)

Here, once more, is the recognition of the glaciality of time; of embeddedness in a cosmic narrative, for which the comet, like the orca in Grinter's play, serves metonymically—for the responsibility of agency in the time and space of justice intervention. And all this, indicative of the radical lack of institutional care towards women as another form of coercion even when their agency is sought by the same system that oppresses them, in a room with "No food, no water, no fire, no candle" (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74).

Still, it is this same room that will become the space of community against disparity and of intervention, against the odds. It is the space where women will develop tactics of care towards the transient space, and towards each other—all in the spirit of preservation of something greater than themselves; all in the spirit of mutual self-recognition that does not erase, but acknowledges and respects difference, while also respecting commonality. The act of care towards their shared space is reflective of and directly related to their care and attention to their legally assigned task. As Lizzy observes, in order to focus it is important, in addition to the individual circumstances of each matron, to acknowledge that:

> This whole affair is a farce. We are cold, hungry, tired, thirsty women and all of us've had our housework interrupted. [...] It is a poor apparatus for

> justice. But it is what we have. This room. The sky outside that window and our own dignity beneath it. […T]ogether we must speak in one voice. It is almost impossible that we should make the right decision. But shall we not try? (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74)

What Lizzy appears to acknowledge here, in her appeal to her peers, is that it is in the space of interruption, in the interlude, when the event occurs. The narrative may well be another, and time depth and longitude might prepare one for the action they are to take in the crucial moment, but the change occurs in the in-between. Parenthetical time and space may be incidental, but is not negligible. Rather, it *is* the event.

In order to furnish the site for an intervention, they must, quite literally, create the space: not only in terms of a break in the standard patriarchal order, but, also, in terms of the material surroundings that enable them to co-exist in a civilised manner, one conducive to the labour they have been tasked with. The spatial equilibrium is as much local as it is universal: attention begins in local minutiae to extend well beyond them. The matrons' attention to the land and to the domestic embeds them firmly within their context: the space where one performs an act is equally important to the act being performed; an act of disruption does not emerge out of a vacuum. Defying judicial order not to have a comfortable experience in the material space afforded—as a way, arguably, of speeding the deliberation process along—is the first step towards disrupting systemic prejudice, labouring for the material conditions towards the physical interspace that might also produce the ideological one. Interventions, too, require meticulousness, care and attention; *The Welkin* shows that no one is in a better position to provide these than the very agents that have been kept intentionally removed from the majority of the bureaucratical and legal processes shaping the society in which they live, and whose wellbeing they shoulder on a daily basis. Acknowledging responsibility towards the human world, it is shown clearly, departs from assuming responsibility towards the non-human environment.

Here, this environment comes in the shape of "*A cold bare room above the courthouse* […] *gloomy. No fire lit although one is laid*" (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). The matrons observe the lack of care immediately, with one of them—Emma Jenkins, whose agency we later realise proves pivotal, in her quiet alliance with Lizzy—commenting: "Dirty skirting, does that not make you want to weep? Who cleans for them? Who keeps

house for the law?" as another matron uses her own handkerchief to clean (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). Already we notice Emma's confidence, her care, but also her ability to be moved by what strikes her as an imbalance and injustice, precisely where justice ought to be a given; her sense of "duty to the parish" is also proclaimed, while she regrets the absence of women's voice except in rare moments of spectacular(ised) crisis (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). The law by which Emma abides is compelled by a moral imperative; an empathy that one might even call old-fashioned, motivated by a deeper urge than sympathy. She will, at the finale, describe herself as "quite a tender creature behind closed doors", which, matched with her sober reasoning, provides a catalytic moment for action—and for the radical potential of the interspace, even when it might appear that the intervention that attempts to disrupt the linearity of the judicial system has failed (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). As Wallace observes, peer adjudication contexts such as the one that the play depicts show how "[w]ithin a resolutely patriarchal judicial system, […] open[s] a small, if ambivalent pocket of female agency" (2022, 33). It is this agency that will be tested and maximised by the conclusion of the play's events.

Early in the process of deliberation, already tired and effectively captive, the matrons are beginning to feel physical discomfort alongside the mental and moral—in some cases also emotional—pressures of being in the jury. Lizzy is able to offer partial relief when she produces some bread, which is eagerly shared. While no claim can be made as to uniformity, a community is, in its way, beginning to form. As time wears on, the matrons support one another towards defying the so-called letter of the law. Eventually, "*They have produced a spark that has caught the kindling. The fire starts to take*" (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). It is a direction as significant for the gradual reclaiming of the space as it is for the reclaiming of agency and of the bond amongst disparate individuals. But it takes effort; coordination; sharpness of spirit in a context where the body is deprived of foundational comforts. So when Lizzy notices the dwindling of the flame, she exercises her summoning strengths—and powers—"*and pumps air vigorously into the fire*" (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). The fire livens as much the hearth in the room, as it does the women's debate; if it dies, the interspace dissolves; the moment of intervention disappears. Lizzy succeeds and "*the fire is kicking into life*"; as debate swells, so "*the fire is roaring*" (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). But the interspace is tentative, exposed—each time the window opens, mostly due to Judith Brewer's menopausal hot flashes, the matrons are reminded of how temporary and transitory their

spatial grounding truly is: the violent shouts of the crowd, hungering for the spectacle of hanging and the performance of punishment, invade.

It is a non-human entity that will, eventually, extinguish the flame and escalate events towards a more dramatic resolution: a dead crow lands spectacularly through the unswept chimney of the lit fireplace. In the crucial moment of milk having seemingly been extracted from Sally's pregnant breast, a cloud of soot descends upon the room, covering everything; the momentum is ruined—the room also; the flame is "*smothered*" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). And while this could prove detrimental, Lizzy continues to rally. It is in the aftermath of the event, as the show resumes following the interval, and as we witness the 'airplanes' scene, that the interspace comes fully into being, and the women's agency—all of them affected now by the intensity of the moment, mentally and emotionally, but also physically—comes fully into its own. Sally is examined by a doctor, who has volunteered his services; she is found to be pregnant. The women share in the moment, different sources of pain and grief rising to the surface; and Kirkwood builds a dramaturgically stunning fissure as they all join to sing Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). In the "strategic" anachronistic spatiotemporal occurrence (Wallace 2022, 37), the matrons transcend their time and space to form an intimate alliance, not despite of, but because of the differences that make their shared afflictions all the more strongly felt. Now, literally and metaphorically, they form a chorus of agreement. The interspace has taken root. They have claimed it through care for the room, and for each other.

Such is the magnitude of the event that, once Sally is found to be pregnant and the verdict returned, saving her from hanging, one of the matrons, Kitty Givens, is hesitant to leave because, as she quietly reflects before being alerted, "*gently*", by Sarah Hollis, to the fact that it is time for them to vacate the premises, "It's been so nice to be out of that house all day" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). Hollis agrees and regrets "But it is over now" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). Kirkwood's stage direction here is profoundly poignant: "*The spell is broken*" (2020, 75–121). That is, "Sally's unruly body and unrepentant agency" have provided the "fractures [to] the consensual common sense that positions the women in this environment, opening instead a discursive agonistic space" (Wallace 2022, 37). Now, the physical space remains, but the parenthesis has closed. The liminal space may have been an uncomfortable enclosure, but, for the matrons, it was a metaphorical clearing in the forest. The room is soon

to be restored to its systemic proprietors; the intervention has occurred, and normality, in its relentless gendered orthodoxy, resumes.

Even so, nothing might quite prepare spectators for what follows: namely, the brutal physical assault that Sally will sustain in a few moments with Coombes as the perpetrator. In a play that wholly casts male authority into doubt, from ineffectual husbands to myopic judges and all degrees in between, it is especially important that even as this act of major violence and transgression is perpetrated by a man, he is still shown to be ineffectual; a weakling. The decisive disruption to the interspace, then, occurs not at the end of the proceedings, not even when the matrons, one by one, vacate the room. It occurs in what, on the stage, as well as in the text, emerges as a moment of immense darkness and gravity in the shape of Lady Wax infiltrating the space of the courthouse to demand an audience. She does not, however, speak to Sally. She does not speak to Coombes either, or not audibly; but she presses money in his hand. He appears to have qualms, but, in Lizzy's absence (fetching food and water for Sally) and following Lady Wax's exit, he still "*stamps on* [… Sally's] *stomach twelve times*", as if to erase each of the jurors that have engaged with and scrutinised that very body (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121).

Consequently, Sally miscarries violently. Upon returning and encountering the scene, Lizzy is mortified at the realisation; and while the brute force of the event, paired with that of class, privilege and money, might have been enough to erase the narrative of justice that the twelve matrons intervened to formulate, it is now that we most resolutely come to grasp the disruptive potentialities of the interspace, and its own gravitational pull and force. Sally, facing the realities of the execution now certainly awaiting her, pleads with Lizzy to kill her before she is surrendered to the authorities and the spectacle-hungry crowds. Lizzy is confronted by the vast scale of circumstance, but finds herself morally unable to fulfil Sally's repeated pleas. Then, suddenly, Emma returns. Objects in space also matter: they are agents; they punctuate the moment. In this case, it is a knife—a blunt instrument that was earlier used towards an act of care: the "letting" of Judith in the toe, so as to relieve her hot flushes (Kirkwood 2020, 29–74). Another relief is about to be delivered, as the knife serves as prompt for Emma's return; she had left it behind and has come to retrieve it.

Once more, Emma, unemotional, "not the person to come to for mercy", as she says of herself, appears compelled by a higher sense of duty and agency (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). Reflecting on the violence of the

mob awaiting Sally, she delivers one of the play's most poignant lines: "There is a moral slippage in this country I find most troubling" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). And then, an allegory from personal experience: the cover-up of a domestic incident involving Emma's husband's favourite pet, which was aggressive towards her and which became poisoned by true accident, but whose circumstances of death, through his extraordinary love for the dog, her husband would have been incredulous towards. Emma's merciful intervention occurred as she "took off [...her] stays, wrapped the laces round the poor thing's throat and released her" (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). Emma, however, needed a witness to corroborate that the dog was already gone when she found her; her sister, as Emma mentions, was able to swear impassionedly that so it happened. In what were extraordinary moments in the play's premiere production, without a hint of sentimentalism, an understanding is reached; a camaraderie between women who are aware of each other's struggles as peers, and as mothers. Emma, then, restores the interspace through personal narration; and, so, a different ending will be delivered to the story. Sally will die with a face cleaned by her mother, as she is instructed, also by her mother, who stands behind her, to face forwards and upwards, to the sky, because the comet—once more described as a "smudge", the same word Sally used to describe first seeing her lover's figure against the sky (and therefore further interconnecting the two experiences)—is about to appear (Kirkwood 2020, 75–121). It is an once-in-a-lifetime moment and it will end in a flash. Sally is released, even if she does not leave the room.

Reflecting on how enclosure can also mark liberation, it is relevant that the play, landing in January 2020, marginally predates the COVID-19 pandemic; the distance between premiere and lockdown is, we might say, within the margins of the temporal interspace that forms at the time of the play's events as far as the appearance and disappearance of the comet is concerned. The sudden stranding of individuals within a closed-up space, the developments that this expedites and their engagements with an outside that is both beyond a door and very far away, would come to acquire greater resonance still within the space of a few weeks from the play's opening. In this context, the Burgtheater premiere of the play, which came in the autumn of 2020 shortly before Vienna would enter another lockdown and as theatres all across the world remained disrupted, acquires heightened significance. Thrust within a COVID-19 context, the staging showed the twelve matrons in an actual physical interspace: a glass room within the room (the stage), revolving, their hands

leaving marks on the windows as they, themselves, had just been thrust into an unknown situation—confined under a strict lockdown protocol for the purposes of serving the greater good. The eeriness of the image—with the women's colourful costumes cast against the darkness, together and yet disparate—as the soundscape of the production swelled, adding to the haunting atmosphere of the set, and as the windows served as dividers between ourselves and the actors, would bring to Kirkwood's already nuanced play dimensions even more profound. A new reality was now shared across stage and auditorium, as our common environment was redistributed: being in a public space comes with agencies and responsibilities that may limit freedom, but also preserve it—a delicate balance that, like the spark in the fireplace, requires delicate kindling.

Sally herself forms part of a broader cosmic ecology—as such, even she, a murderess, a neglected child, a classed and othered pariah, is not to be treated as disposable. In the very beginning of the play, when re-encountering her verbally abusive husband, Sally undermines his church-fearing bigotry through a phrase that appears to acknowledge a grander narrative, and a non-hierarchical way of being: "God isn't up there, Fred. He's inside us. In our bodies. In your body and mine and Poppet's too [the dog that he neglects, and which she cares for]" (Kirkwood 2020, 9–12). Even Sally's curt answer to her husband, "I've been to look at God", when he insists upon his line of questioning as a man betrayed, reveals the one and only fascination Sally allows herself: that with a world greater than the one she has known, and which has failed her; a more expansive life (Kirkwood 2020, 9–12). That the choice she makes in terms of her lover is entirely ill-conceived does not alter the fact that Sally is motivated by a quest for the majestic; for an event that takes her beyond the mundane; that does not disappoint.

Time in *The Welkin* is both/and: it is both almost entirely slowed down and parenthetically interjected, with long-lasting consequences. Its glaciality relates both to how it is experienced in the present moment by the agents involved, and to how these agents' actions will inscribe a legacy, in the form of social attitudes towards women, as well as legal precedent, that will long postdate the temporality of the specific action. Kirkwood's glance at the distant future at the projected time of the comet's return attests to this. One might, of course ask, whether even in contexts where the dramaturgy of the play produces a rootedness in a specific time period, we are not, actually, always embedded in a temporal elasticity by virtue of the fact that we are encountering the events of the

play in our own time—processing them through our present perspective of circumstances. Still, there is an essential distinction to be made: in cases of new plays engaging with past historical periods, meaning that we share the same present historical moment with the playwright, our receiving conditions will be different. In other words, the playwright knows that which we also know; we form part of the same, or similar, cultural, political and social conditions. These parameters combined both imbue the play with the weight of circumstance and defy the strict temporality of the present. Humanity runs more slowly than 'clock-time' might predicate: its narrative its cosmic, interwoven, interspatial.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on three plays: Rona Munro's *The Last Witch*, Matt Grinter's *Orca* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Welkin*. In clustering these texts together under a collective title that foregrounds deviance, this chapter has asked how environments and behaviours are not only cross-attributable, but, rather, form part of deeper and more intricate synergies. The environments in which each of these plays unfolds could be described as 'hostile': a hard land that is the amalgam of a harsh landscape and of unkind behaviours. But there is more to be said about environments that induce, escalate and conceal—landscapes that host and absorb transgressions, witnessing and erasing evidence of these actions; local residents beholden to bonds of dependency and cross-benefit at the expense of those more vulnerable, and defenceless; and an exploration of how such defencelessness might be equally the result of exposure to the elements, and to people. As this chapter has argued, beyond facile anthropomorphisms, these plays conceptualise their terrains as intricate and dynamic, rather than ascribing to the earth the characteristics of its people. The questions that are asked here, regarding human and non-human nature, and the desire of the human to transgress their immediate geo-spatial and geo-social limitations, lead to a consideration of the inter-space as the site of the metaphysical, of that which the human invokes to be delivered of the insufficiency and hostility of the man-made world. Here, the term is used mindfully, because, in each of these plays, we are dealing with social environments that are profoundly male-gendered, with legend and mythologies serving as ground for persecuting any agent of difference, or of change.

The interspaces that open within the institutional, however, are the ones where the upset in hierarchy appears to be momentarily possible: it is so in *The Last Witch*, where one woman is sacrificed to the parochial beliefs of a society that vilifies the different, where her daughter, living at large, in nature, strives to be accommodated in a world whose vastness she rivals with her own desolation. It is so in *Orca*, where a recurring sanctioned ceremonial serves as the ground of sacrifice of young girls to abusive patriarchal forces, but for the intervention of a community of sisters, and of mothers—both human and non-human—that throw their own bodies in the way of breaking the cycle. And it is so in *The Welkin*, where a punishing judicial system both relegates authority and castigates action, only to find itself subverted from within, in that pregnant space of a sisterhood forming amongst dramatically different women, brought—and maintained together—by a commitment to true justice. As these plays show us, and as this chapter has demonstrated, it is looking to the horizon beyond, to the sea and the sky and the non-human, that the lesson is to be gleaned. The lesson is from nature, rather than a community of men: its own unruly landscapes, as these plays have shown, if gendered at all, are, then, female-gendered, inhabited and tended by women. And so the female body strives to connect to a sense of purpose higher than the human, while, at the same time, serving to preserve this very humanity. It is in such a space where change takes flesh.

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CHAPTER 7

The Virtual: Hybrid Environments and Deepfake Realities

Most books, I expect, will at the end be rather different from how they were first imagined; perhaps the likelihood for this happening is greater when the subject is contemporary theatre, which evolves and is subject to alterations—and cancellations—to a higher degree than many other forms of art and literature. Parts of this book are indeed different from how they were initially conceptualised, as a form of recognition for the fact that we are inhabiting shifting ground. As we negotiate our post-COVID-19 world, we are learning that theatre's thematic range and methodologies have changed and are being recalibrated. Much as this is causing a certain unpredictability it can also be, to an extent, a source of invigoration for the medium. As the direct consequence of research and fieldwork being dynamic processes directly intertwined with emerging conditions in playwriting, theatre-making and theatregoing, this book looks to establish an intuitive dialogue with the new world—including that of the theatre—in which we live, capturing the factors that are shaping this experience. This imperative becomes rather more pronounced in the present chapter, which concerns one of the most significant advances of our contemporary moment: the electronic environments in and through which we experience very considerable parts of our lives.

In 2022, as theatre and the world were coming back to a life that was, once again, beginning to feel familiar, though altered, and as a major pandemic event was still being absorbed in ways that will likely require substantial time to be fully unpacked, two texts landed on the stage

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dealing with virtual worlds. They explored humans' cross-embeddedness, the sense of network and isolation, and the playwright's agency, role and presence in this altered world—both taking stock of emergent conditions and gazing towards the future. These plays were staged within five months of each other at the same theatre, London's Royal Court. Even their titles were similar: one was Dave Davidson's *This Is Not Who I Am*, premiering in June at the Downstairs auditorium in a production directed by Lucy Morrison; the other was *Not One of These People*, a new play by Martin Crimp, opening in November in a production directed by Christian Lapointe, also in the Theatre Downstairs. Or so were the two texts marketed, because once we began to peel off the layers—an act with seemingly boundless interpretative possibilities in both plays—the first text was revealed to be the new play *Rapture* by Lucy Kirkwood. Another common thread between the two works, which otherwise went about pursuing this very differently, whether through the story of the couple at the heart of Kirkwood's play's enquiry that was presented as a governmental investigation, or through the plethora of changing faces that populated Crimp's play on a screen, is the way in which they pursued truth and falsity not as binary, but as states profoundly intertwined, all the while probing the playwright's role in changing, digitally mediated social and artistic environments. COVID-19, it would appear, had 'mutated' into something of a dramaturg. The ingenuity of both plays further hinged on their depiction of how sympathy and empathy structures take shape and hold within the digital domain, not least concerning the lives of others, and more specifically the fragments of these, filtered through screens and constructed through non-verifiable (self-)narration.

Rapture/That Is Not Who I Am

I have chosen to cite both titles given to the event I attended at the Royal Court, because both shaped my expectations and response to it as text and performance. Seeing the play on 18 June 2022 meant that I encountered a rather 'spoiler-free' context, as reviews only began circulating the following day. The event/play already begins as interspace between its two authors: one real (Kirkwood) and at least one fictional (Davidson, but also the multiple iterations of Kirkwood, addressed further on). It is also an interspace between the two plays' respective plots: the one I had imagined on the basis of the promotional material, and the one I actually saw on performance night. There is a fluidity inevitably attached to my

perception of the piece, therefore, which I rather welcome. I should also introduce this section by stating that I had booked my ticket sufficiently intrigued by the blurb on the theatre's website, describing a new text by a newcomer playwright:

> Dave Davidson has worked in the security industry for 38 years. This is his first play ever produced. (Royal Court Theatre 2022)

There was further reference to a character named Ollie, who experiences internet identity theft, leading to a domino effect impacting their entire life (Royal Court Theatre 2022). In Kirkwood's play, there is no character named Ollie and, even though the play is extensively concerned with virtuality, internet identity theft is not a focal area. I made the choice to book for the play with the research scope of the present book as a weighing factor, sufficiently convinced that I would be encountering work by a new playwright, and aware of the new text by Crimp, a manuscript of which I had been entrusted with for consultation some months prior to its announcement by the Royal Court. Therefore, I wanted to see what context I might establish in which to situate my discussion of online experience in our present social moment, including its extraordinary augmentation during the pandemic's most socially distanced times, as well as, of course, its legacies.

It is difficult to judge to what extent my choice to book for the unknown Dave Davidson's play was determined by my eagerness to support emerging work, or was influenced by the endorsements listed as part of the production promotion on the Royal Court website, as well as, it would turn out, on the back cover of Davidson's playscript (which served as the sleeve for Kirkwood's play):

> 'This work genuinely has the capacity to change everything.' Playwright Dennis Kelly
>
> 'It is a play of rare political urgency, savage wit and real compassion and wisdom. It is a play that defines this country as it blinks its way out of the pandemic and into a chilling new world. It is, I think, a startlingly significant piece of work.'
>
> Playwright Simon Stephens
>
> 'I looked up after reading the play and felt like the world had changed. Everything looked different. People need to see this.' Playwright Laura Wade (Royal Court Theatre 2022)

I made the conscious choice not to query whether these quotations are 'made-up', indeed drawn from playwrights that have had long associations with the Royal Court for the purposes of the fictitious narrativisation of the promotional framework of the concocted play, or purposely written by each of these authors with the intent of promoting Kirkwood's actual play, because my own engagement with and experience of text and production are in agreement with these assessments—and so the point is immaterial. As this section goes on to argue, this is, indeed, a play and performance experience that has the capacity to make a substantial contribution to the redefinition of social and political playwriting. It additionally contributes to our ability to gain some distance—a term I use with appreciation of how much it has come to denote in our pandemic experiences—so as to observe how the world has become transformed; and how we, audiences, citizens and individuals, have been contributing to this very transformation.

It is common for theatres, once a production has been reviewed, to post selected quotations on their websites. It is less common to see the note that the Royal Court website featured preceding review excerpts for the specific play: "**Please note:** there are spoilers in the reviews below. But if you would like to know more about what you're about to see, read on" (Royal Court Theatre 2022, emphasis original). Still, the quotes posted remained rather generic, responding to the overall mood of play and production rather than to plot specifics. In their complete versions, however, most reviews were, indeed, filled with spoilers. I found this rather surprising given the ways in which critics often respond to shows with major twists: by hinting at the fact that one such exists, without revealing it per se. The atmosphere of secrecy one encountered at the Royal Court, at least in the early days of the show, was in stark contrast with critical reception and the ways in which reviewers proceeded with revealing the plot of the play and facts surrounding the production. To convey the atmosphere of concealment I encountered, I indicatively note that the play itself was not, unlike what is predominantly the case, on sale at the theatre's bookshop, where staff politely informed me that they were in possession of the play but unable to sell it before the show, as it would only be sold by ushers after the end of the performance. Ushers themselves appeared even more rigorously trained than previous occasions to deliver the pre-show advice of the Royal Court regarding effects, re-admission and so on—and to clarify precisely where the playtext would be

sold at the end of the evening. Finally, upon purchasing the text itself—as per its common practice, the Royal Court does not sell programmes in any other form—spectators found that it came in a brown A5-sized envelope, bearing the stamp "CONFIDENTIAL". The playtext inside the envelope, and underneath the sleeve, was Kirkwood's *Rapture*, with entirely different artwork than that created for the production of Dave Davidson's *That Is Not Who I Am* (this was in a magenta colour scheme, featuring the distorted, digital image of a—most likely—male face with a faint, potentially sinister smile on the front, and the promotional blurbs on the back of the cover/sleeve).

The majority of critics revealed Kirkwood as the play's writer, emphasising her prominence as a playwright versus Davidson's would-have-been newcomer status. This is mentioned unfailingly, often becoming contentious: critics query the ethics of such a choice in either creating false impressions for the audience or fertilising hope for aspiring playwrights that an emergent voice (if one did calculations, indeed arguably belonging to an older person) might be given such access and a major vehicle for their opening work. I am mostly concerned, however, with the critics' responses to the thematic range of the play, since its fluidity is such that invites numerous readings and interpretations. At the heart of the plot are Celeste and Noah (Quilter), meeting in a mediated way, sharing a dinner as part of a column that is either precisely, or very adjacent to, *Blind Date* on *The Guardian*. They discuss, for example, how they will mark each other out of ten, one of the distinctive tropes of this column (Kirkwood 2022, 6–7). From the start, then, media, especially digital, form a seminal part of the characters' experience. Celeste and Noah go on to become a couple, live together, marry, have a child—and die, young, under suspicious circumstances.

The key dramaturgical device is that Kirkwood's text functions by way of an investigation, reconstructing the events of the couple's lives and death through found evidence emerging, to a significant extent, from their prolific internet life trajectories and self-documentation. The *Culture Whisper* reviewer describes them as "two British eco-warriors", offering praise for how "Kirkwood curates the years before the Quilters' deaths, painting a picture of an instantly likeable millennial couple trying to make ends meet, trying to have a baby, and trying to save the planet" (Sutton Williams 2022). This is the intricate space that Kirkwood's characters, and of course many in the everyday realm, inhabit: negotiating personal desires and duties in a civic context where they might feel compelled to act

by a greater sense of urgency. Beyond greenwashing, what Kirkwood—like Bush in *~~Not~~ the End of the World* (2021)—accomplishes effectively is to communicate that millennials, sometimes dismissed as entitled and apolitical, are, in fact, one of the most socially- and environmentally engaged generations in recent memory, endeavouring to share, more mindfully, including with other species, a planet dramatically damaged by previous generations.

The fact that the space between truth and fiction in art, as well as in life, is fluid, and that Kirkwood locates her play in this very interspace, emerges, also, from the spectatorial feeling of being challenged, convinced of the veracity of the couple's existence, then surprised to discover they do not exist, as captured in the aforementioned review (Sutton Williams 2022). In an equally positive endorsement, *The Guardian* review (somewhat 'meta', as this was accompanied by the production image of the couple having their matchmaking dinner) concentrated on how "reality and sanity are under constant scrutiny" (Wyver 2022), a feeling that, we might note, has dominated the 'post-truth' climate of recent years. The review identifies another element key to how the interspace that is the couple, a together and, yet, formed by two singular individuals site, both part of the world and distanced from it, is a bilateral flow. The above comment, further, highlights one more of the play's main facts—as well as the essential paradoxes of not only the specific couple's experience, but of contemporary experience more broadly: the simultaneous apprehension and attraction towards technology. The couple do, after all, create a considerable body of online disseminated videos, first the singular output of Noah, and, progressively, a collaborative product of the two. Or, as the *Guardian* reviewer notes: "[a]s they create a life together, his resistance to technology rubs off on her, and among the fragile scenes of their relationship, we see them grow increasingly paranoid of surveillance and data collection" (Wyver 2022); their 'warrior' stance, as identified in *Culture Whisper* (Sutton Williams 2022), is, arguably, an outcome of the latter. But they use the means of their perceived enemy to combat its tactics, thereby contributing to the feedback loop. Another endorsement came from *The Independent*, where the reviewer names the play a "significant work" and, in terms of the space that the play has been occupying in the public's imagination, as "an internet wormhole", which, on the basis of how the narrative of its publicity has worked, including the reactions it has elicited, has emerged "like a piece of durational performance art" (Thompson 2022). The durationality is well identified because of the

production and marketing conditions pertaining to the specific play, but also because the action that serves as a main theme in the work, namely immersion into the digital realm and a gradual contribution of content to it through different media, both as individuals and as collective internet users, has, itself, created an in-between space where narrative and reality interblend.

Other critics adopted an entirely different approach to the piece: in a nuanced record that expressed a negative opinion overall, the *Arts Desk* reviewer criticised the show's publicity dramaturgy (a fitting term if we are to view the play as a durational performance piece) proposing that "this thriller is never very thrilling, the satire is never very sharp and the humour is lukewarm", while observing a "cynical sensibility" (Sierz 2022). For reasons that I hope the ensuing analysis will reveal, I identified great humanity and care extending well beyond the human world in Kirkwood's piece, which I found to be as empathetic as it was sobering. The cynical sensibility, to me, arises, on occasion, from reviews—and not from a play, and show, that, without intermeshing narratives, fears and crises to the point of homogenising their singular characteristics, pays equal heed to the challenges that come with being an engaged—and engaging—human, or even character, in contemporary society, or indeed, in the theatre. I found the ways in which play and production probed concerns of lack of community, empathy, contact, agency and engagement to be rich and enriching in equal measure. In my view, these amounted to a text and event that emerged as large-scale and awe-inspiring, without becoming overwhelming or an empty exercise in style.

The play claims to document the Quilters' (not actually) real life; there are aspects of the couple's common existence that emerge as strikingly plausible—and that render truth an entirely fluid concept. As Kirkwood shows us, there are methods of documenting watershed developments in how contemporary experience has shifted that, rather than give into the tedium of reconstruction, under which they may even, as in this case, pretend to operate, actually manage to write poetry into an imagined everyday life lived under arduous and fraught circumstances. One reviewer notes: "[t]he documentary claim is quickly punctured yet the play contains a marvellous record of lockdown life. It is already easy to forget how essential it seemed to wash tinfoil and how not everyone was comfortable with the rush to celebrate (but not pay) the NHS; a nurse winces as she hears the doorstep clapping for carers" (Clapp 2022).

The moment in the production is poignant—as Celeste slams the household door behind her in an—illicit—search for fresh air, she, as a nurse, expresses indignant exhaustion at the audible community recognition that NHS staff are receiving for their work (a tradition emerging strongly in the early weeks of lockdown in 2020). The clinical self-distancing, spatial and mental, from the world that the Quilters begin to practice as they exist in a space between that is both embedded in the everyday realm and exists separately from it, is enhanced in effect by Celeste's profession.

As it serves to note that, by all accounts, Celeste is a committed and caring nurse, so it merits a mention that COVID-19, too, has been a classed narrative. Another reviewer remarks: "[t]he working-class Quilters are pulverised by the cost of living crisis, but despite their understandable distrust of the government, their rejection of corporations is easy to mock, isolating them further" (Thompson 2022). The classed resistance to the wealth of an extreme minority, whom Noah consistently condemns through his online videos, that is, becomes even more acute once the pandemic's classed narrative sets in, affecting access to jobs, and radically transforming the realities of those that, like Celeste, find themselves in the frontline. She is branded an "essential" worker, who, however, receives neither sufficient care, nor compensation (Thompson 2022). The interspace that Celeste occupies—oscillating between praise and neglect—enlarges the gap between the Quilters and society. They begin to drift further away, into a domestic island mentality, while, at the same time, either through Celeste's profession or Noah's videos, keeping a sharp eye on developments.

The couple's engagement is both visceral and detached, reflective of a tense new human condition. The production's scenography established their simultaneous embeddedness in and distance from the social realm from the start, with the Quilters' house as a stand-alone structure in the middle of the stage, the theatre's backstage laid bare, with theatre staff and props always visible, as the set continued to be curated/modified throughout the show. As one reviewer comments, expressing praise for designer Naomi Dawson, the "ingenious set revolves a skeletal apartment in front of a rehearsal space where technicians move about their tasks" (Clapp 2022). Or, as another critic observes, the "revolving set, moved around by stage managers, reveals artifice is at the heart of this story" (Thompson 2022). As private and public crises escalate, the scenographic effect becomes notably darker. A further review delivers an astute assessment, stressing the importance of set design, while expressing a wider

point as to the changing spatialities, self- and social moorings occurring after the spring of 2020. In the Quilters' case, these begin from a significant personal event, the birth of a child following fertility challenges, and move into the collective realm: "[a] daughter arrives, as does the pandemic, with its own shifting map of objective truth. Meanwhile, Naomi Dawson's inventive set is rotated and re-dressed by stage managers, underscoring that we're watching a fiction" (Curtis 2022). The play's scenographic world, then, offers the ideal visual representation, with the full scale of the Royal Court's spatial hollowness visible behind the set of the home—on a scale very rarely seen in productions—to suggest that, in their own site, the couple are forever floating "in and out of affection, daily concern, apocalyptic alarm" (Clapp 2022). Their space augments and contracts, as do their feelings. Nothing is stable, rooted or to be taken for granted. Vulnerabilities, even in the face of strongest conviction, commitment and—equally importantly—emotional rapture abound. Rapture, it appears, can enwrap and isolate in equal measure.

Beyond such slow rapture, the moments of pronounced, or observable rapture in Kirkwood's play are two, and they both happen in in-between spaces. The first is at the restaurant where Celeste and Noah are enjoying their first date in 2011; it is a mutual attraction, and, beyond this, fascination, that is only going to grow deeper over the decade of their shared life, as they not only enter each other's worlds, but also come to create their own shared world together—the same one that, eventually, isolates them from everyone else. COVID-19, as Kirkwood's text shows us, acts as accelerator and catalyst for this process. The second moment of rapture, and the one that is perhaps more spectacular, memorably enacted by Siena Kelly (Celeste) at the Royal Court premiere, comes when, at an advanced stage in the play, Celeste is raptured. It is now late 2021—a decade since her first meeting with Noah. This rapture, which is shown as a singular, momentary and momentous event, occurs in the couple's living room, in the home that is both their barrier from and only connector to the outside world: the site of Noah's videos and of the ever-powerful dynamic between the couple that renders them a practically indivisible entity for which everyone else is an outsider—including close family members, kept at bay, outside a door that functions both literally and symbolically.

Celeste's rapture is, I propose, a result of her shifting living conditions expediting immersion in an inner life so complete and augmented by the deep-reaching, continuous exposure to self- and external surveillance

documentations and mechanisms, gadgets and devices, software and hardware, that its ingrained hypnotic effect becomes part of Celeste's fibre. So much so, that when the crisis in the couple escalates—primarily financial, but also ideological in their growing separatism—while their interdependency deepens, this creates a quasi-transcendent moment where Celeste, losing her bearings, no longer in control of herself, appears to be seized by an undefined greater force. It is a hyper-enhanced escalation of all the profound emotions at the same time: a moment of emptying and filling up simultaneously, at the other end of which Celeste emerges transformed. The rapture is a space of fluidity in itself, a site inhabited singularly by Celeste, who, even if observed by Noah, allows no margin for external interference or mediation.

In the script, the moment is introduced by one of the frequent interventions of the stand-in authorial figure called 'Lucy Kirkwood', who steps in to dispel the suspicion of marital conflict, offering their own interpretation of the bloodied rags discovered in the couple's bathroom following their deaths: namely, that rather than violence, they were a sign of period poverty. Having understood, then, that at this stage of events we encounter Celeste in what, with even the essentials now removed, is fast becoming for her an escalating state of radical physical, mental and emotional reckoning, we experience the happening that in Kirkwood's text is described as follows:

> *Night*. CELESTE *enters.*
>
> *She takes the Christmas presents* [left by her family, who were not invited into the home] *out of the bag. She finds the one addressed to her. She unwraps it carefully and slowly.*
>
> *She takes out a china vase shaped like a hare.*
>
> CELESTE*'s body starts to rock and spasm.*
>
> CELESTE *drops the vase.*
>
> NOAH *runs in.*
>
> NOAH *holds* CELESTE *as she keens. Her body jerks and flails but her eyes look upwards. This goes on for some time.* (Kirkwood 2022, 67)

Moments later, "CELESTE *sits very still in a chair. Her eyes are open. She is seeing something we cannot see*" (Kirkwood 2022, 67). Or, as Noah will relate to his brother in a phone call, "Celeste got raptured today" (Kirkwood 2022, 67). Already in the mode of execution of the otherwise everyday call between Noah and his brother we have two significant clues: the call, on Noah's end, is on a Nokia mobile phone model (3310) that,

for all Noah's deep familiarity with technologies, or, precisely because of it, is, at the time of the call, twenty-one years old. And then there is the way in which Celeste's rapture is communicated: as an ordinary event, given that, immediately prior to Noah relaying it to his brother, we hear him state that there is not anything particular to report, presumably as answer to a standard question regarding any news. The rapture itself is not brought on by anything other than an ordinary object—if, here, outlandishly out of context given the pressing household needs that render luxury irrelevant. The couple, then, inhabit flows and fluid spaces: they oscillate between repulsion and fascination with technology; and between the mundane and the otherworldly. In creating a world that is entirely theirs, they exist in a liminal space both theirs and facilitated—and upheld—on the basis of the same technologies that they proclaim to distance themselves from. Arguably, the rapture that Celeste experiences, in precisely the moment of rupture of this flow, and as an external object, disruptive, is brought into her carefully protected, distanced space, is a result of this very oscillation.

When Celeste attempts to recount the events of her rapture to Noah, it acquires deeper ramifications still:

> I don't know how to describe it. I just suddenly saw the truth of everything like so clearly? Cos, basically what it comes down to is this place has been infected too badly so that's why it's rejecting us and but that's okay because there's another, like a better place than this? Which is like, we don't own it but it's ours? And us and Candy [their daughter] can go there together, cos you and me are basically one soul and actually we have been for like, since medieval times. (Kirkwood 2022, 68)

Given that the Quilters die a mere few days later under mysterious conditions, and that Celeste has been under an extraordinary amount of financial (their land/home investment has been proven worthless) and professional/community stress (as a healthcare—also unvaccinated—worker in the frontlines of COVID-19, and having offered a long service, which ends unceremoniously), the radical lucidity that she experiences in the moment of rapture may not only be the result of a cosmic realisation. It may also, that is, arise from extreme anxiety, and the tremendous weight of the prevailing practical circumstances, that, precisely because of her intense sense of cosmic and civic agency, Celeste feels all the more profoundly.

Celeste has, moreover, been reducing in food consumption—another outcome of the Quilters' dire financial situation. A moment of reckoning, revelation or vision, then, may well be correlational with the body being brought to its very extremes. Even more sombre, the so-called rapture may be the result of the fact that the individual, approaching death, oscillates between reality and delusion. All the while, the civic weight that Celeste carries is made even more unbearable because of the self-aggrandising that Celeste and Noah's continuous internet presence produces. Celeste, in recounting the rapture to Noah, discloses that it is now time to transition to the next stage, or, as she words it, "People need to see the Truth of how things are" (Kirkwood 2022, 69). The cost of revealing this 'Truth', Noah replies, might be their very lives. Some days later, the couple make their most polemical, anti-establishment video yet: "we think it's time to go to war", they say (Kirkwood 2022, 71). And even as they convey to their audience the imperative need for a break with the status quo, they rely on information found on the internet—on sites that they will be sharing with their public. As Kirkwood shows here, the fraught relationship between truth and falsity is not only one of ripple effect, but also of intersection: Celeste and Noah seek to expose a digital, perhaps even fake world that they, themselves, cannot but inhabit, compelled by its possibilities. Even the masks—of their own faces—that the couple offer to their supporters so that, in joining them in actions of protest and dissent, their faces are not captured on CCTV, are to be e-mailed to those interested as PDFs. E-dependencies, the play shows us, are deep and even inseverable.

The same holds true of anxieties and their linkages to their causes, which, in a characteristically perceptive and—for all its ambition—not at all stretched, redundant or over-laboured way, Kirkwood reveals to be multi-rooted, embedding a profound ecological distress in the couple. Their contempt of the technologies that monitor and shape lives is also driven by their eco-conscience, which appears on an equal footing to their concerns of justice and equality in terms of class and access as far as the motivating factors for their separatism and activism are concerned. Here, too, COVID-19 appears to play a major role, emphasising, once more, the interlocking of debates when it comes to two major crises of our recent period: the environment and the pandemic. It is COVID-19 that accelerates the couple's most dramatic distancing from their circle of family and friends; it is also the effects of COVID-19 that, in rewilding sites exhausted from human utilitarianism in its different forms, leaves a

trail of environmental grief in Noah, who is unable to accept that the world is about to revert to its prior habits of consumption and exhaustion when the pandemic begins to subside and public spaces are reclaimed by their human users. Observing the resuming of flights, for example, in June 2020, Noah exclaims to Celeste: "It's all just gonna go back to normal isn't it?", and, following Celeste's affirmative response, "*He tries to suppress it, but he starts to sob*"; "*He tries to control it, but his sobs overwhelm him*" (Kirkwood 2022, 59). In this moment, Celeste comforts Noah. As weeks and months go by, the couple's stresses only increase—we hear from a 'Lucy Kirkwood' intervention that an equally exhausted Celeste is "Running on fumes" (Kirkwood 2022, 59).

Noah's environmental grief, coupled with the unprecedented feelings he—along with multiple others—is reasonably experiencing on account of the pandemic, are the play's way of dealing with humanity's recent history through an example that both helps characters come alive and strikes a chord with audiences for whom COVID-19 is an ongoing experience, in this precise moment. Gathered in a theatre in the first half of 2022, spectators are still absorbing the pandemic's effects while co-existing in the kind of space—an auditorium for live performance—that was amongst those worst affected by COVID-19 closures as a contagious site. The possibilities for empathy in this moment are considerably enhanced, then, and it is this environmental grief that Celeste comes to share as her own tensions escalate.

It is significant that the present Celeste receives from the family she is keeping at a distance, a source of stress in itself, is a vase in the shape of a hare. It is a present that is extravagant (porcelain), but, at the same time, impersonal—an entity she can interact with visually, but that, otherwise, mimics another entity without capturing its liveness: a simulacrum of the non-human natural world that Celeste, like Noah, deems at high risk. In the object, this world is replicated in its most passive, colonised worst: appropriated by the human hand, rendered lifeless. We might describe the moment of Celeste's rapture as one of enchantment, and of connection with a force greater than herself, or even humanity, and indeed it might be. But there is also greater interpretative potentiality here, especially in the fact that the reaction is triggered by an inanimate object that poses as an animate one—all the while Celeste is becoming increasingly compelled by her environmental agency, and the necessity, but also difficulty of meaningful (inter)action against a crisis in a world relentlessly mined for its resources. As the world pauses and Celeste looks captured,

gazing intently outwards, focused but without directing her eyes onto a recipient, the play stages an intense reckoning that features amongst its most powerful moments. For Celeste, it is a transition to her next stage—like a magus, the object has transported her, slowing down time and heightening perception. It is a moment of stark lucidity, but also of quiet disappearance, as it escalates the events of the couple's death.

The moment provides a rupture between Celeste and the outside world as she previously knew it. Celeste is triggered and repulsed by the object as much as she is fascinated by it—it is the closest we come to an embodiment of the visceral relationship that both she and Noah have with technology, in that case definable as both dependency and mistrust; exposure and fearfulness at the same time. Here, then, settles the grief that catalyses Celeste's own activism: beyond the grief for her land that she and Noah bought after major financial sacrifices (literally a home-land as that is the site, now legally established as unsuitable, where the couple envisaged building their home), and for the construction of a home that can no longer take flesh, Celeste is also grieving for a home-land—nature—lost to countless others, whether human or non-human. The feeling she experiences—exacerbated by her multi-level exhaustion—ultimately leads her to the role of martyr and messiah, driven by a sense of moral duty that now separates her from the laic and takes her into the cosmic. Technologically enabled distancing, made all the more powerful by COVID-19 and, by now, by Celeste's absence of contact with the physical realm through the loss of her work, ultimately intersect. Determined to protect what might still have the potential to exist amidst the vast loss for her and her family, Celeste escalates events to the next level.

Echoing Celeste's account of her rapture, and proceeding from his own unmanageable grief, Noah's activism is also accelerated. In one of the most telling passages of the play in terms of the couple's motives, as well as their anticipation of landing in the receiving end of violence, these are the words with which Noah greets his audience, "*recording himself on a nineties tape recorder*" that would be, as we hear from 'Lucy Kirwood', Noah's last message (Kirkwood 2022, 74):

> […] Everything's about to become very, very clear, and if they come for us, let them come. Cos we are legion. We are in every blade of grass, every drop of rain, we are the fucking tide and we are about to break on their filthy beach and drown every fat motherfucking sunbather, fill their lying

> mouths with our salt and leave only Truth on the sand […]. (Kirkwood 2022, 75)

There is an irony to the fact that Celeste seeks to return to a place pure and uncontaminated by external interference when the topographies of her life, as well as of her common life with Noah, and, certainly, of his own life, have been so entirely virtual (Kirkwood 2022, 81). The grief, then, is not only environmental, but also technological—a gradual mounting feeling of desolation for what has been left behind through small acts of separation from staples of their common and individual identities that leaves the two bereft, gradually unhinged.

Even though the connection to the natural environment that the play builds for its two characters is real, so is the remarkable contradiction of their increasing analogue turn and, at the same time, their respective—and common—reliance on web media in all aspects of their lives, not least the dissemination of their message. As 'Lucy Kirkwood' frames this in the final stages of the play, following the narration of the couple's death, the Nokia 3310 had, at the end, been their only medium of contact, with no web-based resource in use:

> What did they feel? Satisfied? Lonely? Safe? I admire them. But if it wasn't for an algorithm, used by the blind date coordinator of a newspaper, owned by a company, owned by a corporation, which is now owned by a different, even larger corporation, being able to process every online trace of them in a millionth of a second… […] …they might never have met and fallen in love at all. (Kirkwood 2022, 81–82)

The contradiction lies precisely in the couple's very inception, and in their self-narrativisation and self-dissemination. What at first takes flesh as a pairing, and gradually goes on to become the impenetrable unit of the Quilters, is, of course, also the product of digital modes of connection and communication. For all the ideological conviction and activism of the couple, then, there is an ideological gap which they, themselves, perpetuate.

The play is suggesting, in my view, that at a time of not only profound digital literacy—as is the case for Celeste and Noah's generation—but, also, profound digital embeddedness, the ties, even when attempted to be dispensed with, are so profound, that the extent to which they are part of one's own intimate constitution past a certain point is not even

entirely discernible. There is, moreover, the irony that as the very first materialisation of the couple as such is the business of the internet, from inception to account of the date, so their demise is left to the internet to narrativise: once gone, the Quilters' death becomes forum fodder, where anonymous strangers, performing their own fetishisation with information and justice, claim to have a moral stake in, a casual interest in, or, even, information about the couple, and their respective deaths. The very last image of the play is precisely such an excerpt from proliferating online dialogues weaving sub-narratives concerning the Quilters. "***I am so happy to find this story***", one comment reads, arguably devoid of any motive beyond voyeurism and titillation in search of a vessel for, at best, care; at worst, distraction (Kirkwood 2022, 85; emphasis original).

In closing this section, it is essential to reflect on the authorial trope and the way in which this materialises in *Rapture*. Kirkwood's play 'hides' beneath another play; the playwright herself is revealed to be the author only once the ruse for the performance, the debut of a newcomer playwright, has been exposed. It is theatrical *pentimento* of the highest accomplishment; rather than the blurry image of an unidentifiable individual on the cover of the playtext, upon removing the sleeve, we in fact encounter four images of a couple. They appear historical, perhaps turn-of-the century, if we judge from the fact that the image is in black and white, and that the clothes worn by the man and woman depicted point to that time period. The images (not credited) could be described as outtakes: two out of the four have a certain formality; and two shots, intervening and disrupting this linearity, capturing laughter and tenderness and even a certain reticence between the couple, are informal; endearing. Perhaps the photographs are genuine; perhaps they are staged. Either way, the physical disposition of the bodies of the individuals depicted, and their inclination towards each other furnish an impenetrable closeness, an in-between site of intimacy that leaves no margin for distancing or interference. The couple has always been an interspace, inhabiting the soft and sharp territory between private and public, between domestic and social. Such has also been the function of the Quilters in the play.

This effect of the artistic technique is further intensified if we consider narrativisation more broadly, including in terms of how the author writes themselves into the play. Depictions of the playwright herself also unfold layer after layer. The audience might be reasonably expected to hold a mental image of the real Lucy Kirkwood; though perhaps we cannot

make this assumption of all that would have encountered the play in its premiere, or in a subsequent production. As Kirkwood—as authorial symbol—becomes dispersed in two actors, while actually being neither of the individuals that stake a claim to her on stage, the playwright's authority is thrown in disarray, subverted from within. In a play as finely tuned dramatically as this one, the point is significant. There is, as mentioned, the character 'Lucy Kirkwood', whose narrations and interjections relating to the in-between events in the couple's life punctuate the play. She appears on stage frequently. She identifies herself by stating: "My name's Lucy Kirkwood, or rather, I'm playing Lucy Kirkwood" (Kirkwood 2022, 17). The 'real' playwright (of the same name), it emerges, relented close to the play's opening, so she required a stand-in. Then, there is also 'The Real Lucy Kirkwood', or 'LK2', who makes an appearance nearing the finale of the play, widening the interspace between truth and falsity, and between fact and fiction. She interrupts the performance and protests as to the artistic—and political—integrity of the piece as she envisaged it, versus the show that the theatre has put on for reasons relating to systemic pressures that required some censorship; some mediation of the truth. She is also played by an actor and is not the actual Lucy Kirkwood. Soon, both 'Lucy Kirkwood' and 'LK2' speak overlappingly; they argue; the stage manager advises the audience to leave the theatre.

Technology has the final word, as the narrative is written in fragmented dialogues appearing on a screen and capturing the fevered online speculation as to what has happened to the 'real' Quilters. Of course, they do not exist. The author does exist, insofar as they are a writer presenting a physical output—the play—but she also does not, absent and relegated to figures that claim to embody her but are in fact no more than her holograms. Authority, then, and ownership of the narrative become fluid territories; so does self and (its) representation. The play exists in-between reality and fiction, in-between the physical and the digital, and in-between art and life. Stories—and storytellers—real and unreal, as well as truth and falsity, their ambiguous interdependence, and the ability to proliferate stories on digital media—with genuine consequences, but with limited, if any accountability—remain with us as the play closes. Such concerns also emerge as primary points of focus in the final case study of this book. Here, the playwright himself *does* appear on the stage; but whether as himself, or as/in character, remains to be determined.

Not One of These People

While Kirkwood's *Rapture* was playing at the Royal Court Downstairs, the theatre announced its season for autumn/winter 2022–2023. Martin Crimp's *Not One of These People* featured prominently. It was to be a limited event of only four performances, made further special by means of the fact that it would return the playwright to the stage in a way not experienced in London since Crimp's piano playing in the early performances of *Face to the Wall* (2002). Readings or platform events notwithstanding, then, it took two decades for Crimp to inhabit the Royal Court stage as a writer—by which I mean not only as a presence through his texts. Still, very little might have prepared us for the new modes of authorial inhabitation that we would encounter on the stage in the early days of November 2022, when the piece came to the UK after having premiered in Canada earlier that year. The author would be staged as both inhabiting space and being inhabited (by thoughts, others' voices, or creative processes). The sites hosting this act would, themselves, remain fluid, however physically anchored on the Royal Court stage: the private, the public, the real, the artificially intelligent, the physical and the virtual would, in Crimp's latest piece, come to blend in ways not only unprecedented, but genuinely groundbreaking for dramatic form and content—and for the very notion of defining narrative, author and presence in the theatre.

I have discussed elsewhere how in the past decade, from *In the Republic of Happiness* (2012) onwards (also Crimp's last full-length play to appear on the Royal Court stage a full decade before *Not One of These People*) Crimp's writing has become extraordinarily maximalist in thematic scope, while, at the same time, managing to remain as sharp and focused as ever in its lexical world, where there is no room for stretching, redundancies or any particles of speech that do not have a very precise function in the field of the play (Angelaki 2022). We might say that this makes for the perfect antithesis between form and content, though, in my view, it makes for the perfect complementation, where one affirms the other by denying it any predictability or straightforwardness.

As was long-established practice for Crimp by autumn 2022, *Not One of These People* had internationalism woven into its core, following in the path of several previous plays and opera texts, which were not only internationally co-commissioned, but also received their premieres outside of the UK. Opening as *Pas une de ces personnes*, the premiere of *Not One of These People*, described as a creation of the Quebec company Carte

blanche, and a co-production between the company, the Royal Court and Carrefour international de théâtre (Quebec), took place at Théâtre La Bordée on 1 June 2022. It was a significant event for different reasons: firstly, because the same production format was applied by director Christian Lapointe for both the Canadian and British performances of the play, meaning Crimp's presence on the stage in a performing role. Secondly, because Crimp was more emphatically than ever emerging as a fully international and internationalist playwright, whose presence and oeuvre far transcended any prior categorisations and iterations of his work as belonging to the (sometimes loosely defined) European space, however much it might carry its own rootedness within the British cultural domain. This production established resolutely the creative flow, an interspatial site that Crimp's theatre equally created and represented, where barriers and borders, whether geographical or cultural, were rendered rather irrelevant, and indeed redundant. As this section goes on to discuss, interspatiality is equally crucial to the play's form, content and staging.

Critics reacted to the piece with reviews that are a composite of attempting to log a very liquid performance experience, in that sense a similar feeling to *Rapture/That Is Not Who I Am*, and responding with praise to the production, while registering surprise for the fact that Crimp himself appears on the stage. As one reviewer for *Le soleil* notes in a particularly insightful response, there are certain questions that the methodologies of the production give rise to, emerging from the fact that the personas speaking Crimp's text—here we must recognise that these mouths have been enhanced and 'vivified' by special effects and given voice, doubly, by the playwright who both wrote and speaks the lines—are algorithmically generated (Marcoux 2022). As the journalist asks, and I expand, we ought to consider how our reactions as audience members might be conditioned; how we might, consciously or not, superimpose narratives based on these non-existent 'speaking' individuals' appearance, and on a predisposition to fill in the blanks/backstories of the elliptical stories provided in the text (Marcoux 2022). In a further, equally intriguing hypothesis, the reviewer reframes their initial statement to add that the point might be, rather, that the responses might have been, in fact, given by anyone, since the creators of the piece chose to assign the statements to individuals that do not, actually, exist (Marcoux 2022).

From the point of managing our own projections and predispositions, then, we are led to that of interchangeability and universality: no matter

the natural tendency to associate certain commentary with certain individuals, there is no such thing as a cross-verifiability of subject and statement in a social media dominated, virtuality-saturated, post-truth, ChatGPT era. At such a time, web identities are nearly (if not entirely) avatars—and they can be the image of one person, or of anyone at all, with data manufactured, appropriated, proliferated and falsified. In terms of how the stage experience emulates the everyday experience—not anymore in terms of the naturalist reproduction of everyday life detail, but in terms of the faithful digital reproduction of the virtuality that has come to constitute everyday life, the critic for *Le soleil* makes a further astute comment: that the images of the (non-)persons we see, sometimes complete with background noise that augments their verisimilitude, will remind us of the faces we are so accustomed to seeing on social media screens (Marcoux 2022). Or, likewise, that as inhabitants of a "digital environment" ("environnement numérique") where we encounter a multitude of discourses attached to and stemming from profile photos, we exist in the midst of individuals that we do not necessarily know—and, one might add, we may not always be in a position to verify (Marcoux 2022). The entire proposition, but, perhaps, especially the term "digital environment", reinforces both the concreteness and the abstraction of such a space, which is both real (as in sensorially experienced) and not (as in remotely mediated). Therefore, the review captures the interspatiality of both the play and our experience beyond the theatre.

The cohesion between subject and speech, then, has been broken; the same has happened to coherence when it comes to narratives or to the non-linearity of everyday life. The form that the playwright selects in order to tell the stories of our contemporary lives, interwoven yet disparate, is precisely the one that suits the reality of fractional stories, that appear as flashes, narrative moments with which we interact, and which, then, disappear from our transient temporality, even though they occupy a much more permanent digital path (unless they are deleted by their instigator/host, and therefore vanished in another uncertain space). Even the term 'wall' that one of the most prominent social media platforms, alluded to, arguably, by the reviewer, originally associated with the foundational concrete spatial structure, eventually gave way to the much more fluid term 'timeline' which prioritises durationality as flux rather than as fixed. It is a space which one can visit circumstantially, but which will very much exist as a log of our past temporal behaviours in interspaces physical and not, as are our digital environments.

Crimp's play, moreover, written in quarantine times, reflects the social distancing that we experienced in the context of COVID-19, when, for many, the closest we could come to 'human' contact was faces on a screen captured in sharp detail, but otherwise disembodied—and of course subject to all imaginable technological malfunctions and disruptions of any attempted conversational linearity. But *Not One of These People* is not only a COVID-19 play; it is not even only a play for COVID-19 times. It is, rather, a play that reminds us that, beyond the necessity to exist—and to engage with each other—behind and through a screen, which COVID-19 introduced to our lives, this is a choice that we had already made, in terms of the primary interactive methods through which our communications and relationships had long been carried out before the pandemic. In Crimp's long history of prescient theatre, where major social shifts are sensed and deposited on the page—and stage—before their full scale comes to land in ways more public, *Not One of These People*, judged historically, will, perhaps, come to occupy a distinctive space. It is not only COVID-19 and digitisation as we knew it that will always highlight its foresight: it is also the emergence, in the late months of 2022 and especially in 2023, of ChatGPT as a radical remapping device for the digital terrain itself—and for the omnipresence and infiltration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in, effectively, all major aspects of human life, function and interaction.

As other reviewers noted, the piece was entirely in sync with its moment given our era of social media and digital technology omnipresence (Leclerc 2022). The reviewer for *Journal de Québec* relies on another term to describe the process of the play's representational curation: "*hypertrucage*", meaning 'deepfake', or, to use another term that the same reviewer incorporates in the later part of the same analysis, "*vrai fictif*" (Leclerc 2022, my emphasis). The Quilters in *Rapture* might be thought of as one such case: an entirely plausible, conspiracy-theory era story, which enters yet a deeper level of deepfake, once, towards the finale, an image of the 'actual' couple shows on screen (Kirkwood 2022, 82). Proliferating personas appear to guarantee, even certify, a form of truth and legitimacy—not unlike the multiple 'Lucy Kirkwoods'. At the same time, not a single occurrence, is, in fact, real. For all the existential depth that the review for *Le soleil* encourages through its analytical aesthetics, and which I otherwise endorse, the sobering remark of the critic at *Journal de Québec* reminds us of what we are dealing with in the play, and in what may, arguably, still be described as 'real life': an immersive process in a

universe that we have co-created, populated and inhabited—and whose content we have co-produced and proliferated to emulate physical presence and interaction. It is that same content that has, ultimately, displaced the world it was thought to be a substitute for.

Perhaps, then, this *is* our new naturalism and the human nature we are engaging with is both real and not; both actual and mediated—because such is the fidelity that is required to attempt to capture our present time. It is this seemingly perennial, unverifiable populace of a multitude of subjects conversing on a "multitude of subjects" ("une multitude de sujets") that we, and the play, are dealing with on a constant basis (Leclerc 2022). If our physical world—our natural environment—has been damaged by overpopulation and resource drain, the same claim could be extended to our digital world, saturated by falsity that presents itself as truth, and resource-drained (whether in terms of bandwidth or mental health) in ways that have led to toxicity not necessarily, or not always, bound to CO2 emissions, but with their own corrosive risks of pollution and harm. The spatial framing is central here, too: the reviewer comments that Crimp's play is "a large public square similar to those we find on social networks" ("une grande place publique semblable à ce que l'on retrouve sur les réseaux sociaux") (Leclerc 2022). In this phrase alone it is showed how the virtual and the physical coalesce in a new iteration of site of experience—the interspace.

With reviews brimming with praise and unfailingly mentioning Crimp's presence on the stage for one of the three performances (Lapointe took the stage for the next, and remaining, two in the premiere production), it is a short and directly to the point remark made by the reviewer of *Revuejeu* that identifies the immediate political urgency of the piece, described as "a troubling chronicle of present times" ("une troublante chronique du temps present"), emphasising the play's interventionist role in not only staging, but also historicising the contemporary (Richard 2022). Such a gesture requires vision as well as responsibility; we are literally looking, as Crimp notes, crediting the work of Guillaume Levésque, at "299 images" all "generated by Artificial Intelligence (by a method known as GAN, or generative adversarial network). At a certain point they come completely to life, my own voice and spatial movements mapped onto theirs live as I speak" (Crimp 2022, 62). A novel physical and artistic territory is emerging. As one reviewer observes, this technology produces "an image of a pluralistic, multicultural, multigender society, a kind of mixed and hybrid aggregate at the very heart of the empire that

is disintegrating" ("un instantané d'une société plurielle, multiculturelle, multigenre, une sorte d'agrégat mixte et hybride au coeur même de l'empire qui se désagrège") (Richard 2022). We might ask which empire the reviewer is referring to—whether it is the British empire, a comment with reference to the British origin of the text that is premiering outside that specific context at a time when, following Brexit, the country's national narrative is experiencing fluidity and redefinition, and the country itself an isolation and shrinkage, or the orthodox empire of the physical world that had claimed primacy in human contact for all too long. Either way, the sovereignty of the territory is being ceded, and an indeterminate space is borne out of a fissure that expands, where the virtual and the physical are both to equal degrees real and unreal at the same time.

This space, multi- and densely inhabited, irreducible to binarisms, and dynamic by virtue of its amalgamatic nature, is characterised by the hybridity between true and false, tangible and intangible. This hybridity, for all its confusion, is also where social redefinition happens while stock is being taken on how technology, virtuality and digitisation have reshaped our lives—with our own agency seemingly being co-opted in the process. But it is also, as the critic's phrasing reminds us, the pandemic that has had this same, if not stronger, effect, and that has served to hybridise both space and experience. The very term "hybrid aggregate", which the reviewer develops, is reminiscent of the convoluted spatialities that we experienced during COVID-19, when "hybrid" became the ultimate term through which to define sites that were both virtual and physical at the same time, both clickable and inhabitable, both the 'real' world and not. Hybrid was the term through which binarism collapsed, and our vocabularies—and cognitive moorings and unmoorings—recalibrated themselves towards their current, and arguably also their future states.

The review narrative continues in a style that nurtures interrogations of spatialities and perceptions in Crimp's piece, enhanced with concerns relating not only to the virtualities that are forming our contemporary experience, but, also, to anxieties stemming from the other major crisis of our time: the environmental one. Critics highlight how the piece "finds itself at the centre of an ontological question where ethnocentricity, culminating in the Anthropocene, henceforth tips over into an agonizing transhumanism" ("se trouve au centre d'une question ontologique où l'ethnocentrisme, culminant dans l'anthropocène, bascule désormais dans un transhumanisme angoissant") (Richard 2022). The reference to a

'centre' is fascinating, especially as the remainder of the sentence destabilises the very notion: the centre has been redefined, but, more than that, undermined by uncertainties so great regarding positionality, interactivity and interaction on physical and digital realms, that a new sense of being has been produced that thrives on unfixity. This interspace can be awkward and unsettling, but it is also dynamic and honest—a site that does not frame itself on false premises of long-lost linearities and cohesions.

The critic's comment is also crucial because it locates the human-exacerbated climate crisis within the realm of transgressive nationalisms that, adopting the neoliberalist model, have prioritised local gain over the greater (human and non-human) benefit. As the coalitional has been displaced by the ethnocentric, then, so the ethnocentric is being displaced by its own insular principles, which have driven it to a spectacular impasse. Here, the frame of self-isolation and distancing developed in hybrid spaces during COVID-19 emerges as the ideal partner for the socio-political-geo-cultural isolation that the piece criticises through its depiction of radical, unaccountable insularities—the singular, fluctuating, ubiquitous and yet untraceable talking heads—that beyond a personal trope become a collective crisis. We ought not to be surprised that one viral context, then, mimics the characteristics of another; and it has taken a virus identified by medicine to fully manifest the viral capitalist behaviours that lead to extraordinary transgressions. In acquiescing to unaccountability—towards the non-human environment—we have also embraced it as an overall schema, whose consequences, in the radical untraceability of truth or of existence, the play emphatically reveals. This is as much the trope of the digitally created as of the 'real': sites are no longer only one or the other; neither are their inhabitants.

The pluralism of Crimp's text renders it irreducible to critical narrativisation and linearity. The only interconnecting commentary that one could reasonably offer relates precisely to this multivocal multitude; this is where the play's cohesion is to be found, because this is indeed a cohesive text, though not in the way that we might expect—not even from Crimp, who, with each new text, ventures to a dramatic elsewhere. It is important, here, to consider the essay that Crimp wrote as a rare form of explanatory note to the text. The Royal Court turned to this essay to frame its production publicity; previously, the essay had been published on Canadian press outlets ahead of the play's premiere. It is a short text that is significant for many reasons: firstly, because it identifies references

that informed Crimp's text dramaturgically and stylistically. In distinctive Crimp mode, these touchstones are remarkably diverse and historically and artistically rooted and impactful: Boccaccio's *The Decameron*; Forced Entertainment's *Speak Bitterness* (Crimp 2022, 61). The dramaturgy of Crimp's text is set to the rhythm of the viral pathologies that plague not only Boccaccio's time, but, also, our own—the altered patterns of the everyday whose viscerality impacts not only the body of the subject, but, also, the body of the text. The pathologies of society, individual and collective, are written into the form of the text; therefore, they impact not only what story is told, but also how it is told: in fragments. It is especially important that these facts combine to formulate a singular (multitudinous) text that, without naming them as such, also takes on the conditions that brought us to this very disregard for arguably, self as much as others: the kind of separation from our environments, human and otherwise, that facilitated outcomes such as the virus (here it is relevant to recall Marchesini specifically (2021)).

But the text runs even deeper than that regarding the practical socio-theatrical circumstances that compelled its specific dramaturgy, namely, the viability of staging that, as Crimp notes, was contingent on how theatres would be best equipped to produce a play under social distancing and attendance measures as emerged during COVID-19 (Crimp 2022, 61). As Crimp mentions, the durationality of the pandemic itself continued to influence the form of the piece in its stages of conceptualisation and formation (2022, 61–62). Arguably, the single presence of the one 'live' performer—the playwright, or the director—sharing the stage with virtual but no less 'live' personas, was another way of ensuring viability of staging under shifting, fluid and uncertain global conditions. This led to the piece becoming "a strange kind of ninety-minute monologue" (Crimp 2022, 62), and, through its delivery, a razor-sharp representation of contemporary humanity with, strictly speaking, traditional (physical) forms of humanity largely absent from the stage, of course with the exception of Crimp (or Lapointe).

Rarely might we imagine the Walt Whitman phrase of one entity "contain[ing] multitudes" being used more imaginatively on the stage in a way that allows us to reframe the political activism and poetry of these words as both timeless and co-emergent (Whitman 1855 [2012], 67). Creating a thematic and production interspace, the play also, exists as an interspatial site in a more total sense: its concerns unite the three stages of COVID-19, pre-, during- and post-, as the text creates a malleable space

which holds together all the egotism, anxieties, failures and transgressions that pre-existed, endured and even became exacerbated at pandemic times. These, the piece suggests, are more than likely to continue to shape our lives as the reliance upon and allure of digital technologies, and of living one's life on and through these platforms persists, carrying with it the legacies of life under a pandemic and the multiple recalibrations it produced in concepts of absence, presence, distance and co-existence—including in parallel, overlapping but not truly intersecting lives. Here, as in *Rapture*, we observe the cross-applicability of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter One, largely proceeding from Robert Latham and Saskia Sassen (2005), as well as Anthony Elliott and John Urry (2010).

In his aforementioned essay Crimp praises Lapointe's concept of "linking the text to contemporary internet culture" (Crimp 2022, 62). The text itself furnishes possibilities for the shorthand speech that the medium has encouraged, but, also, for the more extensive digressions that have treated the internet as a receptive ear where users can self-narrativise without the limitations of 'real time'—for example, the length of a conversation, or a therapy session—and without, necessarily, (anticipating any) interjections or responses. As much as the internet has condensed speech stylistically and formally, so, also, it has expanded it spatially. Crimp's text, once more, engages with these developments both structurally—through the shape of different 'confessions'—and thematically, through their content.

It is not possible to be exhaustive in the analysis of a text as maximalist as this one; mindful of the fact, the selected quotations that follow are curated to serve the purposes of the present discussion. Keeping to the overall remit of this book, which emphasises concerns of locationality and site with a specific environmental focus, I would like to concentrate on related aspects of Crimp's text, an approach which also provides a bridge to the other case study of this chapter. The modalities through which Crimp's text considers multi-spatialities—physical, experiential, emotional, virtual—and the ways in which these combine and culminate in an expression of varying, interweaving and emotionally escalating attitudes to the natural world and to one's positioning within it, all the while throwing identity, authority, personhood—and therefore agency—into disarray, make the text equally intriguing and challenging. In the ensuing excerpts, environmental discourses gather momentum

through different expressions of, alternatingly, longing, concern, anxiety, as well as grief towards the natural world.

In the early stages of the play, we hear:

> 6. I've never seen the sky looking so blue.
>
> […]
>
> 31. I like trees, I like nature, I like to be outside […] (Crimp 2022, 10, 13)

Or further on, in different style:

> 186. I faked shame, I faked guilt, I failed to re-enchant the world, when I walked through a country lane I slashed the tops off flowers. (Crimp 2022, 38)

Although the three quoted comments are variational in tone and even suggestive of diverging attitudes, they share a certain romanticism, not merely in emotion, but in the Romantic sense of exploring, and becoming immersed in the natural world—or at least attempting to. The first remark communicates a sense of awe—even of fulfilment, perhaps as the speaking subject is caught off-guard and surprised at the sudden revelation. The second statement, followed, in the text, by the expression of a desire to be taken seriously rather than mocked for making this confession, anticipates certain cynicism at sharing an attitude of openness to the natural world, which might be interpreted, indicatively, as quaint and old-fashioned. The statement could also be dismissed as a blatant contradiction for being made in a digital environment, since, while the speaker is making the statement, they have clearly selected to be online (and, therefore, absorbed in a device of some form). There is, further, the potential implication of what the 'outside' referred to has come to stand for in COVID-19 times: a desire for something that has become less secure, and less likely to be taken for granted than previously. Moreover, the individual's relationship with the world beyond the screen itself has become, since COVID-19, much altered and more heavily problematised, leading to not only a quaintness, but, even, to a potential untenability of statements such as that made by 31. Then, there is the third statement, combining two modes of aggression: one externally-, and one internally directed. Both, however, are an expression of the same lament, and an iteration of failure and grief at a separation. This concerns feelings of disconnection from nature, as well as of reduced agency—the comment reveals the fraught

symbiosis; we might interpret it further as climate anxiety manifesting as hostility. The comment regarding the re-enchant[ment] of the world allows a connection to *Rapture*: there, Celeste's own climate anxiety is manifesting as a form of reverse enchantment—a realisation of what might have been, but that is, likely, irretrievably lost. Its absence generates a state of profound interruption, of inhabiting an indeterminate space where the ideal exists, and it attracts and compels, but with a sense of unbridgeable distance and suspended longing rather than attainable satisfaction, or pleasure.

Elsewhere, the feeling becomes even more pronounced, expressing an aggravated state of hostility towards the self, as a means of coping with one's own transgressions, lack and duplicity:

> 198. I tailgated, I bitched, I over-ate, I over-thought, I released particulates into the atmosphere.
> 199. I released particulates, I bitched, I compromised, I deceived myself, I said I'd water my neighbour's pot-plants but when they came back from holiday their plants were all dead. (Crimp 2022, 39)

The consecutive statements reminiscent of darker corners of the internet, spoken by voices inhabiting a space of confession and seeking, through the act of sharing, a sense of recognition and even validation, a claiming of visibility for one's faults and one's plight, and, perhaps, even, a form of redemption, reach deeper into environmentally transgressive behaviours. Here, these are paired with acts of self-harm, direct and indirect, physical and emotional—all in the vein of manifesting an excess that is equally harmful to the individual and to the world beyond them—both animate and inanimate. If one fails as a responsible entity, the text suggests, they fail entirely, on multiple, interconnected levels. The feeling of anxiety and inadequacy persists, though, here, with a reduced sense of empathy towards the self, and a yet more pronounced detachment. The poetry of the preceding statements is, also, notably displaced here by a prosaic speech style. As the play moves dramaturgically towards its later sections, so the tone follows, amplifying the sense of the virtual itself: a rabbit hole where time, in its vacuity, proliferates a sinking feeling.

As the text accelerates, we are drawn even further into the worlds of imagination and nightmare, where the utopian and dystopian appear as escalating reformulations of each other. In the statements that follow, the poetry returns—and, with it, different scenarios for the more spectacular

interactions between human and natural world, from the sublime to the apocalyptic:

> 206. Turns out I'd been buried under – what did they say? – exactly: five hundred metric tonnes of snow.

[…]

> 210. You could see the fire lighting up the whole sky orange. I was one of the first ones there – it was like a disaster movie – flashing lights and smoke […] somehow I survived when some of my colleagues died – and of course in the end we did finally seal the thing with concrete. But the thought of it, the thought of that mass, that volume, that temperature, the thought of it burning and burning its way down into the earth, through the rock, through the aquifers, maybe endlessly – the thought of that material endlessly on fire – sometimes I can't sleep, even now.

But then, again, immediately after:

> 211. And I'm like, oh my god! it's gone completely green! (Crimp 2022, 40–41)

In the above we can observe the clashes and tensions, but, also, that familiar feeling that we encounter in Kirkwood: rapture resulting not from enchantment, but from the encounter with a force greater than oneself; overwhelming, corrosive and likely human-caused.

The human emerges as an agent in natural catastrophe vignettes, materialising differently in each of the above confessions; the last one, of course, could also be a scenario of natural reclaiming/rewilding. Indeed, it could also be awe: in the Royal Court staging, the image accompanying these last lines was that of a young girl, perhaps four of five years old. It is difficult, here, not to make the association that a 'green'—or dramatically different from green—future is the bequest to future generations, not least including those who may have come into a depleted world also in the context of one of its most severe crises, in addition to the environmental one: the pandemic. The Quebec premiere of the play considerably predated the London one in terms of pandemic temporalities, therefore occupying a space even more proximate to the material shifts and arising conditions of the immediate post-COVID-19 universe (at least in terms of the worst outbreak stages). The very internationalism of the play, and the fact that, rather than actors—or even humans—it worked with virtual

voice vessels in the image of human faces, provided a sense of contextualisation, logging and even cohesion for the disrupted experience that we had become accustomed to during COVID-19. This experience was comprised of flows, uncertainties, extreme separations but also radical unifications. The latter was the outcome of a vast number of different and dispersed individuals having joint, or similar, or at least comparable experiences, as the world moved online, while, at the same time, being tasked with preserving their elusive, intangible physical worlds and human communities by remaining separate from them.

Through references to both utopian and dystopian conditions, Crimp's text intuitively hints at the fact that in COVID-19 contexts, but, also, outside of these, and as a result of human transgression upon nature, and the increasing enclosure within the digital, the two are simply no longer tenable as binaries. Desolation might also be peace; rewilding might also be purification. At the same time, we are reminded that, for all the reclaiming by nature that has occurred, and for all the temporary pause to the acceleration of the climate crisis, the event has already transpired—and its consequences are present, and will continue to loom large. This is not least because, as we have seen in Marchesini (2021), the virus itself might be seen to share root and effect with the climate crisis: callousness; lack of empathy for non-human agents; overconsumption. These are all concerns that recur across Crimp's play. In statement 206, we encounter the sudden sharing of a life-altering event that, we might argue, is also impossible to imagine surviving: it is a most impactful encounter between the human and non-human, as firstly given in statement 6 quoted previously, which sets the tone for the more dramatic confrontations of this nature that come to occur in the later part of the play. As we are left wondering, still digesting the information, we are soon surprised by yet another statement (210), also about unlikely survival. Where 206 had not quite painted the post-apocalyptic image so vividly, this one does, bringing considerable exacerbation.

This part of the confessions also moves us to novel territory: nature-related emotional trauma. While physical trauma, due to the blunt force of the snow, is indicated in 206, 210 additionally expresses mental trauma at the encounter with the apocalyptic event. The reference to some familiarity with the workings of radiation, and to 'colleagues', implies an individual exposed to conditions framed as part of a work task—not necessarily scientific. In what can be read as a profoundly classed comment, we are likely dealing with the survivor of an expedition that attempted

to counter natural force: an allusion to industrial capitalist hubris and the devastation it leaves in its wake, including, of course, in precarious human agents expected to serve its imperatives. After the build-up and escalation, 211 will strike us as anticlimactic; and such is its function, introducing yet another attitude to unexpected natural phenomena. Here, we are given so little by Crimp that we need to weigh up context (206, 210) and work by deducing. Green is the by-default colour associated with nature; whether we are dealing with moss, mould—of any scale—or with larger-scale developments, such as, for example, a formerly barren, or even urban landscape being reclaimed by nature, the sentiment is one and the same: awe at that which startles and arrests. A radical change has taken place; a new condition has emerged.

Having encountered the transgressions, having followed them through devastated and reclaimed fields, and having visualised—mentally, not in terms of any stage realism—their effects, we are now crossing over to the dystopian. The content is suggestive of a point zero: the kind of annihilation only possible to speak of in the past tense, confessing to hubris, and evaluating that which can no longer be saved. Here, the text also begins to accelerate towards its final stages, and, by 225, we hear of someone who, in fact, generated an entire universe:

> There were trees, there was light, I'd invented animals [...] tracts of land, seascapes, high-rise blocks, whole sequences of intolerable desert or of rose-gardens. And sure, there were people in them [...] I'd devised this world of mine so none of them could see me looking [...] and I still don't know how I managed to delete it. [...] I mean wiped out irretrievably. (Crimp 2022, 44–45)

The above confession, in its entirety one of the most dense in meaning, as well as comparatively extensive in length, points, perhaps, to the roots of life—in another context, one might have even interpreted it as taking on faith in a higher power. Given the overall context of text and production, however, I propose that the segment refers to virtuality and surveillance in the online realm; to software engineering on increasingly plausible and nuanced AI platforms; and to environments that invite users to enter, inhabit and populate them, perhaps, also, by themselves inviting others—all the while being logged, observed and handled.

The above account could come from an engineer, a mastermind responsible for such a platform—and, as such, has a considerable meta-function given the overall concept of the play. There is, also, beyond the technological implication of such a statement, the fact that here we are dealing with the transgressive ownership agendas of global capitalism—and the belief that all aspects of natural and non-natural life are developable, controllable and modifiable at profiteering will. This, it follows, also renders them cancellable, at the point where annihilation occurs, when resources, quite simply, run out; or when technology moves on. The above statement prepares us for what ensues not long after as, in 244, we are offered the view of a persona that confesses uncertainty as to whether humanity can transition into the next century—not a fact that is detrimental, as they say, since, in any case, forms of non-human life are likely to prove more resilient (Crimp 2022, 47). Both 225 and 244, then, express a certain pragmatism, whether motivated by non-empathy or non-exceptionalism. The outcome remains: humanity finds itself on shifting ground and survival is not to be guaranteed. Misunderstanding, misappropriating and misallocating their agencies, as the text suggests, humans have, they have also accomplished cumulatively little by way of preserving their own future.

Delivering a considerable capture of differing attitudes, concerns, griefs, awes and anxieties by the time we land on 244, in the build-up to it, as well as closely following, the text bombards us with fast, whirlwind statements that function to concretise and amplify its environmental focus. For example:

> 236. I'd still be getting up in the dark to basically electrocute poultry, if I hadn't won thirty-five million […].

[…]

> 240. I look at a butterfly's wing and I think – random mutations! – so much beauty!

[…]

> 260. Exxon Valdez? Deepwater Horizon? I've read the reports and these are not quote unquote 'accidents', these are the entirely foreseeable consequence of unregulated global capitalism. (Crimp 2022, 46, 47, 51)

Like the poignant moment of the child marvelling at the 'green' (statement 211), at the Royal Court it was the figure of a baby given the lines of 260. Who better suited, after all, to both condemn and reveal the excesses of a rampant capitalism that has very nearly destroyed the future—the only time relevant to an infant.

As the play begins to near its finale, its intensity grows visceral; at the same time, a cataclysmic dramaturgical effect is achieved by means of variations of the play's title beginning to populate the stage. These provide indications of the nuances that *Not One of These People* has the potential to assume and produce, both in the world of the play, and as a reference to the world beyond the theatre, and its practices of self-aggrandising but also self-victimising, of accusation as well as exceptionalism, and, of course, of absolution:

> 280. I'm not one of these people who looks up into the night sky and deduces from the clarity and exact mechanism of the stars or indeed from the overwhelming scent of jasmine the existence of an all-powerful creator.
>
> […]
>
> 286. If I hadn't had kids I might've been one of those people whose academic theorising about the right to have children in a world whose growing population is 'morally unsustainable' is queasily close to the world-view of the nineteenth century geneticists I assume they despise.
>
> […]
>
> 292. I'm not one of these people who'd experiment on non-human animals – exposing their brains and so on – just to reduce the so-called risk to humans. (Crimp 2022, 55, 56)

The final statements, moving the performance to its closing, may not be as intense in content as some preceding ones, quoted above, but they still carry their own power and impact. In their lack of intensity, they no longer inhabit what may be perceived as extremes, but, rather, what we might call common ground: they are much more ordinary; they lie much closer, if not directly at, what we might refer to as the average opinion. In a constellation of plays that are atypical and unpredictable, if we may—cautiously—speak of a characteristic in Crimp's plays, it is that sometimes they accelerate earlier to begin quietening down shortly

before the ending. And, so, no more loud statements are made here; no sharp references, no sudden revelations. It is the ideal way to steer a text so multifaceted towards its finale—but not conclusion as such—by slowing it down, and bringing one of the most, once more, everyday, non-spectacular confessions to the audience before curtain, also delivering one of the play's most empathetic moments.

Meanwhile, the set has begun to change: from the large screen stage left and the podium stage right, where Crimp has been performing the words 'spoken' by the deepfake technology generated faces projected on the screen while swiping across faces on a tablet to accompany the changes in the projection, we are moving somewhere more intimate. Now, an office—better yet, a study—is beginning to be revealed on stage. Upstage left, a coat hanger, with a raincoat hanging; an umbrella; next to it, an armchair; resting in front of it, the author's shoes, waiting to be filled. The author has never been disembodied in this play—he has been present all long, even as his words have been mouthed by non-existent, yet very much present, others. But, now, the author, as himself, or perhaps as both himself and a dramatised version of himself, but always performed by himself, must enter and walk in his own shoes; he must take presence, flesh and accountability.

Approximately at statement 225, Crimp leaves the stage; his voice is still heard, and the personas continue to 'speak' in his absence (none of this is noted in any stage directions). As the study becomes more visible on stage, no longer obscured by the screen—itself now fading in intensity—Crimp re-enters. He is no longer working with a tablet or speaking the words live; statement 264 is unfolding (still via an AI-generated face on the screen) in pre-recorded delivery by Crimp, with a reference to the painter Francis Bacon. We hear that, as Bacon tells his interviewer, David Sylvester, "he wants to disrupt – his word, not mine – disrupt this thing – painting – that he can in fact do with ease" (2022, 52). Crimp's engagement with Bacon, and the challenge of representing the world, is documented (Angelaki 2012); here, he returns to it, followed by further reference to Immanuel Kant, still in 264. Representation is the issue: of an evaporating world, in art and space—the theatre is both and—that are now, also, under severe threat (once more, the pandemic). And as to disruption, and ease, once more Crimp proves himself to be the master, a term that applies to both painting and theatre. The canvas is redrawn dramatically as we near the finale, from the technologically mediated to the bare, physical and immediate: the quiet descent of the moment of

creation as other auteurs are invoked to fill that space of artistic *mystagogy*; to attempt to describe it. A space that opens, now, between different forms; issues; artworks; stories; times. This is the creative interspace, and the one that produces the ultimate encounter between the author and ourselves. Now, as audience, we appear to be inhabiting a different time and space from previously; a continuum is opening to engage us in the very moment of playwriterly conceptualisation—or, at least, in its dramatisation.

In this new space that the playwright carves out through his presence, the literal re-entrance into the script, and in the theatre—beyond the digital that served as the trademark for COVID-19 performances—our pace of engagement is changed. As the author occupies the room and the structure of the play, Crimp plays a version of himself—while also being himself—that comes into his study, removes his raincoat and shoes, sits in the chair and puts on the pair of shoes that—like the other objects and accessories—had been implying a presence and a body in the absence of both. The author walks to his desk, chooses a record, places it on the record player and presses the needle gently; it is the second movement (*Andante con moto*) of Franz Schubert's op. 100, written in the final part of his life (1827/1828 (1999)). The author comes back, then, in more than one way—to reclaim the artwork, as they both endure through time. The dialogue continues: not only voices now, but also sounds: in an ongoing conversation with another artist auteur, Crimp—literally—picks up with Schubert, another recurring reference (Angelaki 2012). As the music swells, so the atmosphere (both mood and environment) continues to transition, so the space continues to be redistributed and reformed. The writer performs the ritual—feels the soil in the flowerpot; waters a plant, looks at the laptop; and sharpens a pencil. Now, it is the playwright that embodies the text and the act of authorship as his voice remains audible in pre-recorded delivery and the statements continue, the staged study—which he inhabits in real time—becoming the interspace in all ways: private and public, both itself and a replica of itself.

The music progressively rises in volume; the voice(s) congest the sound- and space-scape. The writer writes. The screen is lifted upwards and disappears. Now the writer takes up space, but differently from before: centre stage, he reads from a page, and there is no voice amplification; it is only the paper, the body, the voice and the spotlight: these constitute the site of the text, the act, the medium between art and audience. Number 299 is delivered thus; and it is a longer monologue, a

sudden, parting luxury of a narrative device that augments time and space: the barest and most physical moment of the play. Its content can be read as both profoundly individual and universal: a person (a woman, perhaps) recounting an early morning call from their twin sister, who narrates an incident pertaining to their mother at a care home; fluctuations of worry and relief; thoughts that give life to other thoughts, on families, and motherhoods, and communications, and legacies, and history, and futures, and agency. And, as part of it, that very call that prompts the speaker to suddenly reflect on their parent

> and me and my own children as part of a long animal chain of birth and death […] no free-will, or let's say, yes, we had free-will, but the world's will was greater than ours, […] a force that had no regard for individual destinies, or the achievements, so-called, of human culture, seeing no more value in the nine symphonies of Beethoven or eradication of malaria than in the successful assembly of a flat-pack coffee-table […] (Crimp 2022, 58)

As the text ends, so we are reminded of the thread that interconnects: locationality, belonging, agencies, flows and uncertainties. The cosmos and the grain, part of one and the same narrative, or, perhaps, not. The finale takes on the importance of presence, of textures and lyricism in the everyday minutiae and of being part of a greater narrative, and, in doing so, evidences the deep humanity in Crimp's writing and—as I have discussed elsewhere—his sharpness of observation and the ability to be precise without judging; and to reveal, but not to condemn (Angelaki 2022).

Even though the text is profoundly ethically engaged, one of the strongest gravitational forces towards Crimp's work is that it is simply not moralist, an attribute that, for the past several decades, it has resisted with notable integrity. And even as this last segment of text recounts a rainy day—the kind that the author, as we have seen in this especially insightful premiere production, has himself just encountered—the play, the performance and the overall experience are not reducible to facile explanations regarding source of inspiration. Rather, they acquire a life of their own, in a space that is as tenuous as it is tangible; as threatened as it is resilient. This is the creative space unique to each playwright, and the common space as well: the theatre auditorium. We discount author and text and physicality at our peril; but to look to the creator to explain the artwork, as the final soundscape of the play, Nick Cave's "We

Call upon the Author" reminds us, while Crimp takes his bow, is also a fallacy. Theatre, after it has been most tested, returns to, and revels in the communal: the shared space. There, author, play and audience are part of a performance continuum, not easily reducible to constituent parts.

Conclusion

This chapter has, by exception, concentrated on two, rather than three plays: Lucy Kirkwood's *Rapture* (alternatively Dave Davidson's *That Is Not Who I Am*) and Martin Crimp's *Not One of These People*. The reason behind this choice is the expansive, at times even apparently uncontainable nature of each of these texts. It could not have been otherwise for work by two of the most diverse and original voices of contemporary British playwriting that, in taking on that most elusive and illusive interspace, the internet, present us with extensive, multifaceted engagements with the domain perhaps initially conceptualised as a site for working parenthetically, facilitating the functions and requirements of the physical world, but that has, rather, produced unprecedented liminality. The interspace of the digital realm, then, as this chapter has shown, emerges as the ultimate fluid environment, which both produces and installs in-betweenness as a permanent state.

Through their respective dramaturgies and preoccupations, which show the digital as embedded in the intertwined acts of (self-)authoring and living, and through both the displacing and re-positioning of the author at the very heart of such e-lusive e-cologies of text, and of narration, both texts probe how agency, creative, environmental and civic might be staged in a way that startles and surprises towards motivating engagement. Each in its own way, both plays have taken on the emerging landscapes—social, digital, political, individual, collective—following the COVID-19 pandemic. The plays have, as this chapter has shown, also queried and contextualised the emerging ecologies of separation from one's social and spatial context, and the isolation resulting from distancing as a dominant state, absorbed into the fibre of humanity, rather than a passing condition somehow containable. Still, as this chapter has likewise demonstrated, these plays have also asked how theatre might begin to re-enter the narrative of an altered theatre ecology, and how it might populate another ultimate interspace between art and society: the theatre auditorium, both digital and visceral, with bodies, images, ideas, and words that might claim substance and presence; and that might compel

processes of querying how the next day in theatre and sustainability—physical, financial, environmental—might look. Ultimately, both plays take on these intersecting tasks by placing their own viability, stageability and overall tenability at the very centre of the experiment; this renders them bold and brave acts of theatre. That the texts have undertaken such complex tasks while also asking how the singular author, dispersed through the faces and the bodies of many, both palimpsest and hologram, presence and absence, might endure, also as a resilient site, is to their credit. Human—and authorial—agency, at its barest, most immediate form, still has a rather major role to play, both texts reveal—literally, metaphorically and emphatically.

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CHAPTER 8

Afterword

In every book, there is a road not taken; if the subject matter is sufficiently intriguing, there may be more than one. This is rather positive, as it opens up to the possibilities of the road that this specific author did not pursue, or at least not on this occasion, being taken up by someone else, opening, it follows, further roads, and paths, and journeys for others. It might be that the choice of itinerary that rules out another one, in the way that Robert Frost envisaged it in “The Road Not Taken” (1915 (2015)), might not be that much of a binary after all, if we imagine it, at least, as an act of continuity, flux and dialogue. I take from Frost the environmental imagery and the reference to paths that invite more footsteps, and extend an invitation to colleagues to take on those theoretical, critical and artistic roads that this book has not taken in their own pursuit(s). I am both fascinated and intrigued by what these dialogues might look like, what discursive space they might inhabit, and what creative impetus they might imagine as so compelling that it cannot but be written about.

For the purposes of the present book, however, the enquiry closes here. Its author does not imagine that a more concrete ‘Conclusion’ is required, because I stand by the view that I have also expressed in earlier work, that an event, which is still unfolding, as we inhabit, digitally and physically, our shared and individual environments, is not best served when presented as a neat story followed by a tidy epimyth. Each of the main chapters of this book closes with its own corresponding concluding section, which serves to capture the development of its arguments and

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its critical discoveries—in that way, those individual conversations are concluded, hopefully in a way that also reveals the bigger picture of the book. The book does not make a claim that the concerns it takes on are resolved by the end of its enquiry. The problematics that inform its discussions will continue to inform the near, but also the longer-term future(s).

I would like, then, to end here, by means of reference to three plays that were at one stage imagined as potentially featuring in the main body of the book, but which were, for different reasons, subsequently deemed as more appropriate for the task of attempting a full-stop to what is an ongoing conversation regarding the spatial coordinates of contemporary playwriting and performance. These texts are: *Heisenberg* by Simon Stephens (2015, Manhattan Theatre Club, director Mark Brokaw), *What if if Only* by Caryl Churchill (2021, Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, director James Macdonald) and *I, Joan* by Charlie Josephine (2022, Shakespeare's Globe, director Ilinca Radulian). Each in its own way, these plays take on, embody and present different versions and possibilities for flow and transience, where the state of existing in-between is not presented as undesirable but as ultimately freeing, even when set against crushing practicalities, confronted by risks of failure, or impeded by rigid structures. Something, in these plays, always escapes, and breathes: it carves out for itself a new path, a space to exist alongside the so-called safe, or the realistic, or the systemic. Each of these plays also stages sites of disruption that materialise in transit sites and awkward public spaces, or charmless private ones, as in *Heisenberg*; in indeterminate spatial and perceptual zones that blossom outwards with hope from the very confining ground of one's immediate rootedness, as in *What if if Only*; or in fissures in histories that take on those unrepresented, unaccounted for, suppressed and eliminated voices and narratives that now seek to reinscribe fluidity in history, and make it happen differently, as in *I, Joan*.

The subtitle of Heisenberg, referring to the play's scientific context, is *The Uncertainty Principle*. Already from the start, the play introduces itself with a key acknowledgement: the only reality set in stone is that there can be no fixity. The text pursues the hypothesis with dedication as it unfolds in motion, acknowledging the fact that stopping—and resting, and defining, whether people, places or things, is a chimera. The only element of control comes in accepting to relinquish it, and in recognising that life is in the between—spatial and temporal—movements, gestures and encounters that appear peripheral to those other larger, seemingly

more impactful segments, but that are, in fact, the event in themselves. To meet someone in the space where the main action is that predicated on the absence of the vehicle that will produce it—the train that is yet to arrive at and depart from—the station; to accept that the singular encounter is in itself the narrative, rather than the other way around—that is, that the everyday narrative allows the encounter. To allow for possibilities, with no promises, and no fixities—"That's all I need. To know that. That just suits me down to the ground. Thank you" says one half of the play's duo to the other in the final moments of Stephens's play (2015, 57). The gratitude pertains to the story that has taken root outside of the dominant pattern of either character's life journeys, to become a new journey. Other than certainty, Stephens's play suggests, there is also no such thing as an objective definition of connection, companionship or even future. Except that there might actually be an attempt at each of these and all combined, in the very denial of their rigid affirmation.

Proliferating possibilities affect not only alternative futures, but, also, alternative constructions of histories that might be well-rehearsed in the public imagination; in other words, the theatre can produce interventionist gestures at the heart of the moment where that difficult past becomes difficult, setting it free, reenvisaging it, correcting the injustice, rebalancing the universe. *I, Joan* serves the symbolic purpose of opening up spaces in closed up histories, releasing, it seems, even the theatre auditorium itself (here the Globe) by treating it as not necessarily a long-established space of the historical canon, but, rather, as a pop-up environment for hope and disruption. Joan of Arc, here, does not die; and why, after all, should that be the case? The narrative of oppressive histories is—literally—interrupted, or, as Joan puts it, "Oh enough! Enough of your words, please, you've spoken, oh so many words"; it is now time for orthodox systemic histories to be displaced by "*a joyous rebellion*", where binarisms—in gender, in success, in failure—cease to be relevant, as does the neat closing of a play within the dramatic structure (Josephine 2022, 161–62). Instead, through a fluid finale of "*bodies moving together* [...] *the release we all need* [that] *builds it builds it builds, the energy swirling* [...] *and bursting up into the sky*" neither the narrative, quite, nor hope ends (Josephine 2022, 162). Likewise, the space of the audience ceases to be delimited or delineated by means of that of the performance and performers. The two sites conjoin, creating an interspace, where the margin for change survives.

Then, there is the question of (the) future(s). In the final pages of *Mobile Lives*, Anthony Elliott and John Urry imagine scenarios of what these 'futures' that are not one might entail "for the middle years of the twenty-first century" (2010, 150). Their vocabulary in this section is rather spectacular, though not spectacularised: in the scenario of a crisis radical, and annihilating, the need is for dialogue, for probing for persevering, for planting a root and following through—even while acknowledging that other roots have been destroyed, and that much has already been eroded. Firstly presenting four scenarios: "*Perpetual motion*" (2010, 141–42); "*Local sustainability*" (2010, 142–44); "*Regional warlordism*" (2010, 144–47); and "*Digital networks*" (2010, 147–50, all emphasis original), Elliott and Urry then move towards the closing of their book through a reflective section titled "Multiple futures" (2010, 150–53). Here, they also rather decisively dismantle the ecology/economy binary:

> It is probable that [...] neoliberalism will continue to set economic and political agendas, making widespread, concerted state actions to deal with climate change unlikely. [...]
>
> But that is not certain, only probable. It could turn out that climate change and peak oil turn out to be issues of such significance that, through catastrophic events, they lead to the dramatic modification or rejection of neo-liberalism. [...A]s economist Nicholas Stern writes, 'Climate change ... is the greatest and widest-ranging market failure.' Climate change shows that the private pursuit of individual gain across the world, especially since around 1990, has resulted in a collective outcome at the global level that threatens the future of capitalism. (2010, 151)

It is precisely these untenabilities of capitalism and its various, extensive, destructive effects that the plays examined in this book investigate vis-à-vis capitalism's deep-seated inscription as a reliable system for the organisation and evaluation of benefit versus liability. The plays examined here, each in their different way, reveal how capitalism has persistently marginalised voices of dissent to monetise, mine and deplete each and every environmental and spatial resource—physical and virtual alike, and to instate relations of profit and reward in societies across time. It is these wounds, on surfaces, soils, atmospheres, cyber-sites, non-human and human life that the plays that this book has dealt with take on through their respective forays into the interspatial and its possibilities.

Without dryly instructing, but, nonetheless, thoughtfully historicising, the plays on which this book has concentrated ask a similar set of questions to the ones that Elliott and Urry pose: "[h]ow should we anticipate the future? How will future historians refer to the next few decades? Will they be known as the climate change years, or maybe even the end of (mobile) civilization years?" (2010, 140). Here lands, in my view, the most striking vocabulary that proves, resolutely, that theatre and society are intimately intertwined, and that the vocabularies of theatre studies and sociologies are not antagonistic, but shared. Or, to return to Elliott and Urry for one final thought, there are "futures that are possible, those that are probable and those that are preferable. And the last of these, the preferable futures, are often neither probable nor even possible" (2010, 140).

This is the space that Churchill's *What if if Only* inhabits, not only anticipating, imagining, fearing or hoping for this future, but, in fact, giving flesh to it—in one of those most inauspicious contexts: the private site of grief for a partner lost, and a future interrupted. There is not only one future; rather, there are several—and the path of desire, and of loss, and of expectation leads to many of these, and to all at the same time, as they contest each other, claiming space, taking root—losing it, once exposed as a delusion, an impossibility, and regaining it, not in spite of, but because of reasoning. The rationality required to appreciate that ecology and economy are not antithetical—and that against fear, theatre can be both pragmatic and instil hope, comes to shape the powerful final image of this play by Churchill that acknowledges devastation but resiliently winks at optimism. Space does not open up easily for such hope; the interspace of disruption is a fleshy and messy process—and it requires sustenance and perseverance. Amongst the different options that have been/could have been/will not be/will happen, imagined by Churchill as "Present", "Future", and "Futures", the one that prevails, through energy that begins to swell and fill the space of the text, the stage and the theatre, right as the short performance draws to a close, is that of "Child Future". Or, as the text reads in its final moments: "*A small child future is there*" (Churchill 2021, 3–14). The Child Future, irreverent to what has been, and free of devastation, and sorrow, and demise, asks, and in fact demands: "I want want to happen I'm going to happen shall I happen?" before eventually, defiantly declaring: "I'm going to happen" (Churchill 2021, 3–14).

In the 2022–23 theatre season, the Swedish premiere of the text played at the large stage of Stockholms stadsteater[1] as *Tänk om om bara* [Think if if Only], part of a double bill alongside Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (2016, as *Undkom ensam*), programmed in a space accommodating almost twice the size of the audience that the Royal Court's Theatre Downstairs has capacity for. The production was directed by Ole Anders Tandberg with scenography by Sven Haraldsson. Here, the role/time/space designated as "Child Future" was portrayed by a child actor (shared between Billie Höper Edfeldt and Hedvig Sahlin) who enters the vast, now suddenly dreamlike, soft-hued stage decisively, blue hair all unruly, bursting with irreverence, carrying a branch, taking root—occupying the space at the same time as creating it and altering it through presence and agency. In so doing, the Child Future, even in a balance still tenuous, and a context still tentative, allows no margin for doubt that the future is very much going to happen, and that we can still, collectively, decide to believe in it, nourish it and subscribe to it as a common endeavour. It is in the sudden, the uninvited, in that very margin that opens, and that grows, where the action will take place; where the event will occur.

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[1] Kindly note that the reference is to the name of the theatre in Swedish, therefore there is no apostrophe.

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