

...?
 ...?
 ...?

There are worse rooms than this.
I am remembering the worst rooms.

...?
 ...?
 ...?

There are worse times than this.

...?
 ...?
 ...?

I am waiting for the worst times.

*An artifact is not a fact
 until it is found.*

Lost, it was obscure.
 Obscurity is the state of being unknown.
 Prior to being found, an artifact is unknown.
 Facts are known.

These are no facts.

I found this artifact.
 I know it for
 I know it for...

a fact...?

Post-Script

I am the editor.

I am the eternal being that lives past the embarrassing labor of the author.

I am the future of whatever has written.

The origin point of this project sounded simple.

Sounded simple when I said it.

Simple sounds being said.

...

...

...

Adapt the Future.

The resulting year involved reckoning with own simplicity.

mind is an antagonist. It plays a childish game; a purely linguistic game in which it rephrases a term in its opposite without considering the resulting meaning.

Childish Game

tongue + Adapt the Past = Adapt the Future

Many artists want the future to hold a utopian world and work towards that end.

wants the future to hold a world where meaning is achievable. But that is not the same as a utopian world. doesn't know that would feel any better in an utopia, so finds at odds with the utopian ideals projected by the arts.

speculated that adapting the future might demonstrate the future as a place where meaning is possible. If adapted that future into the present, then art could create a context in the here-and-now in which meaning is possible.

That was base desire in beginning this project. It has hopefully grown past this desire, but it's important to admit the baseness of its birth.

We start with a post-script because it is indicative of the organizing principle of this ...?

We had to decide what the spirit of a ...? should be, or what would want it to be, and for us, it seems like the sweat and labor of critical thought per annum.

In this ...?, we will try to show our work, and thought processes, and how if one keeps digging their hole they can find the beginning of their digging of a hole.

A shovel.
Some dirt.
The only beginning in the world...

...in the *Earth*.

Some dirt.
A shovel.
The only beginning begins in the Earth.

something is buried...?
something *must* have been buried.
a beginning?
Or you're digging a hole to begin...?
to bury something...?

My hands hold raw flesh.
I'm digging again.
I'm beginning to dig again.

This ends the post-script.

Now the words travel back.

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days of thought, where we will sl

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pitch.

Act I, Scene One: What?

Part I: Study Trends (September/October)

I do a deep dive study of how non-commercial theater has changed in the last fifty years.

Decisions I have to make: I have to decide what the best way into this study is. For instance, should I try to pick a place like The Public, which has been around fifty years, and focus specifically on the change in plays at that institution? That would give me a constant in the study, but it would also essentially mean I'm studying how The Public's *curation* of theater has changed rather than how *drama* has changed. I'm more interested in how drama will change. For instance, the Greeks all played to the Gods, and now the characters usually play to each other. Shakespearean theater had little set dressing, and now we often have set dressing, and it's called minimalism if we don't, which is its own kind of negative set dressing. These are the sorts of fundamental changes in *playmaking* which I want to take an honest crack at tracking.

Another tact is being more general, and saying I'm going to look at an amalgamation of playmaking from Off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway institutions fifty years ago and compare it to an amalgamation in contemporary theater. This runs the risk of being too broad and undefined and relying upon my own generalizations.

A third choice would be relying on other experts/theatermakers who are currently grappling with this problem in scholarship. I could do a survey reading and determine how it has changed.

A fourth choice is sort of an analogous model. For instance, fifty years ago, "radical" was being used to describe ----- and in contemporary theater, "radical" is being used to describe -----.

This seems like an interesting way to go about it.

A fifth choice is interviewing theater artists who were prominent fifty years ago. I could ask them specific questions about the trends they've seen, and the trends they anticipate. This is also intriguing.

Those are five possibilities; the other elephant in the room is 'why fifty years?'. A fair question. It's a nice bold number, which is always important. Also it allows enough time for *longue durée* trends to emerge. And fifty years ago puts us neatly into 1970, an era when it feels like there was a consciousness about fracturing of theatrical traditions, especially downtown. All that being said, I could be swayed into another time frame.

Part II: Build a Predictive Model (October/November)

Part II involves using the data gathered in Part I through whichever methodology, and then using that data to construct a sort of predictive mechanism to concretely declare a play that will exist fifty years from now. This, to me, is the trickiest part of this project. It would be easy to just

sort of look at my research, and then write a paper about trends that I anticipate moving forward, and then write about a hypothetical play based on those trends.

This is not interesting to me.

This predictive mechanism somehow needs to be capable of creating an **objective output**. Something more akin to an algorithmic computer program. This project will be absolute malarkey if I can't convince people that this predictive model is an objective thing outside my own influence. Again, this is tricky. If I build an algorithmic mechanism, but it is based on my own research, haven't I already skewed the process? The death of this process is people believing that I am essentially creating this hypothetical future play. I need to merely react to whatever is spit out from the predictive mechanism.

A few options:

I input my research into some sort of computer program that then vaguely describes a future play?

I give someone else my research and allow them to build a mechanism.

If Part I was interview based, perhaps someone just takes my transcripts and edits them to make a description of a play fifty years from now.

Part III: An Essay & Review of the Future Play (November/December)

Part III is when I'm first introduced to the future play created by the algorithmic model. In order to further clarify my own understanding and relationship with the future play, and further cement its hypothetical reality and legitimacy, I will write a speculative scholarly essay about how the future play shows that theater has changed in the last (next) fifty years. I will also write a review critiquing the future play.

This is why the predictive model's objectivity is so important. There is such a fine line between people thinking this is fascinating and people thinking this is, pardon my French, bullshit. If it feels like I've just made up a play, and am now talking about this play I made up, then it's a nonsensical, self-indulgent waste of time. I have to, with all my will of conviction, believe, and convince others, that this future play is a thing that tangibly exists in the future based on a predictive mechanism. It is a future reality. A concrete thing. And I am reacting to that thing that exists outside of my own creativity or imagination. That is the only way this project will be successful.

Part IV: Generate a contemporary Adaptation of the Future Play (December/January-March)

Pretty much what it sounds like. The way, say, Daniel Fish looked at *Oklahoma!*, I will look at this future play. I will apply my same understanding of adapting past work towards adapting future work. I'm sure there will be additional nuances to this adaptive methodology that account

for the temporal reversion, but I believe it will be a shockingly similar process. I will employ Brian Kulick's "Four Fold Reading Model".

Again, the only way I'll be able to do something with that much depth is if the future play exists completely objectively in the future. It's far too early to speculate on whether a devised adaptation or an adaptation into another medium, or a plain old written adaptation, or a dance-theater adaptation makes the most since. The process will be compelled, like any other adaptation, by the source material. So the intent of Part IV is known, but the shape of Part IV is entirely dependent on what happens in Part II.

Will it be just me? Will it take other collaborators? Perhaps it appears that the future play only exists in Virtual Reality. Well then, I'll have to figure out how to do a theatrical adaption of VR. The possibilities and stimuli are endless, and I find this thrilling.

Part V: The Performance (March-May/Summer)

The culmination is a performance. I obviously can't predict what shape or form that might take without knowing the source material I am adapting. But I believe in theater actually happening, so I'll make sure there is a performance of this adaptation of the future play.

Act I, Scene Two: Why?

Dramaturgy, Ex Nihilo, is a rabbit I've been chasing for all of graduate school. Studying Dramaturgy and having to explain it is an insecurity of mine as someone who wants to exist as a generator rather than an enabler. One of the allures of Adapting the Future was the idea that through a dramaturgical process, such as adaptation, I could generate a piece *ex nihilo*. In this way, I could prove that dramaturgy, even by a stricter sense of one who engages rigorously with a text, could be a purely generative form.

Beyond this insecurity, my own sense of self is tied to *ex nihilo*. To create meaning, we have to generate it *ex nihilo*. Theater art is a machine with which I am always trying to calibrate to make meaning. One element that goes into that theater machine is time. The past has no meaning, and the present has no meaning, so they are useless ingredients in trying to produce meaning. The future is unknown and ambiguous. I cannot say it is meaningless. Therefore, the future is an ingredient-- and perhaps the very material-- out of which we should build our meaning machine.

In Adapting the Future, I'll be practicing two different shades of dramaturgy. One, I'll term Conditional Dramaturgy. I think of this as setting conditions for a project to happen, and then the project playing out under those conditions. I'm doing this by creating the imaginative task of Adapting the Future. I've created a timeline, I've created a semantical frame, and I've created an artistic goal.

Then within these conditions, I'm practicing a second form of dramaturgy, that of the adapter. I'm going to try and form rules and methodology around adaptation, and then attempt to rigorously apply these rules within the conditions set by my Conditional Dramaturgy.

As I reach the end of this description, I'm no longer certain that what I'm showing is that Dramaturgy has the capacity to create *ex nihilo*. Perhaps what I'm demonstrating is that there is *no such thing as ex nihilo*. Thus the dramaturgical tools oughtn't be separated from more traditionally generative disciplines like playwriting. Perhaps playwriting is just a form of dramaturgy.

Or this whole line of logic is corrupted because it is merely compelled by my own insecurities on the symbolic restrictions of dramaturgy.

To establish is a new directional leaning. Or a new directional receptivity? Too long we've taken from the past but the past has not taken from us. Our subjective lens on events means there's a two way exchange. What if the past is adapting us right now?

Past (causal actuality)--> Present

Past ("History") <--Present (Subjective Hermeneutics)

Present -->Future (Speculative Imagination)

Present <-- Future (Casual Actuality.)

Is there a new double consciousness in present work, anticipating the eventual past --> present treatment? Did the Greeks think they'd be adapted?

Don't ever assume I know more than anyone else. *Anyplace* else. *Anytime* else. It is a common pitfall of many adaptations of the past. They drag this thing from two thousand years ago into the present, kicking and screaming all the way, in order to wag its bony finger of insight at their ethical ignorance. We may have implemented more just systems, but where it counts, we don't fundamentally know more than any other time.

An appealing trait of adapting the future: it's hard to trick oneself into thinking one knows more than the future. But the opposite issue may arise. A sort of utopic deference to the future in which we assume the future will know more than we know now. No! Sacrifice all these Enlightenment notions of human perfectibility through time and increasing knowledge.

The Devolution of Design is a new deconstruction. There is an inevitability within contemporary adaptation that we're often applying more advanced theater technology towards the adaptation than existed for the original performance.

When we adapt the Greek dramas, we rarely confine our efforts to the same limitations as the original time period--open air, daylight, no sound or lighting tech. And when we do, it is merely

a novelty. Therefore, we are, without paying much attention, also generating a technological adaptation of most past ---> present plays.

Adapting the Future raises the possibility of flipping this assumption on its head. What happens if we assume that the play we are adapting from the future also has updated performance technology-- new sound techniques, new lighting equipment, extending even so far as emergent technologies like AR and VR. In what seems to me like a first-of-its-kind thought experiment, we are now having to consciously devolve our technological capability in the adaptation process.

I mean, how would we possibly adapt something from Augmented Reality into an analog stage version? That's a brain-rattling conversion that hasn't been considered. It might lead to entirely new generative work. What does this devolution mean? How can we use it to our advantage? What are the implications? There are plenty of exciting questions surrounding how we might (un)build this design reduction into our process.

As I return to my survey, there's also a chrono-colonialism to consider. I am claiming a part of the future. Semantically, I don't have the rights to this future play, so it's reasonable I'll be sued, or am being sued right now in the future. Anachronistic legislation. Second, my identity comes into play. As a straight white male, infamous for colonialist tendencies, am I perpetuating this pattern into the future? Who wants straight white men claiming ownership of the future? It is especially problematic because I think it's exceedingly likely the straight white male will not be a part of the downtown theater ecosystem fifty years from now. I anticipate a more fundamental shift where downtown theater stops being *about* social justice, and actually *becomes* a socially just enterprise. Certain justifiable erasures would ensue.

This makes me wonder...unconsciously, has the impetus of this project been my own feelings of erasure from the downtown scene of which I want to be a part? Do I worry that it's very likely I won't have a space in 2070? Is this why I'm trying to bring the future to the present while I'm still participating in theater making? Maybe.

Or, on the other hand, I often talk about how because of my identity, I can't take up space downtown that is finite. However, if I could own my own space, or create a space that otherwise wouldn't exist, I could be justified in taking up that particular space, especially if I figured out how to use it for others. I wonder if the same logic can apply in a temporal sense. Maybe I feel like I can't have any claim on the present, because it is finite, whereas 2070 feels permissible, because it is abstract, it is infinite, and I can take up that time-space without excluding anyone more deserving.

I've tried to mitigate these justified concerns by reaching out to a wide, diverse swath of survey participants and stressing that my adaptation is a contemporary adaptation of their opinions through an objective mechanism. I'm saying I have a contemporary MFA thesis space, and claim no presumptuous future space beyond that.

The Material Future vs The Ideological Future

We must make a differentiation between what I'm calling *material* future and *ideological* future.

The *material future* is the tangible aspect of the future that we cannot bring about in the present. For example, we don't yet have a teleportation machine. And just because we can collectively imagine a teleportation machine, there are material impossibilities in that we cannot presently build a teleportation machine.

I'll contrast this against the *ideological future*. This is what I believe mostly comprises the timeline of the arts. If we can imagine something in the future, we can immediately bring it into the present. There are no material constraints. I thought of a thesis I'd like to write in the future, and then one day I wrote it and it became a present project.

Ideological Future

Thoughts about Future ---> Actualize in Present

Material Future

Thoughts about Future ---> Remain actualized in Future

Let's look at the prophet Cassandra in *Agamemnon*. She knows what's going to happen, but she is powerless to enact it in the Present. Even though she tells everyone that Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon, the actual killing does not occur in the present, it remains in the Future. Her real frustration, and the curse of knowing the future but no one believing her, seems to be being stuck in this painful liminality between ideological future (what I know) and material future (fate).

This differentiation will be significant to our project. We aim to take a material future (the future play) and *adapt* it to the present without making the play itself present. And it can still exist in the future because we actually can't make that material context inhabit the present.

However, if we are unable to truly manifest a future play, then there will be no material future, just ideological future. This would be tantamount to me just thinking of a play in the future and then writing a present adaptation. That thought of the play in the future, because it was an ideological future, actually was a thought in the present.

This difference is why Step 2, in which an objective predictive model creates an actual play in the material future, is so important. It is creating material future.

We should define 'future' in our own terms, rather than the status quo definition. Because of the primary role of imagination in art, and our ability to manufacture work ideologically rather than materially, it seems to me the following definition is most precise:

Unambiguous & Known = The Present

Ambiguous & Unknown = The Future

In art, the only ideas we cannot drag into the present are those that are ambiguous or unknown to us, so that we cannot ideologically manifest them in the present.

Act I, Scene Three: How?

The Four-Fold Reading Method is a mode of adaptation. It is important to state that I am not an artistic anarchist, and this project is not an attempt to eradicate methodology by moving the entire adaptation process into the abstract. I never believed in divine revelation, nor immaculate conception, and I don't desire to model them in adaptation. Quite the opposite. I am a sucker for rigorousness. I adore methodology. It is my intention to apply a rigorous methodology to my adaptation of the future. We will see if this is paradoxical. Let's not pretend we know just yet. With this stated intention, it follows that before we agonize over creating our own methodology of future adaptation, we ought to see if it might be simpler just to steal a methodology from someone we respect.

Enter Brian Kulick, former AD of Classic Stage Company, and current Chair of the Graduate Theater Department at Columbia University. He has a rigorous methodology for adaptation he teaches to theatermakers. It is entitled the "Four Fold Reading Method". It is a method originally developed to help one interpret the Torah. If you can play the four fold game, you have a three hundred sixty degree understanding of the play. It deepens your wholistic understanding of the text.

Naturally, it is geared towards adapting plays from the past into the present. My attraction to this reading method is that even with texts such as Shakespeare, which have been dissected to death by scholars, the Four Fold Reading Method, in its mystic lens, tries to treat this play of the past as an ambiguous artifact. We have defined the future as ambiguous or unknown, and thus any methodology we uncover for adapting the future will have to engage with ambiguity. Thus, our interest.

So now, I will play a stupid game, which is if this methodology works for the past, why not the future? We will go through each of the four readings embedded within the methodology and assess whether all or any might be applicable to adapting the future. Let us use a typical past adaptation, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, as our reference point.

Plain Reading

The plain reading includes the contextual facts of a piece: at the most superficial level, when was it written and what was historically happening at the time. For example, *Measure for Measure* was written in 1604. This reading also includes its relation to the historical landscape. What ideas and concerns were floating in the cultural ethos that can be heard echoing within the

piece? Shakespeare authority Tony Tanner says “James I’s Basilicon Doron had been published in 1603, and was, we may say, required reading. Shakespeare certainly knew it, and, as has been noted by scholars, many of the concerns and exhortations articulated in that book could equally well have come from the Duke. This reading also includes notes as to from whom Shakespeare was borrowing his story, the English’s stereotypes of the Viennese, and the general view on sex at the time.

The Plain Reading seems difficult to apply to a future adaptation because it is inherently geared towards the *objective* and the *factual*. In this nascent stage of our thinking, *objective* and *factual* seem to us descriptive language of the past or present. The future is not objective, the future is not factual, and in some ways, this is why the future is not the past. Now, we know that the past is not actually *objective* or *factual* (and if the reader is a relativist on our scale, then we suspect *nothing* is objective and factual) because we’ve all heard the axiom “history is written by the victors”. However, for our purposes, it is useful to consider the past objective and factual in so much as it differentiates it from the future, which cannot even have the pretense of objectivity or fact. I don’t know, perhaps determinists or fatalists would object, but for the sake of this thesis, we’ll have to operate within a worldview that includes ambiguity at some level, or we’ll simply be lost at sea.

Let’s at least consider what our future play’s relation to *futuristic* landscape will be. What might be the cultural ethos at the time of the future play that seeps in? There is a way I might use these questions to adapt the future play, but not until I include one critical step—a projection of future landscape and future cultural ethos. Whereas right now, the Plain Reading method is a fundamentally descriptive step in adaptation, for our purposes, it would need to come after an independent projection which would create something it might describe.

Still, I am wary of Plain Reading’s use for engaging with ambiguity and the unknown. It is a literal tool. I’m not sure how much use such a tool will be.

Analog Reading

The Analog reading is the development of a thematic frame to help the audience *see* the play. What would be a way to tell the story so that contemporary audiences understand it? The New York Times loves this reading. Others believe it’s reductive.

In *Measure for Measure*, the King of Vienna pretends to go away on a trip and then disguises himself to observe his subjects. I suggest an analog should be a small town in Nevada, a place where brothels are legal. It should be their local government town hall meeting, and the mayor of the small town in Nevada should feign a sickness for a bit and hand it off to their right-hand deputy, and then likewise would sneak around and observe everyone’s reaction.

The Analog Reading seems potentially relevant to this project. What would be a way to tell the future so that contemporary audiences understand it? Already the Analog Reading, even in a traditional past → present adaptation, is focused on bridging a temporal gap between contemporary audience and performance from another time.

Although, herein lies a semantic reckoning. The *performance* isn't really from another time, but the *text* is. Particular to the dramatic form, we have to examine what a play from the past or future really means. And often, it is two parts: text and performance. The text and performance are a microcosm of the time rift we engage in adaptation.

Thinking about something like *Measure for Measure*, that text was written at one time, and then it was performed at another. Already, this idea of play is equally anchored in two different times. So what is a play's past, present and future? It is a complicated timeline. This is only exacerbated when we try to adapt a play. Even in a traditional adaptation of Shakespeare, is it possible to adapt the play? Or only the text? What does it mean to adapt the performance? Could you adapt the text without adapting the performance? Could you adapt the performance without adapting the text? A text might exist at a single point, if it is written and not changed, but a performance, as long as text exists, always has the potential to be a present or future iteration.

The Analog Reading is concerned with the text. It is able to locate the text at a specific point in the past, and then reincarnate it into a newly legible body to a contemporary audience. This process requires certainty about two temporalities: when your text exists and when your audience exists. I could spend this entire project simply challenging how adaptations of the past are reductive in their handling of play as 'text in past.'

But that is not our focus. Applying all that we just examined in the light of adapting the future, if we choose to be broad in our accounting, the Analog Reading has something to offer us. We too know these two tentpoles: our text is in the future, and our audience is in the present. Working in this way, we can concern ourselves with developing a thematic frame to help the audience *see* the play.

This development of thematic frame sounds attractively dramaturgical. It is not a poor summation of the way in which adapting the future will work best. We will develop a thematic frame to help the audience see the future. In this case, it's a heady knot, as the thematic frame is 'adapt the future', so it all becomes self-referential in a strange way. In order to make them see the future, they need to know that they are engaging with a project which wants to make them see the future. And a thematic frame seems like an efficacious way to connect present and future, without necessarily needing to know the exactitudes of the future text.

However! This is reductive for the reason we mentioned earlier. The idea, primarily, was to adapt a future play. That means the text *and* the performance. We've already noted that performance is a temporally destabilized entity with any play. This is even more true with a future play. Where in the world does the future performance exist? In the future, yes, and in the future beyond that potentially, also yes. But can't it also exist in the present? Even if the text is a future artifact, couldn't we perform it in the present? In many ways, isn't that the whole goal of this project? Could it be thought of as simply a lopping off of contemporary performance from a future play?

Yet, this too is reductive! For this holds an assumption that the future play will use *text*. That is putting the cart well before the horse. Hopefully, after the survey results, we'll have an idea of

our formal contours for this future piece we are to adapt. At that point, *if* it seems like text is a component, we can return to the Analog Reading.

Allegorical Reading.

The Allegorical reading asks, what is the secret story of the play? Often this ends up being political, theological, or psychological. In *Measure for Measure*, I posit that Shakespeare has unwittingly written his Plato's "Republic". Or at least created a story that is asking the same thesis questions: What leads to a virtuous society? How should we organize society? How ought rulers act? How can rhetoric aid or impede us in this task? At the beginning, the Duke is uncertain how best to rule. The Duke is Socrates. However, instead of remaining with his fellow citizens and engaging in Socratic dialogue transparently, he believes only through his absence will he see the *actions* of his compatriots. From this, he will derive rhetoric through action.

The Allegorical Reading is confounding, because it asks what the secret story of the play is, and at this point in the project, the secret story of the play is, what is this future play? It will be difficult to find the play's secrets without knowing what the play is. Although, this same difficulty may serve as a useful way to obfuscate my lack of precise knowledge on the future play. When the survey data is turned into the contours of the play, those very contours will be a superficial corpus, and my adaptation will anatomize that corpus to find the present. Perhaps the best way to legitimize the future play I'll be adapting is by preemptively claiming that it holds a secret, and that the secret of the future is what I'm bringing to the present. If something has a secret, it must be real. Everyone knows that. That's why we keep so many secrets.

It is an interesting projection that will perhaps be addressed by the survey, but do we expect the future play to implicitly hold secret stories of politics? Or psychology? Or theology? Which is more likely fifty years in the future?

If we're not claiming these secret stories are implicit, and I am to draw them out in adaptation by applying my political, psychological, or theological lens, then which should I use? Dealer's choice? Does it matter? How do we look into the future? Politically, psychologically or theologically? How will these fields all have changed in the time of the future play? Will there be secret stories embedded in the future play that I simply won't have access to because my political, psychological, and theological lens are not yet evolved enough?

Will trying to adapt the future leave me with a keen awareness of my political, psychological and theological impotence in the present?

Abstracted/Deconstructed Reading.

The Abstraction/Deconstruction reading is self-evident. To abstract something artistically is to take just one thing and look at it. To break it down to its essence. Whereas the deconstruction involves breaking it down into its conflicting parts to show the contradictions and problematics inherent in what might otherwise look like a stable text.

For *Measure for Measure*, the issue with a problem play is that everyone's going to want to create an abstraction or deconstruction in order to point at the problems. The low hanging fruit is taking Isabella's *silence* and making that the organizing principle of an entire production. For instance, maybe every other character in the production has a microphone except for Isabella.

The Abstraction/Deconstruction Reading seems alluring at first glance. Since we are dealing with an ambiguous future play, oughtn't we look to abstraction or deconstruction? The problem, however, is that it's difficult to melt water. If we are dealing with a future play in the abstract, then how does one abstract it? Do abstraction and deconstruction imply a fully constructed product by their very abstracting or deconstructing?

In abstraction, how might we break down the future play to its essence. Isn't the essence of this project the process of this project? Wouldn't you be scrutinizing the future play within the adaptation of the future play? I think this project is too insecure for self-scrutiny. Don't know that we'd survive it. An abstract reading of the future play could focus more on the essence of the future play being the answers to the survey questions. Perhaps an abstract adaptation of the future would be just showing the anonymous survey answers which ultimately manifested the future play.

Deconstruction of my adaptation of the future play might just look like this written thesis. This paper involves breaking it down into its conflicting parts to show the contradictions and problematics inherent in what might otherwise look like a stable text. Well, that's good enough. Moving forward, it is fair to think of this document as a deconstructed adaptation of the future.

Act I, Scene Four: Who?

Who is Gertrude Stein? Gertrude Stein is Gertrude Stein. Gertrude Stein is the primary artistic inspiration for adapting the future. Gertrude Stein is one of the pioneers of modernist literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Gertrude Stein radicalized words and how words are spoken and how words are written and how words socialize with other words. Gertrude Stein socialized with Picasso and Hemmingway and Matisse in Paris, France. Gertrude Stein's oeuvre consists of more tinkering with time than a Swiss clockmakers. Gertrude Stein wrote plays like this play called *Not Slightly: A Play*:

Instinct.

Instinct or reason.

Instinct or reason.

Instinct or reason.

Round and about.

Round.

About.

Pale.

Pale enough.

Not so in satisfaction, in real satisfaction.

Not so much.

I meant to go home.

I meant to go home.

I meant to go what do I mean by white. I meant to change in it. More methodically. Yes purling. I don't know instances.

Gertrude Stein wrote plays and also Gertrude Stein wrote two Seminole essays by Gertrude Stein-- *Plays* and *Composition as Explanation*—which we will examine below.

I.

Gertrude Stein wrote a 1934 lecture-turned-essay entitled *Plays*. In it, she discusses her journey from not liking plays to writing plays. She paints a portrait of great anxiety as an audience member. She feels as though the actors on stage are playing out an emotional fiction, but they've had such a head start on her, that she'll never catch up. She sees this as a problem of *syncopation*. She always feels as if she is lagging behind the performance and cannot catch up and this is an unsatisfying experience.

Stein then describes her revelation as an audience member, and the birth of her aesthetic as playwright. She was listening to someone read a play in French, and because she did not understand the language, suddenly she felt no obligation to keep up with the play, and thus no anxiety at falling out of time with the performance. She tried to replicate this relationship to time in her own writing, and named it as landscape theater.

I have an intense anxiety with my own existence within the timeline. I suspect this is not uncommon. It seems difficult to feel in sync with a world which did not start with my birth. And if I were to convince myself the world did start with my consciousness, I'd enter some sort of solipsistic paralysis (which, I mean, yes.). I've tried to assuage this anxiety by studying history, and getting on the same page with the world. But that only does so much. So I've thought that perhaps it is best to turn to the future as a place where the world and I might meet mutually. But if we try to meet in the future, it will be the present. So perhaps an adaptation of the future can serve as a meeting point in the future in the present. Maybe we can sign a treaty or something.

It was only when Stein heard something she didn't understand that she was able to develop a satisfying temporal relationship with theater. How will this apply to theater and its relationship to time when we speak of present and future? By adapting the future, can we address this issue of syncopation from another vector?

II.

***Composition as Explanation* is a lecture Stein gave at Universities** in an attempt to frame her own creative writing. The lecture was published in essay form in 1926. I've found it to be a sort of bedfellow with her *Plays* lecture, and was astounded in recently rereading it to find the nearest facsimile to *Adapting the Future* I've encountered.

I would describe these essays as the founding dramaturgical texts for this project. Below, I've lifted pertinent passages for our purposes, and annotated them with three pressing questions which will inform our adapting of the future.

“There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it”.

Is the only difference in time what people are looking at?

And does “composition” determine what people are looking at?

So is the only difference between time-- “beginning, middle, ending”, actually composition?

“To come back to the part that the only thing that is different is what is seen when it seems to be being seen, in other words composition and time-sense. No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept. And they refuse to accept if or a very simple reason and that is that they do not have to accept it for any reason.”

Is Stein saying each person has their own personal, subjective time-sense?

But then what does it mean to have contemporaries, the very basis of which is an objective timeline?

Is there a difference between timeline and time-sense?

“Beginning again and again and again explaining composition and time is a natural thing. It is understood by this time that everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition... Everything is not the same as the time when of the composition and the time in the composition is different... The time when and the time of and the time in that composition is the natural phenomena of that composition and of that perhaps everyone can be certain. No one thinks these things when they are making when they are creating what is the composition, naturally no one thinks, that is no one formulates until what is to be formulated has been made. Composition is not there, it is going to be there and we are here. This is sometime ago for us naturally.

What is important about beginning again?

What is the difference between the time “of the composition” and “the time in the composition”?

Is she saying the composition actually creates the “phenomena” of “time when and the time of and the time in?”

“Naturally I would then begin again. I would begin again I would naturally begin. I did naturally begin. This brings me to a great deal that has been begun. And after that what changes what changes after that, after that what changes and what changes after that and after that and what changes and after that and what changes after that”.

I ask again: what is the importance of beginning again in time-sense & composition?

How has a “great deal” begun if everything is beginning again?

What changes after that?

“The time of the composition is the time of the composition. It has been at times a present thing it has been at times a past thing it has been at times a future thing it has been at times an endeavor at parts or all of these things”.

Is Stein saying the time of the composition has at times been a future thing?

Is the composition a play?

Is Stein saying there is a future play?

“Now there is still something else the time-sense in the composition. This is what is always a fear a doubt and a judgement and a conviction. The quality in the creation of expression the quality in a composition that makes it go dead just after it has been made is very troublesome. The time in the composition is a thing that is very troublesome. If the time in the composition is very troublesome it is because there must even if there is no time at all in the composition there must be time in the composition which is in its quality of distribution and equilibration. In the beginning there was the time in the composition that naturally was in the composition but time in the composition comes now and this is what is now troubling everyone one the time in the composition is now a part of distribution and equilibration”.

Is “the time-sense in the composition” also what we might call “play-time?”

Or is it “clock-time?”

What is this “distribution and equilibration” that causes time to be in a composition “even if there is no time at all in the composition”?

This is the thing that is at present the most troubling and if there is time that is at present the most troublesome the time-sense that is at present the most troubling is the thing that makes the present the most troubling. There is at present there is distribution, by this I mean expression and time, and in this way at present composition is time that is the reason that at present the time-sense is troubling that is the reason why at present the time-sense in the composition is the composition that is making what there is in composition.

And afterwards.

Now that is all”.

End lecture.

How does expression and time equal distribution?

Do expression and time serve as the basis for time-sense?

Is time-sense a specifically artistic experience of time?

Act I, Scene Five: *The Raven*

I was using all the considerations above to inform my structuring of the survey. This was interrupted when Lance Weiler unexpectedly called me into a professional endeavor . Weiler is the Founding Member & Director of the Columbia University School of the Arts’ Digital Storytelling Lab (DSL). Over the last year, Weiler had been directing and co-producing *The Raven*, a large-scale immersive/interactive performance project opening in two months at the 57th New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center. Up until my inclusion, the concept had been outlined by Weiler in collaboration with an acting alum of PunchDrunk’s *Sleep No More*. I was brought in as a story editor/dramaturg to take this outlined concept and mold it into specific storytelling.

This was an incredibly ambitious project, in which we took over the Irish American Historical Society-- a gilded age mansion across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The conceit was that twenty-four guests would arrive each night to attend the wake of Edgar Allen Poe. The project was meant to innovate upon the highly popular immersive theater genre. It aimed to take a successful template—the large scale space, masked guests, and impressive soundscape of, say, PunchDrunk’s *Sleep No More*—and introduce two radicalizing elements: live text and emergent technology.

We hoped *The Raven* would map a new frontier for storytelling, in which an immersive experience would become more personalized, intimate, and interactive than previously possible. Our emergent technology included the incorporation of Bose Augmented Reality glasses and Internet-of-Things enabled lanterns.

The AR glasses allowed us to, sans headphones, bone induct sound directly through our guests’ temples, so as to put a narrative voice directly into their head. The IOT lanterns were in constant conversation with all other digital aspects of the space, allowing us to control each guests experience remotely. The most crucial technological endeavor saw us inventing, with Microsoft’s support, an entirely proprietary state machine.

This state machine could serve as an interactive stage manager and remove the need for the traditional docent in immersive performance. It had the ability to run our entire show based on if/then statements. For example, each guest was assigned, unbeknownst to them, an identity of

one of twenty-four persons from Poe's life-- either real or fictional. The state machine then could track each guest, and run a specific show for each "character". The state machine was linked via Bluetooth to beacons throughout the mansion which could sense proximity, and a system clock which managed the time elements.

It would look something like this:

<If **RODERICK USHER** walks within three feet of the **DILAPIDATED MODEL HOUSE** within **minute 45-50** of the performance, *then* a passage from **The Fall of the House of Usher** will play in his ear through the **BOSE AR GLASSES**. >

My task was labor intensive: to take Poe's entire cannon, and create one overarching story that could encompass each of the twenty-four characters. Then, to create a completely separate interactive story for each of the twenty-four characters, an amnesia narrative in which they individually come to realize that they are characters within Poe's life or fiction.

This was an entirely new form of adaptation for me. I was taking Poe's fictional cannon as well as all the historical letters written to or from Poe and adapting it all into an interactive collage of space and time. I was adapting something from the past- from known sources- yet the conversion was different, as I was reincarnating the spirit into a completely new form. And this form really didn't even exist if not carried out by the inquisitive spirit of a guest and the technical efficacy of a state machine.

I was taking a 19th century story, written in a 19th century form, and adapting it into if/then statements for the sake of the state machine. It would be up to the state machine to adapt these statements into an actualized, 21st century form of storytelling for our audience.

The spirit of the project had the iterative quality I associate with a start-up. I became acutely aware that *The Raven* would completely change how I was approaching my thesis. Here we were in almost the tangible manifestation of adapting the future, as each day we attempted to build technology that didn't yet exist in order to tell stories in a form that wasn't yet technically possible. Meanwhile, on the creative side, I'm trying to apply a traditional methodology of adaptation to contemporize a story, while in the next room, the very formal building blocks I was working within were being haggled over with Microsoft.

The ideological future and material future were doing the splits, with one foot in the present and one in the future. As the performance date approached for the New York Film Festival, we found ourselves with a Schrodinger's Cat—*The Raven* simultaneously existed and did not exist, as we were unable to fully actualize our speculative vision.

When the month-long run of *The Raven* was through, we all agreed that the Platonic Ideal of the show still remained in the future (*material future*), just beyond our technical grasp. Our ambition to create a more personalized, intimate, and interactive performance than previously possible remained abstractly that--an ambition. The failure of the technology to function as we imagined meant our imagined storytelling form likewise failed to function successfully. It was a strange feeling moving on from the project as though it had completed its run, all the while feeling that

our *actual* project--in all its personalization, intimacy, and interactivity—remained on a shelf too high for our reach. We still felt a conviction that *if only we could build a stool...The Raven* could be something special.

I returned to my thesis with an entirely new understanding of the complicated relationship between the present and the future, and the material and the ideological.

Still processing this influx of new information, I set out to solidify and distribute my survey.

Act I, Scene Six: The Survey

Part I of the Adapt the Future project was altered almost immediately after the initial proposal. It was my initial intention to do a sort of personal research paper regarding a deep dive into the last fifty years of downtown theater and then from trends and patterns to make extrapolations about the next fifty years from my subjective lens. I came to the decision that a study of the last fifty years would prove a red herring of sorts.

The world progresses exponentially. The data of fifty years of change between 1970-2020 holds almost no relevance to 2020-2070. The advancement of technology and our societal and cultural contexts, aided by social media and new forms of information and connection, mean that we are changing at a speed that simply cannot be compared to any previous fifty year period of time.

Another reason to reconsider: artists needn't pay any attention to how something evolved over fifty years and project it forward. That's deadly common sense. When, in any field of life, is that good enough?

The new sensical form of surveying involved polling the people who would actually match up with the timeline of making art.

So a consideration became: will they be alive in 2070? Or, will they be continuing to make theater moving forward that will closely influence the downtown landscape in 2070? This wouldn't be lay-person extrapolation based on hypothetical past trends, this would be, straight from the artists' mouths, an expression of what they imagine *they themselves* will be making and feeling about the future downtown theater landscape.

The survey is below:

Adapt the Future Survey

Hello there,

If you are reading this, you are a person in the theater world whom I value and respect. I'm trying to complete my Dramaturgy Thesis, and if you'd anonymously fill out the following survey, it would help me immensely! The collective answers to this survey will go through a predictive mechanism which will spit out the vague form of a downtown theater piece in 2070. Then I will work with collaborators to try and generate a contemporary adaptation of the future play. Again, this is all anonymous! Thank you fondly.

1. List three adjectives to describe the artist making downtown theater in 2020.
2. List three adjectives to describe the artist making downtown theater in 2070.
3. List three adjectives to describe the audience of downtown theater in 2020.
4. List three adjectives to describe the audience of downtown theater in 2070.
5. List the single most pressing societal issue being reckoned with by downtown theater in 2020.
6. List the single most pressing societal issue being reckoned with by downtown theater in 2070.
7. List three adjectives that make a performance “experimental/radical/innovative” in 2020.
8. List three adjectives that make a performance “experimental/radical/innovative” in 2070.
9. List three adjectives to describe your feelings towards downtown theater in 2020.
10. List three adjectives to describe your feelings towards downtown theater in 2070.

I went through many different iterations of this survey. I didn't want answers that were overly qualitative, because then people wouldn't take the time to answer, and there also becomes more noise. And quantitative questions seemed like a poor way to describe art. So I compromised by just asking for a list of qualitative adjectives.

The way the questions are arranged is meant to rev up the imagination of the survey takers. By direct and simple couplets, hopefully we'll see a strong contrast between present and future in their answers. I tried to give them a chance to “describe”, because this feels like the imaginatively generative way to consider the future. Rather than speculate or guess, I wanted to give permission to the survey takers to describe the future with the same articulation they describe the present.

The contents of the questions are drawn from what I suspect provides the descriptive contours of a play in the present. Basically, who wrote it, who is it for, what is its urgent issue, and what makes it formally unique. The idea is that these will be the same basic descriptors used for a play in the future, as well.

I also thought this format would allow for effective projection of the future play. The answers are essentially creating word clouds that will coalesce into the descriptive contours of a future play.

I will distribute the thesis to a diverse group of downtown theater artists within the millennial generation. I've chosen to focus on this group because they theoretically are one of the actual groups who will have a heavy hand in shaping art over the next fifty years. It also corresponds to my suspicion that projection amongst the creative arts can be radically imaginative. That is, if we all get together and collaborate in imagining the future, we might be able to manifest the future in the present.

While the survey was circulating online and garnering answers, I lost my laptop. In travelling from Los Angeles to New York on Christmas Day, I left my laptop on the security belt at LAX. The laptop had three years' worth of creative writing and academic notes, as well as three months of thesis work. I had never backed any of this up.

This was devastating to my psyche. I tried to think about why, specifically, beyond the obvious lost labor. I decided the root of the devastation was a timeline issue. The thoughts I was able to have as a twenty-six through twenty-eight year old are completely dependent on temporal contexts-- where my mind, society, my relationships were *in time*. The loss of these three years was a hole-in-time that could never be filled because I could never re-enter that prism of contexts.

Of the thousands of pages, I did recall vague shadows of my writing. Certain short story premises. Project ideas. Devious notes.

After the initial hopelessness and nihilism, it struck me the relevance of these feelings towards adapting the future. The more I pieced together the context of my life—the physical places I'd been writing, which classes I'd been taking—the more I was able to write in the shape of the lost work. I knew I wasn't writing the same thing verbatim. I am fixed in my current temporal context. So what was I doing?

Adapting.

Something from the past, yes, that's normative, but also something largely abstract. The original material, at this point, was an amalgam of my imagination and circumstantial renderings. The adaptation was the original material altered by the inability of my mind to fluently travel between past and present. This seems to share a great deal with adapting the future!

What if I thought of losing my future laptop and trying this same recovery tactic? Memory is mostly imagination, anyhow. So why can't imagination also be a kind of future

memory? Future archeology is more interesting than archeology of the past. Go ahead, find tomorrow's artifacts. They're probably here among us.

A month later, after being stonewalled in my digital inquiries, a family member flew thru LAX, went to the lost & found, and they handed over my laptop, which they'd been in possession of for more than a month. When I compared my original documents to the documents I'd been recreating from memory, the relationship of one to the other basically represented an original to an adaptation.

If the future is the unknown, what is the vaguely recalled past? In the case of the past, the process is clear of how we get from known to unknown-- we forget. If we've defined the ideological future as the unknown or ambiguous, then what is the forgotten past?

This relationship between future and forgotten past might be a big clue as to how the future can be adapted.

Act I, Scene Seven: Insecurities and Perversities

With my laptop back in tow, and the survey still collecting responses, I met with good friend Blair Simmons, a Program Administrator at the NYU Interactive Media Arts department in Tisch. She specializes in creative technology, and had previously developed a playwriting computer program, *Print(Dialogue)*, as an artist-in-residence at La Mama's CultureHub.

The objective was to hash out some of these ideas regarding Step II, in which the survey answers are fed through some predictive mechanism in order to generate the contours of a play in the future.

What followed was useful carnage.

She took a look at my survey questions, and explained to me that my objective (the future play) wasn't specific enough to inform any predictive modeling. When she asked me what I wanted it to be, I said the vague contours of a future play. She said that didn't mean anything. I said it intentionally sort of didn't mean anything, because it's trying to hold that ambiguity of the future. The paradox is the moment we know something in the arts, it becomes the present. She then rightfully chastised me for thinking that I could offload agency so flippantly to 'a predictive mechanism' without making a vast multitude of decisions.

I'd reached an impasse.

Some sort of predictive mechanism can only predict a future play only if I first answer a whole bunch of questions about what I want the future play to be. But that means I'm destroying the

ambiguity and making the unknown known. And the ambiguous and unknown are how we're defining the future. So, again, it's a paradox.

As we discussed further, she said that based on my survey questions, the actual math I was tallying were artist's *opinions* of downtown theater in 2020 and 2070. So what I would actually be trying to chart is the *opinion* of artists on downtown theater in the future. I wasn't asking the questions that could formulate the future play, and to do that, she reiterated I would need to know exactly what I wanted.

My take away was that in using something like A.I., in many ways, a human has to know *more* about what they want as an end result, because you have to do complex engineering in the present to achieve that future result. She talked about making her own playwriting computer program, *Print(Dialogue)*, and how it took her a year of answering innumerable micro-specific questions to form her A.I..

This made great sense, but I also wanted no part of knowing *more* about what I wanted-- it's antithetical to this whole project. Then it's truly just me making up a future play. Which is not a future play. It's just a more elastic arrogance.

The meeting revealed that four other options existed based on my data set that would remove the need for an A.I or any predictive software.

Option #1:

I could still work under the notion that in the arts, a collective imagination is a time machine, and take all the downtown artists I had sent surveys, gather them in a room, and talk about what a future play might look like. This would essentially be the living version of the survey. The thought here is that this collaborative conversation *about* the future play *is* in fact a future play. The act of collective intentionality is the key. I could record the live conversations, type up transcripts, and then work on adapting the resulting future play into a contemporary play. This is an enticing option.

Yet I am resistant. There is still something telling me that, although I might be able to justify it as a future play, artists in a room discussing the future play is still *a contemporary play*. I do believe that collective imagination and intentionality can function as a time machine in the arts, but if we are defining the temporal present as the known, and the future as the unknown, then what exactly is the unknown aspect in this version?

Ideological Future

Thoughts about Future ---> Actualize in Present

The artists would technically be speculating about a future play, and there might be some unknown latency in speculation...but what does it even mean to speculate about a future play? If we are not considering technological advancements, a la *The Raven*, then what can artists in the

present speculate will exist but are unable to make until the future? Everything I think about is semantical, and I am unconvinced.

Option #2:

The second apparent option is to give the survey results to another artist, have them create a future play based on the results, and then I will adapt that play they constructed as future play. The hole in this option is obvious. Even though the play is based on opinions on the future play, it is actively being generated in the present. This would be a contemporary play. Thus, I could not adapt it, and could not satisfy the stated goal of this thesis.

Option #3:

We could bypass the A.I. predictive element by creating a word cloud. Since the survey questions are gathering adjectives, I could have another human build a word cloud in which we observe which adjectives overlap from the data and which are most prevalent, and then build a description based on the most common descriptions of who wrote it, who is it for, what is its urgent issue, and what makes it formally unique.

This is basically mad libs and makes me a little sick. It is not art. It is a kind of kitsch joke. And although this form would mean that the future play technically is not yet written, knowing who wrote it, who is it for, what is its urgent issue, and what makes it formally unique means that there is no real ambiguity or unknown.

Option #4:

We could also bypass the A.I. by doing a less nauseating variant on the mad libs. As Simmons said, I haven't given an A.I. a specific enough answer for which to solve. Based on my survey data, which uses adjective descriptors, what I want is a description of the future play. If we think of a description of a future play as, say, the loglines or marketing slogans used, then we could establish four quadrants in which we compare the survey data, artists feelings about downtown theater in 2020 and 2070, with two other quadrants, the loglines of popular plays in 2020 & 2070. This would leave us with only a quadrant to solve, and the necessary information to solve for X.

Survey Data about 2020 plays	Actual loglines of 2020 plays
Survey Data about 2070 plays	X

X= Actual Loglines of 2070 plays

This method makes sense to me. It is research I could do. I hate the buzzwords in theater, and I find they repeat so often that it wouldn't be hard to build another word cloud that embodies the language around successful downtown theater. And it would be interesting research to see the correlations between the descriptive impressions of downtown artists about downtown theater and the actual descriptors productions use to define and market themselves.

And in a sense, I believe this method actually *could* work, and maybe someone *should* do it. But the motive behind doing it would be to show how terribly formulaic the whole theater system has become, and how the tether between marketing and art inherently creates a uniform, copycat aesthetic. Downtown often differentiates itself from naturalist theater, but if the art is beholdng to what is marketable (urgent! relevant!) then what is the downtown scene except a different strain of boredom in which a mirror is held up to society?

Though my curiosity is piqued, this still does not actually satisfy the interest of this project. That would be a project that was primarily concerned with the present, in a sense. And it would be a project that is primarily concerned with a process for predicting or knowing what the correlation is in perception between artists and the art. I don't want to pursue the realities of downtown theater that bore me. I want the ambiguous and the unknown! I want the future.

After meeting with Simmons, and considering these additional tactics, I had to admit that I wasn't interested in artificial intelligence, or building predictive mechanisms, or statistics. Our talk made it glaringly obvious that I wanted nothing to do with the reduction that would need to happen to create a product.

It reminds me of how the gods probably ended up with the very dull *Homo sapiens* when their creation could have taken any form. The gods chose and chose and chose, they picked out the concept of hair and the concept of features or whatever, it doesn't matter, the point is, *especially* starting from ex nihilo, the great mass of unknown and ambiguous, it was only by making infinite choices that a future sprang out. And the gods start with this great exciting void of chaos and end up with, oh, there's a human sitting in the artisanal woods I crafted.

I don't want to make so many choices about how to project the future that I end up stripping away all the unknown and ambiguity. I don't want to make a human when I could have something far more interesting.

It gives me the same sort of dead inside feeling as holding a mirror up to reality in naturalism.

I was interested in using a rigorous methodology to adapt the future. And everything that strips the unknown or the ambiguous from the future made the future more present. It lost its *futurity*.

I wanted to preserve the ambiguity and unknown of the future and adapt from that hidden material. *I want to adapt the future, not predict the future.* This is a clear distinction.

It became obvious to me at this point that I'd been going about things all wrong.

I thought I could predict a future play objectively, and then subjectively answer the millions of implied questions when I reached the adaptation section.

But I found out here at Step Two that the act of *choosing* would make this impossible.

An objective predictive mechanism, and the input needed to create one, are inherently incongruous with the art I find worthwhile because it strips away the ambiguity and complication.

I need to no longer rely upon something like a predictive model—I need to develop and generate the *artistic mechanism of futurity*.

Or I need to realize the potential superfluousness of the predictive steps.

Maybe the future play is already here.

It's already here.

What if I've started with a flawed assumption about *ideological future*? What if there is a way to hold an idea in the present while somehow simultaneously allowing it to remain ambiguous and unknown?

I need to build methodology to recognize future material and adapt it, not ask some robot to spit out definable numbers.

I have a sneaking suspicion that *if I recognize the ideological future around me*, I will have found my *methodology for adapting the future*.

Act I, Scene Eight: An Interview with Lance Weiler

Fresh off the destabilizing impact of my chat with Simmons, I was wrestling with this frightening reductive quality of technology when navigating present and future.

My experience with the immersive technology of *The Raven* came to mind. Lance Weiler, the aforementioned Director of the Columbia University School of the Arts' Digital Storytelling Lab (DSL), was gracious enough to sit for an interview so that I could further probe this connection

between digital storytelling and my project of adapting the future. Pertinent exchanges from the interview are included verbatim below:

Wait.

Actually.

In the spirit of interacting with, yet retaining the ambiguity of the future, I've inserted verbatim below the result of a Recording Application on my iPhone which promised to transcribe the recording of our interview. Only the first few minutes were a free trial so that's what we have.

[Transcription for Lance_Thesis 2.5.m4a:

I was recording him OK you're recording now I know now on the record his hands here look at it so yeah it's probably the background was going to hear me OK I've had to do some coordinated voice but I think that's that's all all right let's go nice with Jones taking a day reading this paper where in Leominster Just reviewed digital storyteller OK thinking that in the most basic since it's kind of it's I guess it's like what I talked about in class and I like stories the same and telling us changing and so it make a based culture just for Tori interactions what is it to challenge the ownership awesome and someways when I'm experimenting with experimenting with worry when it's not just confined to a running time or a platform Or for me what is it mean now to have a world is it what is it mean if you can actually interact with these he's works in unexpected ways not just in the living room or in a theater no changes in someway based upon who you was there they are whatever it is right like all the sudden stories becomes a living I think I've always been very final and they're done maybe some Jane Austen pride prejudice and zombies are citing you know what I mean with you settle shift to you know mashing up with some other form I think it's hard to classify but then it's not it's just kind of it's funny because often things like in short order these conversations matter because everything will be so ubiquitous if I make a difference if you will be like we said around talking about my grandparents she sounds like him and worrying about how are you is it supposed to did you find it or help people understand I've really been into tonight trying to do this it is capable of now All of now compared to what an audience is ready for meg is that a consideration I think in some regards yes, I think you're always trying to think because it is interesting is you have to kind of do that not even just for the offer here's right because a lot of times a lot of times people come through and establish this marching to the future mirror you know that we always and we can put it into a box yeah that's right now what is wrong some respects like having us But I think you know because a lot of people are like OK what what is this object how do I

Sent from my iPhone.]

As is evident, this transcribing technology exists in the liminal space between present and future. It theoretically has the capability of performing a task in the present, but its errors indicate that its actualization exists somewhere in the future, like this:

Ideological Future

Thoughts about Future ---> Actualize in Present

{*Transcription App?*}

Material Future

Thoughts about Future ---> Remain actualized in Future

This brings into focus an interesting possibility.

Can a process that is seemingly destabilized-in-time create products that are destabilized-in-time? Might this be the future play?

Let's examine the above transcript.

The inherent error—*perceived error* at any rate—does seem to interrupt authorial intent, and thus allow for an ambiguity open to reader interpretation. However, we must also think of the implications of *error* in this context—the reader is free to interpret an ambiguous product, but the vast majority will see this as an error, and thus as a corruption of a definite authorial intent. There seems a thin line between interruption—a favorite term of Richard Foreman—and corruption of audience rational comprehension.

I argue that an interruption, like a bridge collapsed into a river, often leaves an audience no way to reach the other side (to rationally comprehend).

A corruption, like a bridge in disrepair, may be reconstructed, and thus the other side reached.

In this case, it is my hunch that most readers will attempt to reconstruct from this corrupted text the verbatim language used in the interview. What mind does this put the reader in? In fact, it actually engages their rational mind *even more intensely* than if the language had not been corrupted. They have entered a sort of 'game mind', in which they are trying to solve the ambiguity by reconstructing the verbatim language. Thus, we find this to not be particularly interesting to our artistic ethos.

How can we apply this to Adapting the Future? It seems that one course of methodology has been disqualified. We are intrigued by these emergent technologies that have the unique ability to split themselves into present and future by theoretical versus practical efficacy. We are also intrigued by their creation of a product with a destabilized ambiguity in the form of malfunction or error.

However, upon artistic application, we find that not *all* ambiguity is created equal. That is, based on the test case above, it seems some ambiguity, sourced from error or malfunction, inherently signals to a reader/audience that it wants to be solved using reason. This is not an audience-mind which excites us. Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that we cannot represent ambiguous futurity by exploiting technologies which themselves exist within an ambiguous futurity. The methodology to explore ambiguous futurity in the present is not one of technological error and malfunction.

Below is an Anthro-Transcription of an interview with Lance Weiler.

Baseline for people reading this paper who don't have any idea what it is you do, in lay-person's terms, what does it mean to be a digital storyteller?

I think in the most basic sense...story is the same, the telling is changing-- and so at this point in time, as we shift to what used to be a *one-to-many* to a *many-to-many* paradigm and a whole new generation is coming up infused with maker-based culture, I've become very interested in this idea of participatory interaction. What is it to challenge the ownership and authorship of stories? What I'm experimenting with is this idea of shifts in agency. The notion of how to tell a story when it's not just confined to a running time or a platform or a format. What does it mean now to have a world? What does it mean if you can actually interact with these works in unexpected ways, through a mobile device or in an immersive space that changes based on who's there or what you've done prior to getting there? All of a sudden stories become these living, breathing things.

It's funny because I'll often think in short order these conversations won't even matter because everything will be so ubiquitous that it won't make a difference and people will be like, wait, you sat around talking about *that*? And worrying about how you defined it? And now it's just **IT**. It's just interesting to think that it becomes the natural course, the evolution of what it is, as opposed to trying to define it or help people understand a transitional time.

I've run into that question while trying to adapt the future-- is there a tension between what we might be capable of now and what an audience might be ready for at this moment?

I think in some regards, yes. It's interesting because you have to do that not only for the audience but for your fellow makers or peers because a lot of times people come through an established system and they look at what it is, it's kind of like that Marshal McLuhan thing, "we march into the future, shaping our business models through the rear view mirror." We always have to have some container for it that's familiar, that's comfortable, so we can put it in a box-- that's film production, that's theater, that's journalism. Now what's really interesting is all those lines are really blurring. I think in some respects there is a digital literacy part to it. People are like, what is this object? How do I interact with this? What does it mean? There's an element where you're almost borrowing from game design, you're kind of creating a golden

path--you're going to go in that door that's three to the right and I designed it so you'd go through that but you feel like you had agency doing it.

The 'golden path' is a strange collapsing of the future and present. You're designing something in your present to be their present in your future...but the golden-pathing of it means their future is already determined in a way, so how can it be their present?

I should say that's the current modality for it. In the future, when you look at the ability to generate worlds in real time, and machine learning, and artificial intelligence, and game engines, and processing speeds that are faster, better network connectivity, and what that promises with augmented reality which hasn't been available previously, it points to the fact that yes, right now, in the confines of the golden path, it's the past because it already exists but in the future I can determine that there's twenty-six different doors but that's based upon how you interacted previously or who you interacted with. That's stuff we were playing with in *The Raven*, right? Where it's like, oh, you're Virginia Poe and you came across Elizabeth Ellet? Something changed. It's like a butterfly effect.

We don't often frame the discussion around interactive performance as a temporal shift. But what you're describing to me is the ability to erase the past/present/future hierarchy--to situate a performance perpetually in the present. To create a *presentness* to the performance in which the creatives and the audience are both going through the experience in the simultaneous present, because neither knows what's going to happen.

If you think about that, what is the performer always striving to do? They're striving to be in the present. So that's interesting because maybe some of the future of this sits right in the present. The ability to make work so it's personalized and relevant to you so it is present, not a random choice that fakes you into thinking that it was actually the present. It's *actually* the present because it has these reflective moments where you think this happened a few moments ago and now I see a trace of it and now I feel like I'm right there in the moment.

The future as making the present more present. That's not something I've been imagining when I've been thinking about a project in 2070. You work with a group called Future of Storytelling. If the future of performance is trying to situate the performance more totally in the present, what the heck is the Future of Storytelling?

At this point in time, it's very simple. Me being able to interact with a story in unexpected ways that I haven't previously. When I sit down and read a novel, there's a relationship that I already know. I'm looking and saying not only are we challenging the notion of who a creator is in this world, we're challenging a notion of how the stories are constructed, how they have more value to the participants, and the way in which they're delivered. So it's all happening at the same time.

This is sort of what I've run into, which mirrors our experience with *The Raven*, which is when you try to do these innovation-based projects, you find yourself in this liminal space

between present and future. What I've come to think is that the valuable thing—[my phone rings. A strand of unintelligible numerals flash on Caller ID.] is it still recording?

Yeah, you're just getting spam bots from the future.

How appropriate! I'm going to leave this interruption in the transcript. This conversation has me thinking about this project as being less about trying to generate an objective product, and more trying to create a methodology for generating work within that liminality.

That liminal space that you're talking about is fascinating because yesterday, Microsoft released all these resources around *The Raven*. A How-To. The Code. And folks are kind of digging into it and some of the people who came to it were like, oh, wow, I didn't even realize—now I realize that the tech didn't even exist anywhere close to what it was supposed to do. And the aspirations of what something can do and the reality of both what the marketplace is and what the expectations and understanding of the audience is-- you're trying to do something that hasn't existed previously, so you're up against all these things, you're fighting with it to try to make it work, and you have a vision for what the thing could be.

I still feel about *The Raven*-- like when we scratched the surface on it and you could see those moments come through-- it was like, Wow! It was crazy. I've never seen anything like it before. And to be in those moments where you're right on the precipice of something but in order to thread that needle you have to thread it so many different ways... You get into this infinite craziness of the generative possibilities but I think that liminal space is really hard because it's like you're wrestling the confines of expectation, wrestling with the confines of the technical limitations, and you're wrestling the limitations of the original source material and its ability to be adapted. This idea of adaptation set into the future is really interesting because it's even challenging those who create the work to challenge themselves and their expectations of what they even think their own practice *is*.

Are you consciously aware in your practice of what the world will be like five, ten, twenty years from now while you're making the present project? Are those two timelines in conversation for you?

I just naturally gravitate towards speculative things. It's the ambiguity of what those things are that is really fascinating. Because it hasn't been defined. But for a lot of people that's really challenging. Often when I engage in a project, and you're figuring out how to collaborate with everyone on it, you're trying to go to a place that people aren't used to, a lot of it is ambiguity and ambiguity can be really strong because I found when you do speculative things-- you paint just enough of a picture that you allow someone to envision what *they* think the future of it can be. Because if you try to overcontrol the future of what it is, it's going to potentially make somebody feel uninvested. That shared vision comes from an ambiguity where it's not so defined. Because you know there's a certain destination in the distance but you're not sure exactly how to get there, and there's only so many times you're able to go and do something where you're actually first.

Are you *creating* those firsts or *discovering* those firsts?

It's a combination. Sometimes you think you know where you're headed and you're totally wrong and it takes you somewhere else. When I look back at *The Raven*, it could have been an incredibly powerful piece if you just went in and figured it out with those twenty four people that were there. Borrowed a little bit from the "escape the room" mechanic, borrowed from the participatory nature of, we're together in something but we're not sure why, and then it kind of unfolded over time. I loved that idea that everyone became part of this yarn, and that presents a lot of narrative challenges, infinitely challenging, but I haven't given up on those desires because there's something really cool there.

There's so much more unknown in what you're making than a traditionally scripted project.

Totally.

You put it on, they go in, you know the product you're putting on, you might not know exactly the audience reaction, but you gauge it, then tweak it—it's a pretty tight container of known quantities. Whereas you're in the wilderness with what you're doing.

Totally. Because I think even with a screenplay the part that's not known is the reception to what it is. If you'll be able to execute on that vision. But the container of it is known. Like I know one page of a screenplay is approximately one minute screen time. That's a given. So at least I know when I finish that thing, I have an idea of what the running time is. When we got through to tech on *The Raven* we had no clue how long it was going to last...is it an hour or is it an opus in ten days?

I was really struck by the amount of timelines that were running concurrently throughout *The Raven*.

I became obsessed with this idea of mapping stories. What does it mean to map a story? When Mike Figgis did *Timecode* and this goes back to the early 2000's, it was a novel project because digital technology was available at that time and early digital technology meant that he could create four simultaneous storylines and he built a four quadrant screens and you watch the story unfold as everybody was making their way to something. He scripted it using music composition. With *The Raven*, we struggled all the way through with, how do I give this to somebody to let them read it? To let them understand what it is?

I've seen a lot of people use metaphors when cross-platform or cross-media or transmedia work first started gaining foothold, there would be people that would be like, here's a method and this is what you can use. Imagine you have a dinner plate, the dinner plate is your main property, and you have various food that's on the plate and then you have like the silverware that you use..." Just trying to find all these ways to create and I always found myself pushing against that stuff, it drove me nuts, because I can't work like that. You're trying to say that there's one way that fits all and that's why a lot of the work I've done is so bespoke, and the way that I'm actually leaning into it is more of a design practice which is like, let's figure out what the guiding

principles of this are, let's try to figure out that design question, or that hypothesis, and then let's just let it happen through rapid ideation and rehearsal, and it will emerge as we workshop it, and then we'll find it. Because I can't just say oh this is the method for it, apply it, here's the dinner plate, put the main property down, there's that, okay, what's the utensil, what's the desert--- it's like 'I don't know! It's so prescriptive. What if it's only a fork? And there's nothing on the fork—

Demanding definitions..

-Yeah and what's on the plate is now dictated by what they scavenged in the space and they find the food and maybe they're not hungry.

Maybe they're not hungry.

Maybe they are hungry in a different way.

Almost done by the way.

Is this hitting on what you want?

Yeah, this is perfect because it's the practical problem of having a foot in the future and present while trying to make something....

That NASA story where Kennedy says by the end of the decade, I want you to put the first man on the moon and they end up reverse engineering it. So there's a power in not knowing and living in that liminal space because there aren't rules yet. Because the moment that you get into the, no but, tried that didn't work, bah bah, you dismiss so much because you're trying to wrestle something that *doesn't exist* by putting it into this framework of what *does exist* and using that as a way to measure the productivity of what you're doing. Which is all a byproduct of Silicon Valley narratives, especially when you look at design thinking or product design or any of these things, it's like, what is your minimum viable product, no matter what, what are you going to have, how are you efficiently using your time? But when you bring the creative arts into that, you can't operate the same way, because you have to have the time for the reflection.

One of the big things about the monthly meetups [*Digital Storytelling Lab @ Lincoln Center*] I think is really important, when things are accelerating in terms of the time frame--what makes it possible is collaborating with a group of people from diverse backgrounds and doing that in a managed way so it's efficient, and finding mutual value, but I've found that the meetups greatly accelerate and allow for reflection in a process that's totally ambiguous. All of a sudden there are so many different minds there and you're seeing it and you're accelerating the thing and you don't have time to make it precious, you have to put it out there and you watch how people stumble across it, or you watch how something grows up where you're like, wow I would have never thought of that. So that meet-up group is really for me a reflection point in the process—you test something but then you're getting all of a sudden fifty people constantly iterating on it and it's giving me and those who work on the project an opportunity for reflection in a highly concentrated development cycle.

Finding room for reflection in an ambiguous process. There's something about ambiguity, where we want to get out of it—

You want to figure it out and move on.

So there's something about pausing in the ambiguity and reflecting where we are, it's so counterintuitive in a way, but in an artistic process, it's necessary.

It also creates a modeling of uncertainty and future has uncertainty, right? So it's a little microcosm of a future. Or multiple futures. We're saying here, we don't know what the form is going to be, but let's bring the people together and use some of the methodologies that have been used within product development or game development and mash them up with an artistic process and realize we can't get there ourselves so the value proposition is if this work is going to be participatory, that participation should be there all the steps of the design: the ideation, the testing, the prototyping. So naturally, across all that you'll have one of the most important ingredients of design, which is the empathy phase. And you'll be building stronger and better relationships with people who are there.

So then the stakeholders navigate and are willing to embrace ambiguity because they're not alone in what it is. They're together with other people who are trying to figure it out. There's something powerful about being in a space where it's creative, and there are so many potential possibilities. Then what you end up being are these weird Sherpas or something. We look at it and think it's interesting and we say, let's try this way so it's not total chaos. There's a curatorial thing that's happening that's important to help move that living breathing organism.

The natural consequence of what you just said is this paradox that you're *reflecting on the future*. How can one reflect on the future? Actually, I may be misrepresenting the precise definition of reflection. I'll have to check on it. But it seems like a paradox. Whatever the case, the creative process is different from other processes, because if you get a group of diverse people in the same room, and let them reflect on the ambiguity of the future, and they all engage a collective imagination, that is a form of time travel.

Totally.

We don't have to wait for certain things to happen, because if we can get there collectively in our imagination, and reflect on that, we're already moving towards that. Or bringing it towards us. Let's get in a room, reflect on this ambiguity and see where we're going to imagine ourselves next, and then start making it by curating it a bit and using our interdisciplinary methodologies. A development process that is radically different.

So radically different. The other part of it that is really exciting, and this is why we say new forms and functions in the lab [Columbia Digital Storytelling Lab], because what if you take this method and insert and apply it to a piece that is about public housing? What does that mean in terms of civic imagination? What does it mean that art has become an innovation driver in ways it never has been before, where it's been almost siloed away or devalued because most people

don't see it having value, but now I really believe the arts are going to become so much more important in terms of helping people not only connect but co-design those potential futures. So what we're talking about here and how we've been trying to build the program over the decade is this essential question. How do I bring that development process into a classroom? And you hope everyone rises to the occasion. But you can only try to hold the imagined space. Establish it and hold it.

Okay last question, how about one thing that you're excited for in the future. What do you see coming, what's on the horizon...

This idea of granting agency. A moment for myself to reflect and then me being challenged by a group of people and going back and forth and having the agency to step away and then return. That's incredibly valuable.

I'm a big fan of what you're doing because in some ways you kind of put this stuff out into the ether and you're not sure and you're always trying to figure out like, okay, how do you actually codify it? What does it look like? How does it become applicable to someone who is studying within it? And how can that be valuable for others later? Because then if you do that, you create a shared narrative that people are a part of. So I would encourage you to create these workshops, think about the container, how do you express the ideas so it can move beyond, so that it can challenge them on what an actual thesis is.

End Interview.

Iteration seems to be the methodology that Weiler is using to navigate the present and future of digital storytelling.

This repetitive inquiry allows the digital storytelling field the space to reflect on the ambiguous enmeshing of present and future. They are navigating a landscape where the present means not only what they might *choose* to do (ideological future) but what they are *capable* of (material future) as well. This stretch between the two keeps ambiguity from resolving into something definite. This iterative process *can't* resolve or else their project will be outdated and thus obsolete in a field in which the very idea is to be playing in the liminal space of emerging technology.

This term- *emerging*- brings to mind a fertile temporal pocket between present and future. *Emerging* applies not only to the technology, but also the art form of digital storytelling. The common trap-- or perhaps temptation-- with nomenclature such as emergent is that it signals to artists a mandate to eventually make a product *emerge*. Weiler is asserting that emerging doesn't imply an emergence. Rather, the value is in *remaining in that unknown liminality of emerging*.

Ann Bogart tells an acting anecdote about actors who, when sitting in a chair on stage, position themselves uncomfortably on one buttock to provide the necessary tension to speak or act at any moment. That seems like the sweet spot for digital storytelling as well. The one buttock upon which digital storytelling uncomfortably sits is iteration. And this keeps it in the perpetually emergent state. Logistically, this is achieved through a rigorous methodology of meeting up at Lincoln Center and holding an imagined space in which the present and future are in perpetual collision.

The talk with Blair Simmons had begun these notions that *I want to adapt the future, not predict the future* and that *if I recognize the ideological future around me, I will have found my methodology for adapting the future.*

It was abundantly clear to me after this interview that I have no interest in the predictive nature of this project. That is, I have no interest in the *emerged product*. I really only have interest in this method of adaptation and its ability to create imagined spaces where the future can perpetually be *emerging*. And ambiguous. And unknown. All at the same time.

If I followed my original blueprint for this thesis, I would inevitably be putting my efforts towards the winnowing away of futurity (ambiguity, unknown) rather than the thickening of it.

This is not why I make art.

This thesis needs a new *raison d'être*.

Intermission

It must be intermission.

We see those subway video monitors. Just showing grainy video of people standing on the subway platform.

FAMILIAR HOST is someone with a microphone who is sort of narrating what is happening.

FAMILIAR HOST

This is security cam footage it shows something awful coming up coming out I must have I must've marked the wrong point in the video. Where is it shows a video of the person who is in the microphone and now they're starting their reading their own thoughts and then I said something horrible is coming up but I can't remember if it happens on the monitor or in the real life and they can't remember if it happens to them or if they do it to someone else.

An interruption by UNFAMILIAR HOST.

UNFAMILIAR HOST

I don't need this.

I'm a hero.

I'm a kind of hero.

I can reach into my pocket and anything I need will be there.

Toothpick after a meal,

Big Red to freshen my breath,

a gun to murder my enemies.

We all stop paying attention to UNFAMILIAR HOST.

FAMILIAR HOST

Something terrible—I'm going to do something terrible—you'll see me if you watch! Watch the monitor. But it's not me because I'm here watching with you. it's prerecorded but like I said it was me *then* but now not me. Not as you knowing me. I don't actually know when it happens on this tape so I'm going to keep talking but if you see me doing something terrible on this tape—what was I wearing?...no I can't remember— if you see me doing something terrible just yell and I'll turn and look at the tape and explain it or why it wasn't me and it's actually really important we nail this because I've never seen this or don't think this is the kind of thing you can rewind? there! I am. Entering the frame from elsewhere right over elsewhere and I'm sure --what am I doing? I don't remember, I guess I'll just watch too, no point in trying to remember if I can just watch too-----

Everyone is watching the subway video monitors.

Intermission is over.

Act II, Scene One: ...?

Act I was *product* oriented, but Act II will be *process* oriented. We have turned away from the initial five-step plan to predict and adapt a future play, and ask the more fundamental question of what is a meaningful relationship between art and futurity (ambiguity & the unknown)?

Act I of this thesis has demonstrated that in the ideological arts (those that aren't critically reliant upon material technology) *time* should not be considered in the normative sense of timeline--with a materially fixed past, present, and future. Collective imagination in the arts is a time machine. If we can articulate the future of art, we can make it present. Therefore, within our performative parameters, *time is merely a temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous*. If something is unknown or ambiguous to the collective imagination of the arts, then it is in the future. If something is known or unambiguous, then it is in the past or present. This is obviously a radically different usage of future and present, but it is more precise.

We now seek to build a methodology to manifest, in present theatrical performance, *a temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous*.

This distinction is important because we now have shared definitions which connect the spirit of this project with the spirit of projects we admire. Though we cannot look at other projects whose aim was strictly to adapt the future (they don't exist), we can study the methods and techniques used in art that manifest the material of the ambiguous and unknown but do not resolve them.

We'll also find in studying these projects that a recurring theme is a fixation on *time*. This is even closer to our interest, which most strictly is adapting the *temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous*.

I have experienced the ambiguous and unknown within:

1. John Cage, *4'33"*
2. Linear Perspective/ The Vanishing Point
3. Michel Chion, "The Voice in Cinema"/ Yorgos Lanthimos, *The Lobster*
4. Vivian Sobchack, "When the Ear Hears"/ Philip Glass' "*Koyaanisqatsi*"
5. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Le Voyeur*

John Cage. 4'33”.

I'd like to begin with a brief study of the experimental composer John Cage's 4'33" -- in which four minutes and thirty three seconds pass as the musicians are present but play no music. Composed in 1952, the musicality of 4'33" is composed solely of whatever sound happens to exist within this framing of time. Though divisive—it is glibly accused of not being music-- this famous piece represents a historical landmark in music composition. Cage is radically challenging the common sense notion of what constitutes musicality by suggesting silence, or the potential impossibility of silence, is equal to noise in the hierarchy of musical composition.

I will attach a YouTube link below. It shows a performance of 4'33" by pianist William Marx in 2010 at the McCallum Theatre, Palm Desert, CA. We can call this an adaptation of Cage's 4'33”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTEFKFiXSx4>

Obviously this radicalization of musical composition interests us a great deal, as it suggests an inextricable connection between time and art. It has also addressed one of our theatrical particularities in bringing the writing of the piece and the performance of the piece into the same time. Whoever has been to a performance of 4'33" will have contrasting opinions of what the piece sounds like, and they will all be right. So are any of them actually right?

4'33" questions how art exists within and without a frame. Cage has carved a frame out of time. The empty stage joined by the empty minutes. Yet does this frame matter? When the contents of the frame are indistinguishable from the contents outside the frame, then has a frame even been carved?

The cipher seems to be *listening*. Cage has created a piece that truly only exists within the listening of the audience. He has created a frame which is nothing more than *attention paid*. But this is the charm, and also a radical temporal notion. 4'33" is, in a sense, already written, but it only exists in performance in such a way that we might suggest that its writing is only actualized when it is performed. Yes, of course, this is the very basis of differentiation between dramatic literature and literature-- the former is only actualized in performance.

However, 4'33" takes this difference and distorts it to its most extreme form. There is no materiality to its writing, only ideology. So it is not technically written in the past. And since each performance exists in a confounding state-- there *still* is no intentional materiality (played sound) in performance, only incidental materiality.

So in a way, Cage has written (ideologically) a piece that cannot be played (actualized as 'intentional art phenomenon').

4'33" is perpetually unknown and ambiguous.

4'33" is *happening* in the present, but it cannot *happen* in the present, and it will sound different in the present than it will in the future, because the sounds will be different. (The future will have more beep boop beep boop from all the robots in the audience.)

Cage has exploited two major factors to create this sense of futurity:

Humans experience time linearly.

&

When humans listen, they hear sounds.

Key Takeaways: Transgressive framing, Only Actualized by audience's listening/paying attention, Perpetual Happening but Actualizing differently, Beginning Again & Again & Again

Linear Perspective & The Vanishing Point.

I am an utter lay-person in the field of art. But I am blessed with vision, and when I use that vision, sometimes in art museums, I experience a sensation of which I am fond. The sensation is that of the unknown, the ambiguous, and the unresolved. The artworks which triggers this sensation within me share a common feature--linear perspective creating a vanishing point.

When I picture a vanishing point in art, I imagine two parallel lines representing a road running off into the distance.

Here I include a stock image of what I picture in my mind. Thank you Getty Images.



According to Tate Modern, “The vanishing point is used as part of the system of perspective, which enables the creation of the illusion of the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional picture surface” (Tate.org).

If we temporalize this, we might think of how to create the illusion of the fourth dimension (time) in a three dimensional world in performance.

Since the vanishing point is a subset of perspective, we should start there. Linear perspective is thought to be a product of the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century.

Tate Modern says “Linear perspective rests on the fact that although parallel lines never meet, they appear to do so as they get further away from the viewer towards the horizon, where they disappear. The sides of a road, or later, railway lines, are obvious examples” (Tate.org).

I’m immediately drawn to “although parallel lines never meet, they appear to do so as they get further away from the viewer towards the horizon, where they disappear.” Is there a technique in performance we might use that would make the present move further away from the viewer towards the horizon (the future), until it disappears? This is what intrigues me the most about the Vanishing Point in linear perspective. The notion that it is not by hiding something from view, but by *looking at a thing, that thing disappears. How do we see a disappearance?*

The lines of a vanishing point are painted parallel, and they do not meet. It takes the viewer to collaborate with their own *looking* to create the meeting and resulting disappearance. It brings to

mind our repeated landing on *listening* from Stein, in which the attention of the audience seems to be a determinant in art time. Here, we deal with sight instead of sound, but the agency on the part of the experiencer remains.

The Vanishing Point-- this naturalist representation-- only vanishes if the viewer *looks* and makes the two parallel lines meet. If the viewer does not look, the representation itself remains two parallel lines without meaning. Unknowable and ambiguous. So it is in the gaze of the viewer that this unknowable and ambiguous artifact is transformed into the known and definable vanishing point.

Tate Modern goes on to explain “In painting all parallel lines...are drawn so as to meet at the horizon if they were extended. This creates the illusion of distance, and the point at which the lines meet is called the vanishing point. Things look smaller the further away they are, and perspective enabled painters accurately and consistently to calculate the size things should be in relation to their supposed distance from the viewpoint” (Tate.org).

The technique of the vanishing point within the system of perspective may seem contrary to this paper in intention. This is partially true. Artists were seeking greater *naturalism* in their work by introducing the vanishing point. Generally, we associate naturalism with the known and the unambiguous. Certainly we associate it with the present. It is hard to hold a mirror up to the present moment and not be operating in the present.

However, we must consider the system of representation that linear perspective was radicalizing. There was no illusion of space or depth. Depictions were flat and two dimensional. The size of the differing people and objects within the depiction were determined by significance. In these depictions, there was absolutely no suggestion that anything existed beyond the frame. Not even depth within the frame. What is *apparent* is definable *as the art piece*. The system of linear perspective interrupted this definable sense of the frame.

The Vanishing Point is a technique that inherently suggests that this art piece is not *all* there is. It's a paradox in that it's a representation, but not a representation in total. Therefore, not the Judeo-Christian God. This may seem like a strange use of paradox but I have an artistic feeling that if we represent anything that is not everything, then it becomes paradoxical. I am redefining paradoxical as something that is not God. If our Western notion of morality and resolution and Enlightenment reasoning in some way graduated from a monotheistic understanding of the world, which I believe it did, and in that monotheistic pedagogy, all is God and God is all, then God is the opposite of ambiguity. He is also the opposite of futurity, because he is omnitemporal, and thus renders futurity an impossibility.

This may seem like a strange detour from a Vanishing Point, but the reason I am interested in a Vanishing Point is because of how it is very much not God. It is not the great “I am”, it is a great “I am?”. Something does exist in the representation—the Vanishing Point. Yet the very technique of the Vanishing Point is to acknowledge that something is not represented. That the road goes on, the train tracks go on, as they would in the world, far out of your sight but certainly not gone.

The vanishing point exists as a reference to something not in the frame.

Visual perspective suggests something that isn't there by hacking into the *way we see*. In Western Art, this was being utilized spatially. However, why can't we think about this temporally as well? Can we suggest a time that hasn't happened yet (futura) by hacking into the *way we perceive time*?

Is this a phenomenological question? Is it about understanding the phenomenon of time? We understand the phenomenon of sight, so we were able to create the Vanishing Point to represent the unrepresentable. If we understood the phenomenon of time, could we create the X to represent (in presentness) the unrepresentable (futura)?

But I *don't* understand the phenomenon of time. And if we are defining art-futura as ambiguous and unknowable, is it valuable, or even possible, to understand time phenomenologically? Still, performance is clearly a method through which we study the phenomenon of time. We will see with Maxwell, Stein, Cage, Robbe-Grillet, Parks; all these artists are rigorously studying the phenomenological aspects of time in their practices.

Key Points: Phenomenal indication of unrepresented source/ Actualization through audience seeing/ Paying attention/ Transgressive Framing,/ The incomplete picture collaborating with imagination.

Chion. "The Voice in Cinema". & Lanthimos. *The Lobster*.

The French film sound theorist, Michel Chion, has a provocative book entitled "The Voice in Cinema". Published in French in 1982 and translated to English in 1999, one particular chapter, *Mabuse: The Magic and Power of the Acousmêtre*, describes a technique that seeds the ambiguous and unknown throughout a film. This technique is the creation of an acousmêtre, who we can understand as a character within the story of the film whose voice is present but whose image is absent.

The figure of the acousmêtre derives from acousmatic sound, which Chion defines as "a sound that is heard without its cause or source being heard." The word was coined in the 1950's to describe the sound phenomena of telephones and radio. The opposite of the term was then required, and was decided to be *visualized listening*, referring to television or stage. Filmmakers all the way back to Fritz Lang's *M* (1930) have experimented with acousmatic sound in film, in which we hear a sound which is not visualized on screen.

In this essay, Chion coins his term:

“When the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualized—that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face—we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name *acousmètre* ” (22).

Whenever a “talking and acting shadow” is involved, our interest is piqued.

“In the case where it remains not-yet-seen, even an insignificant acousmatic voice becomes invested with magical powers as soon as it is involved, however slightly, in the image...It bears with the image a relationship of *possible inclusion*, a relationship of power and possession capable of functioning in both directions; the image may contain the voice, or the voice may contain the image” (23).

The ability to embody futurity in the present may require some “magical powers”. Chion claims these powers are invested in the “acousmatic voice” when it becomes involved “in the image”. The implication here is that the intermingling of a sound-sans-source and a visualized image are a potent combination. But what is this power and how does it bear relationship to ambiguity? It seems to involve its “*possible inclusion*”.

This term is of temporal interest to us, because *possible* is a sort of speculative future, *or* an unknown or ambiguous element of the past or present, which is still futurity. The ability to engender possibility may be important to us. Yet what does Chion mean by “*inclusion*”? Is he using it spatially? Temporally? To include in this space or include in the present? Or in another way altogether? An *imagined* inclusion?

He goes on to detail this “possible inclusion” as a form of “possession capable of functioning in both directions”. If we temporalize this, this alien element, this unknown, this acousmatic voice is capable of functioning in both directions—capable of “possessing” the *present* or *future*. This is not necessarily what Chion means, but it is provocative for our argument.

Chion is talking about this “possible inclusion” and “possession” in “both directions” as the intermingling between image and voice (sound). The acousmatic voice ruptures the traditional filmic relationship—*visualized listening*-- by separating image and sound, and then, rather than working in synchronicity, gives them a sort of demonic capability of *possessing one another*. It might be said that the normative relationship between sound and image—working together to depict a film—is a relationship *in the present*. It serves the known and the unambiguous. The demonic relationship between sound and image—each one threatening to possess the other—is *in the future*. It serves the unknown and ambiguous.

Yorgos Lanthimos. *The Lobster*.

With Chion’s theories in mind, I rewatched *The Lobster*. a film in which acousmatic sound is ubiquitous. The 2015 film, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, also carries an ethos of ambiguity and the unknown. Lanthimos is an auteur hailing from Greece, who, over the last decade, has developed a filmmaking aesthetic that stands distinct from his contemporaries. This aesthetic is most recognizable through its use of opaque performances, extreme integration of sound

composition, and abnormal cadence of language. His work is commonly referred to as *strange* or *difficult* (often substitutes for ambiguous or unknown), yet *The Lobster* found relatively broad acceptance, winning the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and an Academy Awards nomination for Best Original Screenplay.

The story of *The Lobster* is a surrealist vision involving lonely individuals who, if unable to find their romantic partner at a hotel, are transformed into an animal of their choosing by the State. The functioning of this surrealist fable is dependent on the technique of acousmatic sound.

The film immediately introduces the spectator to an acousmètre- however, the spectator's relationship to the acousmètre is not as clear cut as Chion's taxonomy suggests. It is difficult to discern whether this acousmètre is what Chion would call a *Commentator-acousmètre*, "she who never shows himself but who has no personal stake in the image" (21) or a *complete acousmètre*, "the one who is not-yet-seen, but who remains liable to appear in the visual field at any moment" (23). There are reasons to suggest either might be true.

The Lobster is a linguistically dense film, akin to a literary text, and so my experience of this acousmètre initially referred me to an explicitly literary narrator—the novelistic third-person point-of-view. In the literary sense, the third person narrator of a novel- essentially a *commentator acousmètre*- is not expected to find its way to a diegetic character source.

Yet *The Lobster* also provides reasons to believe this acousmètre might be a *complete acousmètre*, with the power to enter the screen at some point. This includes the dynamic timbre and inflection of the narration that hints at emotional entanglement. The voice also betrays its identity by its linguistic material; the diction, the vocabulary, the short arrhythmic manner of speaking. This matches the phonetic texture of the characters on screen in *The Lobster*. The narrator follows these sound and speech conventions, perhaps clueing the spectator into her state of complete acousmètre, capable of entering the screen.

The sonic experience of the acousmètre yields a strange attempt to reconcile speech and sound, as each time the narrator-acousmètre speaks, a jarring instrumental refrain—a discordant swell with the occasional stinger- accompanies the speech. The non-diegetic orchestration of sound parallels the diegetic diction of speech in its abrupt and arrhythmic cadence. Interestingly enough, the sound mix is not deferential to the speech of the acousmètre, as often it sounds as though the acousmètre is struggling to be heard over the music.

Chion says:

“The acousmètre ...must, even if only slightly, have one foot in the image, in the space of the film; he must haunt the borderlands that are neither the interior of the filmic stage nor the proscenium—a place that has no name, but which the cinema forever brings into play. Being in the screen and not, wandering the surface of the screen without entering it, the acousmètre brings disequilibrium and tension” (23).

We might read “disequilibrium and tension” as the discomfort that accompanies the ambiguous and the unknown. A signal that the demonic relationship between sound and image—each one

threatening to possess the other—is *in the future* and we are in the present, and thus, we feel Gertrude Stein’s issue of syncopation—we are *out of time* with the film.

I find the voice in *The Lobster*, with its demonic intent of possessing the image, worrisome because I recognize this acousmètre as being *too familiar*. My anxiety is that I am experiencing a sourceless sound externally that actually might just be a voice inside my head. This identification is easy to see once we understand the filmic spectator as acousmètre in their own right. My body-as-spectator is sound machine but I am not on screen; this narrating voice of *The Lobster* is also making sound, but is not on screen. I begin to identify with the voice in such a way that I suspect that this voice is my own thoughts.

Even further, the acousmatic is oft applied to deities, and doesn’t this represent the spectator’s biggest conflation in listening between the objective/subjective and internal/external? Am I hearing the external, objective Voice of God, or my subjective, internal thoughts?

Nearly halfway through *The Lobster*, the film shows us that the acousmètre had been, in fact, a *complete acousmètre*, as now it reveals its source as an on-screen character, saying “That was the first time I saw him. He was hiding behind a tree close to mine.” Once the acousmètre has become an *already visualized acousmètre*, the spectator is left to retroactively consider the nature of the acousmètre. For instance, early in the film, the voice tells us one morning, when the character is not in the space, that “that morning he was really hungry. He could have eaten a whole chicken.”

Although the acousmètre does find its source, the film does not de-mystify the powers of the voice from the spectator’s early experiences. If the conceit is now that the voice had a source who was not present at the earlier events of the movie, then how did the source witness, much less ascertain, the hunger of the main character? Even as the acousmatic voice embodies itself in the image, it does not abide by causal, temporal, or spatial common sense.

Another peculiarity is that even after the acousmètre becomes embodied, her narrator powers remain. We oft see her personage, but hear her in a close mic narration still describing events in the past tense. The only conclusion is that although we’ve located spatially the source of the acousmètre, we are still attempting to locate it temporally! This is not considered by Chion, who claims “The not-yet-seen voice...possesses a sort of virginity, derived from the simple fact that the body that’s supposed to emit it has not yet been inscribed in the visual field. Its de-acousmatization, which results from finally showing the person speaking, is always like a deflowering. For at that point the voice loses its virginal-acousmatic powers, and re-enters the realm of human beings” (23).

However, what if the acousmètre returns to the *where* of its source, but not the *when*. This certainly does not feel like a deflowering in *The Lobster*, nor a return to the “realm of human beings.” In fact, the voice seems to take up a new interstitial thrill in its ability to show us its source physically yet remain a *temporal acousmètre*.

As shown through our study of *The Lobster*, Chion’s theories regarding acousmatic sound show two techniques towards futurity, the first of which we’ve witnessed in our two other studies. The

acousmètre, by “Being in the screen and not, wandering the surface of the screen without entering it” serves ambiguity and the unknown. We have seen this same radical transgression of frame in both John Cage’s *4’33”* and *The Vanishing Point*, albeit through different techniques. Perhaps the unifying theme of this technique is that if the audience does not know *where* or *what*, then they no longer know *when*. Does this all relate somehow to being without *source*?

Second, we’ve seen a conflation of sound and image, and a disruption of the viewer’s normative perception. In this case, by creating sound and image that have a demonic rather than synchronized relationship to one another, the viewer’s relationship to *hearing*, *listening*, and *paying attention* have been radicalized. This visualized listening that represented the known and unambiguous has demonized as an unknown, ambiguous shadow of *acousmètre*.

Key Points: Transgressive Framing/ Demonic dynamic between image and sound/ Only Actualized through Audience listening/ Paying attention/ Ruptured sense of Source

Sobchack. “When the Ear Hears”. & Glass. *Koyaanisqatsi*.

Since the 1970’s, Vivian Sobchack has been a leading film phenomenologist who in particular studies the interplay of sound and image within filmmaking. She has been a professor on the subject at the prestigious UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television since 1992. In her 2011 essay, “When the Ear Dreams”, Sobchack investigates the enigmatic, ambiguous Dolby sound trailer “Train”. She uses this case study to further scrutinize French philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s theory of sonic dreaming, which also has serious implications when turned to the ambiguous and unknown..

Dolby is a sound technology company responsible for movie theater sound apparatus. Dolby’s “Train” is a trailer that would play before previews in movie theaters with the intention of demonstrating the new sound capabilities of Dolby speakers. The sound trailer features a loud, unresolved sound blaring through the speakers in the auditorium as the ghostly contour of a train slowly renders on the screen.

Below I have included links to the YouTube video of Dolby’s “Train”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ5hexGXzp4>

We can glean important conclusions for our purposes from one particular passage from Sobchack’s ‘When the Ear Dreams’:

“Indeed, as a figure emerges from and within the films intensified soundings but never fully resolved, the train exists throughout tenuously---more as an “indication” of a train than as a phenomenal “thing.” However, as Bachelard suggests, this very lack of resolution—the phenomenal “weakness” of the visible image—lends it greater poetic significance and points to an “origin.” That origin, however, is elsewhere—neither on the screen nor in the image” (117).

This case study is immensely relevant to our study. It is discriminating between how a piece of media exists as “never fully resolved”, and “as an indication” rather than “a phenomenal ‘thing’”. Doesn’t this sound similar to our aims towards futurity? The ability to render a future while keeping its ambiguity and unknowns intact? Sobchack is suggesting the train in a manner I had hoped might be used for my future play.

Sobchack goes on to cite Bachelard, who suggests that “this very lack of resolution—the phenomenal ‘weakness’ of the visible image—lends it greater poetic significance and points to an “origin”.

Now isn’t this doubly exciting? Bachelard philosophizes that the ambiguous and unknown characteristics that compose futurity also lend the future “greater poetic significance”. This echoes my sentiments exactly. But Bachelard goes further and says that “phenomenal ‘weakness’ of the visible image...points to an ‘origin’”. Fascinating! It is unclear if Bachelard intends for origin to be temporal or spatial, or both. If we apply our lens, and read it temporally, then *a visible image that isn’t very apparent in the present points to the future.*

Bachelard adds “That origin, however, is elsewhere—neither on the screen nor in the image”.

Doesn’t this relate to the technique of perspective in art? The Vanishing Point indicates something that is not apparent in the painting, but which points to a continuation. A future beyond the present frame. And if we think of future as an origin, we have the radical notion of art in the present—ambiguous and unknown art—pointing to an origin that is not made of the past, but the future. Then, in a way, if an art piece’s origin is in the future, *that art has not yet originated.*

Isn’t this a sort of paradox? How can something that exists in the present, even in phenomenal weakness, not yet have originated? And yet...don’t we feel the truth of this constantly? If we interpret originating as *actualizing* instead of *beginning*, isn’t this the very impulse of so much artistic creation? Isn’t it the same impulse behind the Ancient Greek notion of Platonic Ideals, or the Judeo-Christian notion of only achieving actualized self through a future union with God?

I create art of ambiguity and the unknown because I want to find my origin. This revelation seems like an ethos we could readily bring into a performance making process. In order to adapt the future, we need to create work of “phenomenal weakness.” We need to create work that is “never fully resolved” and exists more “as an indication” rather than a “phenomenal thing.”

In creating work in this fashion, our work will “point to an origin” that is “neither on the screen nor in the image.” We will point to a performance that is “elsewhere.” If we create a process with enough phenomenal weakness, we will be indicating an actualized performance in the future, but not yet creating that performance. Doesn’t this sound a bit like we’d be adapting the future?

Sobchack’s application of Bachelard’s philosophy to the “Train” media is a concrete case study. Sobchack has witnessed a train that she believes has an origin somewhere else. I offer Sobchack that the train is from the future!

Glass. *Koyaanisqatsi*.

Now we will build on Sobchack’s application of Bachelard to Dolby’s sound trailer “Train”. Though I am excited by the prospect of “phenomenal weakness” pointing to an “origin” that is the future, it has brought to mind another piece of media which elicited the same feeling without ‘phenomenal weakness’.

I’ll enter this conversation of sound and image poetics through the 1982 American experimental film *Koyaanisqatsi*. The film is directed by Godfrey Reggio, and crucially, its soundtrack is composed by the experimental American composer Philip Glass.

Before we begin this examination, a word is necessary on the experimental structure of *Koyaanisqatsi*. The one-hour twenty-seven minute film- oft labeled a ‘tone-poem’- is entirely devoid of characters, dialogue, and familiar narrative. Alternatively, the film consists of a series of images and continuous scoring. The images are juxtapositions of the natural and manufactured world. Also of note is the aberrant pacing of the images; the filmmaker uses time-lapse to speed up and slow certain segments—for instance, a volcano explodes in slow motion while city traffic flies by at hyper speed.

I’ve attached below a link to the Criterion trailer for *Koyaanisqatsi*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jM2WA2WbDc>

The entire film is scored by Philip Glass in his signature brand of reiterative, repetitive, trance-inducing composition, which refuses to resolve itself with any Classical musical logic. This enigmatic quality of Glass’ score, and its particular relationship to the visual storytelling in *Koyaanisqatsi*, requires an expansion of Bachelard and Sobchack’s notion that “phenomenal weakness” is the trait that “points to an origin”.

For not only is there a “greater poetic significance” of sound or image based on “phenomenal weakness” as suggested by Bachelard and illustrated by Sobchack’s study of Lumière’s “Train”; in *Koyaanisqatsi*, there is also a poetic intensification due to *semiotic* weakness.

In *Koyaanisqatsi*, in contrast to “Train”, we are not presented with a “phenomenally weak” image—the image is visibly apparent. The sound, like in Lumière’s train, is also phenomenally present. Both of these phenomenal strengths would suggest the origin of the image as the present.

Yet I am certain when watching *Koyaanisqatsi* that there is a similar kind of sensorial interplay leading to “greater poetic significance” (the future). So we must look outside Bachelard’s attention to phenomenology, and find our answer lies in the semiotics of sight and sound. This might seem counterintuitive—sight and sound of film marry well with phenomenology, since they in large part are experienced as things-in-themselves. But here is where the old master Philip Glass throws a wrench in this normative experience.

The *Koyaanisqatsi* score, sonorically, doesn’t have “phenomenal weakness” like the ghostly train of “Train”, but a similar effect is achieved through different means. Sobchack describes this ghostly train, in Bachelard’s terms, as “an indication of a train”, and therefore, something with a “lack of resolution”. It is this “lack of resolution” that Bachelard measures out into “poetic significance” and “origin” value. Glass’ score, phenomenally, isn’t merely an indication of sound, yet it still achieves the same “lack of resolution” as the ghostly train image. The indeterminate, looping, perpetuating structure of Glass’ composition defies resolution—and remains ambiguous and unknown-- *even in its phenomenal strength*.

Therefore, I propose it has another sort of weakness- *a semiotic weakness*. That is, although it can be heard phenomenally, it can’t be comprehended semiotically. Glass’ music defies legible meaning by refusing to resolve. Therefore, the phenomenal strength suggests the present, but the semiotic weakness suggests an origin in the future.

Sobchack describes Lumière’s train imagistically as “more as an ‘indication’ of a train than as a phenomenal thing.” In *Koyaanisqatsi*, we can likewise describe Philip Glass’ score, because of its unwillingness to resolve into meaning, as “more as an ‘indication’ of a sound score than as a “phenomenal thing”. In examining this sensorial dreaming, we have recognized that Sobchack, through Bachelard, found “Train” to be illustrative of the “phenomenal weakness” of image that leads to “greater poetic significance”. In our case study of *Koyaanisqatsi*, we expanded upon Bachelard’s theory by noting that through semiotic weakness in sound, we can also observe “greater poetic significance.”

For our purposes, there seems to be a link between creating weakness-- either phenomenal or semiotic—through sound and image and an imagined future origin. The strength of a phenomenon or sign in performance indicates presentness (the known and unambiguous), while their weakness indicates futurity (the unknown and ambiguous).

If we are looking to adapt the future, we ought to incorporate these weaknesses into both process and product, so that we are always operating within a present that merely indicates our performance’s origin in the future.

Key Points: Ruptured sense of Source/ Demonic relationship between sound and image/
Phenomenal Ruptures, Beginning Again & Again & Again.

Robbe Grillet. *Le Voyeur*.

We next examine a product of the literary movement known as the Nouveau Roman (The New Novel). This movement radically rearranged the traditional hierarchical arrangement of the novel. They interrupted readers' expectations of the foregrounding of plot, narrative, and dialogue, and offered something more ambiguous and opaque.

Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur*, published in French in 1955 and English in 1958, is a pillar of the Nouveau Roman movement. Robbe-Grillet is one of the most vexing authors of the 20th century. His assault on the normative novel ruptured literary form in an enduring way. *Le Voyeur* champions the unreliable narrator, interrogates the first and third person tense, and creates internal loops of text which conflate past and present. The phenomenological fetishization and repetition of seemingly obscure details makes it an uncommon read. The same characteristics that make *Le Voyeur* thrilling to some make it alienating to others, but this divisiveness cannot occlude its status as literary cannon. It represents a literary genre which leapt off a cliff of legibility and into the deep, unknowable waters below.

It also contains perhaps the most compelling opening passage in mystery literature.

“It was as if no one had heard.

The whistle blew again-- a shrill, prolonged noise followed by three short blasts of ear-splitting violence: a violence without purpose that remained without effect. There was no more reaction--no further exclamation--than there had been at first; not one feature of one face had even trembled” (3).

Immediately, we are drawn to the first line, “it was as if no one had heard”. For a book with a reputation for opacity, Robbe-Grillet is being transparent with us immediately. He communicates to the reader that the actualization of the story to come will only reveal itself if it is *heard*. In order for a story to be heard, what must happen? The reader must listen. This is not a story that will reveal itself regardless of the attention of the reader. It is an artifact that can only be unlocked with intentionality.

The reason I am so thrilled by this opening passage is that it is synecdoche-- this passage contains the entirety of the very dense story to follow. We have “a violence without purpose that remained without effect”. This describes the murder act to come. Robbe-Grillet then signals the entirety of how the Nouveau Roman aims to change the novel in “There was no more reaction...not one feature of one face had even trembled”. Here he explains that the form of this novel, even in the face of this violent act, will not reveal itself, nor react as a normal story ought to react to such an act.

It's an odd request to a reader--to appeal to their sense of hearing--when they are using their sight to read the book. It reminds us of Sobchack noting the strangeness of the Dolby trailer asking an audience to listen and not look in a movie theater. Already there is something unusual about the relationship between novel and reader, a rearranging of the attention hierarchy, asking for hearing rather than seeing. Perhaps it is the challenge of listening to a novel form that Robbe-Grillet finds necessary. There is some sort of imagined gap that would need to be

navigated in order to actively listen to his prose. The impossibility of it requires the reader's imagination to figure out a new way to utilize their senses. And the fact "it was as if no one had heard" occurs in the past tense implies that perhaps no readers *have* been able to listen the way the art requires.

What effect does this synecdoche have? It makes the reader feel as if they have begun something that has already happened. That is, they are already out of sync (Stein!) with the novel.

"And even supposing that everything, down to the smallest detail, had remained just as he had left it, he would still have to reckon with the errors and inaccuracies of his own memory, which experience had taught him to mistrust. More than any real changes on the island, or even hazy recollections...he would have to be wary of exact but false memories which would here and there have substituted themselves for the original earth and stones" (17).

Mathias, whose mind we are seemingly in, admits blatantly to the "errors and inaccuracies of his own memory". Robbe-Grillet has not led us to discern that our narrator is unreliable through experience, but rather has transparently told us that our protagonist's point of view is inherently unreliable.

He also distinguishes between "real changes", "hazy recollections" and "exact but false memories". It is the latter that Mathias asserts he must be most "wary" of. For our purposes, let us make the same discrimination through a temporal lens. "Real changes" would represent those alterations that are tangible, and thus known and unambiguous. Therefore, real changes are in the present. "Hazy recollections" would contain the known but with holes in it. It would therefore be ambiguous, but not entirely unknown. Therefore it is the past, but conjoined with the limitations of the present.

"Exact and false memories" are an interesting study. The *exactness* implies the known and unambiguous. The *memories* implies semi-ambiguity. And the *false* implies the...unknown? Therefore, the exactness is in the present. The memories are a mix of the past and present. And the falseness is the imaginary. So we have something as known as the present, as semi-ambiguous as the past, and as imaginary as...the future perhaps?

This seems to be the closest approximation of how to contextualize the future within the present. It is through "exact and false memories." Could we structure a theatrical process around exact and false memories? I am excited by this possibility. But how does one even manufacture exact and false memories? That would be a good place for a process to start.

If you begin in a present constructed from exact and false memories, then just as Mathias, if you engage with it phenomenologically, you will continually be surprised at the actuality of the place. The phenomenon of the present will perpetually collide with your exact and false memories, and existence will seem unreliable, unstable, ambiguous, and unknown. It will seem like you are in the future. You will have created a place where *revelation* is constant. The ability to surprise yourself like a child will once more exist.

If a performance can then take that collision of false and exact memories and the phenomenological present and shift its shape, it will be on the path to adapting the future.

“He was about to continue on his way when he heard the sound again, a distinct moan almost in his ear....At that moment he noticed a ground-floor window within reach of his right hand...Standing near the bed, bending slightly over it, a masculine silhouette lifted one arm toward the ceiling. The whole scene remained motionless. In spite of the incomplete nature of the gesture, the man moved no more than a statue.....Mathias had no time to wait for what was going to happen next. He was not even certain the moans came from this house; he had guessed they came from a source still closer...in thinking it over he wondered if he had heard only moans, inarticulate sounds; had there been identifiable words? In any case it was impossible for him to remember what they were” (20).

This passage lends us another instance of a “sound” being “heard” in a repetitive way, “again”. We also have the tangible instrument of hearing, the “ear” and the phenomenal proximity of “distinct moan” with “his ear”.

Next we are intrigued by this “incomplete nature of the gesture”, in which the “whole scene remained motionless”. This gesture is remaining in the ambiguous and unknown semiotic. Mathias is waiting for the semiotic to resolve, and with a finishing of the gesture, for meaning to exist. The incomplete gesture is, until resolved, in the future. This is why Mathias is eager for it to resolve, because he himself, witnessing the gesture, has entered the future, and until it resolves, he will not be back in the present.

We see this in “Mathias had no time to wait for what was going to happen next...”. We can read this as Mathias literally had no time, because while witnessing the incomplete gesture he was in the future. The only way he could reenter the present was by not waiting for the gesture to resolve.

This splitting of Mathias into present and future causes him the need to rationalize his certainly “He was not even certain the moans came from this house; he had guessed they came from a source still closer”. What he had just witnessed, the incomplete gesture, was so filled with the ambiguous and unknown and futurity, that he himself could not ascribe something to that gesture with certainty. Thus, he backpedals, saying that he is uncertain the moans came from that future place.

Now we see the effect on an audience of having been to the future, “he wondered if he had heard only moans, inarticulate sounds; had there been identifiable words? In any case it was impossible for him to remember what they were” He is now trying to piece together what the futurity meant. The vague contours of cause-and-no effect. What had he witnessed? Were they “inarticulate sounds” or “identifiable words”?

This is the ambiguity of hearing-- the moan he *heard* with his ear had led him to *see* an incomplete gesture-- the future-- and thus he is now trying to make meaning where meaning was

withheld. He claims “it was impossible for him to remember what they were” , and we see that he uses the verb “remember” to describe his reckoning with this moment of futurity! This further buttresses our suspicion that the future has something to do with memory, as we saw with “the exact and false memories”.

Key Points: Unreliable Narration/ Only Actualized if listening/ paying attention/ phenomenal fetishization / Demonic relationship between sound and image/ listening and seeing/ memory & forgetting/ Beginning again & again & again/ Perpetual happening but disrupted actualization/ temporal destabilization between character and audience/ Conflation of memory and imagination/ perception vs phenomenology/ Repetition/ repetition/repetition.

Act II, Scene Two: In the Theater...?

As in these other art forms we’ve studied above, in theater, too, there are methodologies rigorously engaged with ambiguity and the unknown-- though none of them seem to hold an explicit intent or awareness towards futurity. In my previous encounters with these works, I’d not yet defined futurity in art as *a temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous*. Now, with this definition in mind, we will examine theatrical engagements with ambiguity and the unknown, and glean whether there is a temporal element to the method.

1. Chekhov: *The Cherry Orchard*
2. Susan-Lori Parks: *Elements of Style*
3. Richard Maxwell: *Theater for Beginners*
4. Beckett: *Not I*

Chekhov. *The Cherry Orchard.*

Anton Chekhov is a late nineteenth century/early twentieth century Russian playwright. He exists on the pantheon of early Western(ish) dramatic writers. His collaboration with Konstantin Stanislavski, the preeminent naturalist director of his era, often leads to Chekhov being wrongly branded a naturalist writer. For our purposes, we might think of naturalist drama as the known or the unambiguous. However, in Chekhov's 1904 dramedy *The Cherry Orchard*, we have the intentional instigation of ambiguity in Western theater in one brief moment.

They all sit thoughtfully. It is quiet. Only the mumbling of FIERS is heard. Suddenly a distant sound is heard as if from the sky, the sound of a breaking string, which dies away sadly.

LUBOV. What's that?

LOPAKHIN. I don't know. It may be a bucket fallen down a well somewhere. But it's some way off.

GAEV. Or perhaps it's some bird . . . like a heron.

TROFIMOV. Or an owl.

LUBOV. [Shudders] It's unpleasant, somehow. [A pause.]

We are in an ostensibly naturalist space, and suddenly, there is the sound of a snapping string. The characters cannot name it. They take some guesses, but the nature of the sound, the proximity, and its cause are all ambiguous and unknown, leaving behind only a feeling--but even the feeling has a hole in it, "it's unpleasant, somehow." That "somehow" is a hole, because it links a feeling as an effect-without-a-cause.

Perhaps more importantly, even to the author the gesture retains ambiguity and the unknown. Let's focus on Chekhov's admittedly translated use of "suddenly", "distant", "sound", "heard", and "as if". These are the building blocks for the gesture of the snapping string.

"Sudden" is a temporal term, meaning that the gesture was not apparent to the characters before because it was not in time with them.

"Distant" is a proximity term. It means the gesture is separate from them in space, as well.

"Sound" is a sonic term, and implies that the form of the gesture is auditory.

"Heard" implies that the gesture exists as perceived sound that has been listened to by the characters.

And “as if” suggests that the source would appear to be the sky, but the impossibility of that implies a rupture between the hearing and the sound. A rupture between the hermeneutic and phenomenal.

So Chekhov has created a gesture that feels as if the source is elsewhere. Now, it is suddenly here, because it is heard, but it is not exactly *here*, because it is still distant and the source cannot be identified.

The characters heard the present snapping of a future string.
 For us, the snapping is performance, and the string is the play.
 They witnessed a present performance of a future play.
 This is what we want to do.

And doesn't this directly relate to Sobchack?

“Indeed, as a figure emerges from and within the films intensified soundings but never fully resolved, the train exists throughout tenuously---more as an “indication” of a train than as a phenomenal “thing.” However, as Bachelard suggests, this very lack of resolution—the phenomenal “weakness” of the visible image—lends it greater poetic significance and points to an “origin.” That origin, however, is elsewhere—neither on the screen nor in the image” (Sobchack, 117).

The snapping string is more of an indication of a sound than a phenomenal thing. But this very lack of resolution--the fact that the characters cannot identify the sound-- “lends it greater poetic significance and points to an ‘origin’” The characters sense this significance, and try to place the origin, cycling through disparate ideas. However, they cannot possibly identify the true origin, for “that origin...is elsewhere-- neither on the screen nor in the image.”

Obviously, there is no screen, but we *always* have the onscreen/off-screen because it is the dichotomy of what is phenomenal and what is not. For the characters within the fiction, the origin is elsewhere...neither in their mind nor in their senses. In performance, the snapping string holds this same “elsewhere” origin to the audience-- it is neither on stage nor off stage, and thus, the audience too is thrust into the unknown and ambiguous by this alien snapping string.

Key Points: Demonic relationship between sound and image/ listening and seeing/perception vs phenomenology/ Ruptured sense of Source/ Transgressive Framing/ paying attention,/temporal destabilization between character and audience.

Parks. *Elements of Style.*

Suzan Lori-Parks is a contemporary dramatist who has had a substantial influence on the dramatic landscape for decades. *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, *The America Play*, and *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* are three of her most influential plays from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990's. Each of these works is characterized by radical poeticization of language, including liberal use of repetition and revision, and each fundamentally altered the common sense understanding of what comprises a dramatic work. In 2002, Parks became the first African-American female to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play *Topdog/Underdog*. Here is a sample of Parks writing from her 1993 *The America Play*:

A. Big Bang

LUCY: Hear that?
 BRAZIL: Zit him?
 LUCY: No.
 BRAZIL: Oh.

(A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes.)

LUCY: Hear?
 BRAZIL: Zit him?!
 LUCY: Nope. Ssuhecho.
 BRAZIL: Ssuhecho.
 LUCY: Uh echo uh huhn. Of gunplay. Once upon uh time somebody had uh little gunplay and now thuh gun goes on playing: *KER-BANG!* KERBANG-Kerbang-kerbang- (kerbang)- ((kerbang)).
 BRAZIL: Thuh echoes.
(Rest)
(Rest)
 LUCY: Youre stopped.
 BRAZIL: Mmlistenin.
 LUCY: Dig on, Brazil. Cant stop digging till you dig up something. Your Daddy was uh Digger.
 BRAZIL: Uh huhnnn.
 LUCY
 BRAZIL

(A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes. Rest. A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes. Rest)

In addition to her dramatic work, Parks is a valuable contributor of dramaturgical wisdom. Her 1995 experimental essay, *Elements of Style*, is chief amongst these contributions, and is a vital reference point for the ambiguous and the unknown. *Elements of Style opens* by stating the

clear intention to, “form a sort of bulwark against an insidious, tame-looking, shmaltz-laden mode of expression that threatens to cover us all, like Vesuvius, in our sleep” (6). Parks goes on to lay out an artistic treatise much cited by all who share this opening sentiment. We, too, will go about citing her poetic essay for our own purposes, paying attention to the applications of Parks’ ideas towards ambiguity and the unknown, and in particular, their interplay with futurity.

“Why choose that shape? If a playwright chooses to tell a dramatic story, and realizes that there are essential elements of that story which lead the writing outside the realm of ‘linear narrative’, then the play naturally assumes a new shape. I’m saying that the inhabitants of Mars do not look like us. Nor should they. I’m also saying that Mars is with us-- right on our doorstep and should be explored” (8).

Parks says that the play must assume a shape that will actualize “essential elements of that story”. She states that there are elements unknown in dramatic literature, “the inhabitants of Mars”, and their shape, or dramatic form, does “not look like us.” Yet, through adapting our form, we can see “that Mars is with us-- right on our doorstep and should be explored.” For our own purposes, we might substitute the analogous ambiguous and unknown “Mars” with “the future”. It would then read “I’m saying that the inhabitants of *the future* do not look like us. Nor should they. I’m also saying that *the future* is with us-- right on our doorstep and should be explored.” It seems that Parks and this thesis have a similar investment in taking the Martian -- ambiguous and unknown (for us Earthlings)-- and actualizing it through present form. With this common goal in mind, we will examine the rest of *Elements of Style* for techniques engaging time and performance.

“*Repetition and Revision* is a concept integral to the jazz esthetic in which the composer or performer will write or play a musical phrase once & again and again, etc.-- with each revisit, the phrase is slightly revised. ‘Rep & Rev’ as I call it is a central element in my work; through its use I’m working to create a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear narrative style to look and sound more like a musical score” (9).

Here we first encounter the term Rep & Rev, which Parks coined in this essay and since has been a stylistic bug in the ear of a generation of writers. Parks cites jazz as her reference point, but we also might point to Gertrude Stein, who in her cubistic renderings of language creates a sort of early precedent of repetition and revision. We might even see a similar spirit in reasoning, as Parks says Rep & Rev allows her to “create a dramatic text” that will “look and sound more like a musical score.” Perhaps from this same formal impulse, Stein described some of her writing as opera.

We note a common technique between Stein and Parks in Rep & Rev, and now have suspicions that another correlative might exist. We know Stein was working towards an interrogation of syncopated performance time, and now wonder whether a similar anxiety has led Parks to adopt her style.

“...in drama change, revision is the thing. Characters refigure their words and through a refiguring of language show us that they are experiencing their situation anew” (9).

The ability to experience a “situation anew” is a temporal suggestion. In fact, “anew” might be a key word for what we are seeking. The temporal implication of “anew” is that it somehow knows the past situation, yet is offering that situation in the present as though it had never happened. It is making the old (past) new (present) through “revision” which is a “refiguring of language”.

Yet there is a question of agency here which is difficult to understand. We know that the characters are refiguring their own words and thus we experience them witnessing their situation anew. However, it is unclear how much *agency* or *intention* the characters have in this refiguring. Are they intentionally refiguring their own words so that they might experience their situation anew? Is that a goal of the characters?

Or is it possible it is involuntary, and what would this look like? It seems that the most direct way they'd be capable of experiencing their situation anew is through forgetting. If a character were able to configure language, experience a corresponding situation, and then forget that specific configuration of language, they could cycle through this Rep & Rev process for eternity. Although even in this forgetting, we must wonder about agency. Though it is counterintuitive, isn't it possible to willfully forget? Clinically, we can point at something like repression, sure. But what if we think about it in a less clinical sense. What might it mean for a character to spiritually forget their language? A process of beginning to actualize, experiencing one form, and beginning again?

Can't we point to the Nouveau Roman as akin to this process? In *Le Voyeur*, Mathias as a character is trapped in a loop of forgetting spurred by his inability to be present. The bleeding between past and present and imagination have caused him to unwillingly enter what we might call an involuntary Rep & Rev cycle.

“I am most interested in words and how they impact on actors and directors and how those folks physicalize those verbal aberrations. How does this Rep & Rev-- a literal incorporation of the past-- impact on the creation of a theatrical experience?” (10).

This is an extremely provocative idea of time that rubs right up against what we're aiming to conjure. For Parks, language *is* physicality. Therefore, when an actor speaks the language in the Rep & Rev form, it is a kind of physical spell in which they are “a literal incorporation of the past”. What an amazing prospect! But we are concerned with the future, not the past.

Parks says “incorporation of the past” because she is framing Rep & Rev in the obvious sense. I speculate that she's implying that if we are repeating or revising something, the temporal implication is that we are moving from *present to past back to present back to past* in a sort of rhythm. We might call it the drumkit of time.

However. What if we think of repetition as a form of augury? If a phrase is repeated with intentionality by a performer, then the audience begins to expect the phrase will continue to be repeated. Once this relationship exists, the performer has essentially predicted the future for the audience. The audience knows what will happen in the future! It is as though the performer has reached into the future of the audience and placed an artifact--the phrase which will be

repeated. This turns the audience's unknown into a known, the ambiguous into the unambiguous. Think of this common example: you are in the car, listening to the radio, when a poorly written pop song plays. You are unfamiliar with the song, but it mostly consists of a basic refrain. By halfway through the song, if you've been listening, you know and possibly can even sing along with the remaining refrains that come along.

Gertrude Stein's synchronicity will pop up again and again like an annoying time traveler and here it has relevance again. People use repetition in their daily lives to be in sync. Stein uses it as well. Repetition is embodied into habituation, which leads to Viktor Shklovsky, and our forgetting having done a habitual task, and the need for defamiliarization. We can think of this as perhaps Shklovsky having anxiety over people being too in sync with time through repetition and thus the future is disqualified and without future we do not have a lively stimulated self.

If we acknowledge the augury of repetitions, and its ability to predict the future, then when an actor performs the language of repetition, not only are they an "incorporation of the past", they are an *incorporation of the future*. We might say that repetition allows the performer to physically time travel.

However! Suzan-Lori Parks threads the needle between repetition's power as augury and the ill effects of knowing. We do not enter the paradox of turning the future (unknown, ambiguous) into the present (known, unambiguous) because of *revision*. The audience anticipates the future as present, but then it changes, and their expectation fails, thus creating futurity. Rep and Rev ruptures the synchronicity, but allows you-- like improv jazz-- not to necessarily be in sync with the present, but to exist pleurably in the arrhythmia of the future. However it should be noted that many people seem to not like jazz for this very reason.

It makes me also think of the Greek Oracle Tiresias, who serves a purpose for irony, a kind of knowing, by always being right about the future and thus giving a cued in audience an answer while we see a character, such as Odysseus, still in ambiguity about the future. This separation is interesting. BUT would it be more interesting if Tiresias was often wrong? Or not necessarily wrong, but constantly revising his Prophecy with each repetition? So that the future is present but it is still ambiguous? These are actual questions for the reader to decide.

But, for the sake of the purpose of this paper, yes, it would speak more to our interest.

"I walk around with my head full of lay-person ideas about the Universe. Here's one of them: 'Time has a circular shape.' Could Time be tricky like the world once was-- looking flat from our place on it--and through looking at things beyond the world we found it round?" (10).

I wonder.

“History is time that won’t quit” (15)

And future is time that won’t start...?

Key Points: Repetition & Revision/ Beginning Again & Again & Again/ Perpetual happening but ruptured actualization/anew/forgetting & intentional forgetting?/ false and exact memories/ repetition as augury/ revision as disruption/ synchronicity.

Maxwell. *Theater for Beginners.*

Richard Maxwell founded the theater company Richard Maxwell & New York City Players in 1999. In the ensuing two decades, the company has become a vital part of the downtown theater landscape, as well as a touring force, having performed its work in over twenty countries. Richard Maxwell’s writing and direction have established a unique, immediately recognizable aesthetic that is now often imitated. This aesthetic is seen as subversive to normative theater practice, and is most associated with what many refer to as a stylistic *neutrality* (he’d disagree) or *ambiguity*.

In the summer of 2019, I was drafted into a Richard Maxwell & NYCP play, *Police & Thieves*, at the Performing Garage. I do not identify as an actor, and the process was a foreign land for me. Rehearsals were stressful. He would often tell us “we’re in this room together to find the time together.” It was an effective direction. One evening, we’d been running a scene with “Baba O’Riley” diegetically on the radio. We kept finishing the scene at arbitrary points within the song. After this direction, we somehow began to finish the scene in synchronicity with the conclusion of the song without consciously making any changes to our performance.

This sense of listening may not at first glance appear unique to Maxwell’s work. Stretching all the way back to actor/director Michael Chekhov, listening has been emphasized for actors. But I posit there is something unique about the kind of listening for which Maxwell is asking. When I was an audience member to Maxwell’s work, I always found that the performance was asking me to listen more intently than any other. I mean this both figuratively and literally. The actors seem to be speaking on the condition of me hearing them, and often making eye contact with the audience expectantly.

In a literal sense, there were always more pauses in the cadence of spoken text, as though much of what was being said was being communicated in the silence. Counterintuitively, as an audience member, I always find it a more demanding task to listen to silence.

This stylistic ambiguity associated with Maxwell's aesthetic, taken together with this attention paid to finding time together, make him a relevant case study for this project.

Although I could examine Maxwell's process through further personal anecdotes, I am not an actor, and have very little ability to articulate what was happening in the room with time. Thus, we will turn to Maxwell's articulation in the form of his 2015 book, "Theater for Beginners". The book serves as a sort of frank instruction towards theater practice. Below, I lift out all mentions of time there within.

"You, actor, are the warm presence that gives words life, you are the medium in the room before us, you are in the present" (3).

An important phrasing here: "You are *in* the present" rather than you are present. And somehow being in the present is connected to being a "warm presence that gives words life" and "the medium in the room". The actor is inherently in the present? Maxwell asserts it as a state of being. The actor is in the present. It also is suggestive that others who are not actors might be somewhere (somewhen?) *other* than the present. Is the actor-as-medium channeling present? Is that the association? And the actor is a "warm presence", a more traditional use of being present in a spatial sense. Yet, his impulse to separately articulate being a "presence" and "in the present" suggests that a scenario exists in which the spatial presence does not imply the temporal present for an actor.

"Apart from any style, I believe good performance is thorough performance and depends on a constant sense of beginning" (4).

The actor is both spatially a "presence" and temporally "in the present", but they also ought to have a "constant sense of beginning". Is this "sense of beginning" a tactic to remain "in the present"? This would link the temporal present to--not necessarily the beginning--but the *sensation* of beginning. I won't pretend to be an expert on the topic, but this sensation of beginning brings to mind the 14th-century Japanese term coined by Zeami Motokyo, *jo-ha-kyu*, which, in my basic understanding, partially implies that the present moment never ends, but simply begins again. It also brings to mind Suzan-Lori Park's concept of "Repetition & Revision" from *Elements of Style*. In Rep & Rev, one finds themselves perpetually at the beginning through repetition, but also constantly changing through revision.

"Make yourself 'invisible'. While others watch you, see if you can cross the playing area without being seen. You're in plain sight, so this becomes 'impossible'. But see what happens if you do not accept impossibility. Summon all devious means and resources on hand in the room to commit absolutely to accomplishing this feat" (29).

What is this relationship between impossibility and ambiguity? There seems to be one. Ambiguity wants to poke holes in impossibility. This Maxwell acting exercise is about an actor who is observable (obvious) attempting to be ambiguous. It is a kind of dark art. Look

even at his language, “devious means”. If we want to be in process with something as ambiguous as futurity, we need these sort of devious dark arts. It is about hiding and seeking. The future is the last hiding place. The last hole. Not really, of course. There are holes in every impossibility.

We know that Suzan-Lori Parks talks about the “great hole of history.” But the future is a hole, too. But it’s different from the hole of history, in which we disappear and are forgotten. The hole to the future is a blackhole. And if you send any hope into a blackhole, it becomes a wormhole. Instead of being forgotten as in the hole of history, we hope that we will enter this wormhole and come out on the other side in a time we might feel meaningful.

“Listening requires patience, and listening without assuming is a very difficult thing to do. But, letting go of assumptions allows you to be more accurate. I find I’m often racing ahead of a speaker, anxious to keep up, assuming, and getting something different from what is said, because I’ve missed the end of the sentence, for example. I often also hear things that weren’t said, maybe because I want to hear something else. On stage, listening is the way into the present moment. While the lines and the blocking may be fixed nightly and repeated, the event of those tasks presented is not. Listening, essentially, means paying attention” (36).

There is a lot to unpack here. The immediate thread to pull at is Gertrude Stein’s theory of syncopation in *Plays*. “I find I’m often racing ahead of a speaker, anxious to keep up...” Maxwell’s anxiety mirrors Stein’s own experience of anxiety watching theater and falling out of time with the proceedings. The entirety of the passage brings to mind Stein’s play *Listen to Me*. It is perhaps my favorite play. It is certainly my favorite repeated phrase in any play. I might have already mentioned this affinity earlier in this essay.

Maxwell is certainly linking to Robbe-Grillet’s *Le Voyeur*. “On stage, listening is the way into the present moment.” We might substitute one of Maxwell’s hypothetical actors in this passage for Mathias, our unreliable narrator in *Le Voyeur* who uses listening as a way of sorting temporal detritus. The constant interrogation of *what* is heard and *when* it has gone from noise to that which has received listening. When the hearing and the listening are in sync, the mind has found the present. The reader (audience) experiences listening as a potential situating force within an ambiguous event. *The ambiguity of event*. That seems like a term we might want to coin. It’s apt for the Nouveau Roman, in which the event (murder) in *Le Voyeur* could also be a non-event (not murder). When the event becomes ambiguous, listening becomes mandated. A new contract is drawn up between audience and art.

In Maxwell’s estimation, even the actor is a sort of audience to the event, and the *ambiguity of the event* demands the actor listen (pay attention!) so that it might be actualized as present. *The event is present. Presentness is an event. Listen to the event that is present. Listen to the present and actualize the event.* So what would this similarity between Maxwell’s theater and Robbe-Grillet’s Nouveau Roman suggest? Something about art creating an *ambiguity of event* which requires the listening of the audience in order to reconcile a past/present/future timeline unhinged by the collision of known and unknown.

For our own purposes, is it too presumptuous to say that Maxwell's theater and Robbe-Grillet's *Nouveau Roman* both contain futurity? Or in actuality, is this ambiguity of event resolved in each interaction with audience/reader? Perhaps. But does this disqualify it for the readers/audiences who have yet to experience it? This brings us into another speculation: can a piece of art hold futurity for some audiences and not for others? Or do all audiences travel on the same timeline?

“A critical question in theater-making is: What’s at stake? And the question represent the theory that risk or conflict needs to be involved to make the proceedings for the stage worthwhile or interesting. When you don’t know, the stakes are inherent. Uncertainty keeps the room alive, it’s a gift” (58).

This isn't directly commenting on time in performance, but I think it is an essential question for this thesis too. “What’s at stake?” This passage advocates for the ambiguity we want to retain in futurity, for “when you don’t know, the stakes are inherent.” Therefore, the stakes of this thesis are inherent, because we don’t know. “Uncertainty keeps the room alive”, and uncertainty keeps this thesis project alive.

“Performing in a play is a working paradox—you step on stage and contradictions fly at you: real versus fake, contrived versus spontaneous, aware versus unaware....The paradoxes stem from the predicament of being in two places at the same time: the room and the story. The body grapples with the potent mix” (71).

This is really something. “The room and the story”. We might think of that as an offshoot of “real versus fake.” I don’t think that’s precisely what Maxwell means though. It might lie more along the lines of known and unknown. And as we have found, known and unknown almost always implies a timeline. “The room” is the present. But not necessarily the performance. “The story” is always in danger of being somewhere other than the present. The story is only in the present if the actors are listening.

Actually, the story might only be present if the room is also listening. The room is a space, but it is also a time, the present. The room is present and in the present. The story is not a space, it is only a time and tasks (blocking, speaking lines). “The predicament of being in two places at the same time” for the actor is the body knowing that its temporal and spatial association with the room makes it present and in the present. However, the body of the actor also must make the story present and in the present, which is an extreme effort of task and, most importantly, listening. If the actor does not listen, the room will be in the present, and the story will be in the past, and this will not be a pleasurable sensation for any party involved.

“I am the audience member. I sit down and there is a void between us. I can’t stay with you in time, I race ahead, or I lag behind. As I watch, the moment is already disappearing. I am yearning for moments as they occur, predicting moments that haven’t. How can we manage this, to be in the past, present and future, in the same room,

watching the same play? Yet, despite being out of sync, despite any delay-effect between our pulsing bodies, a charge jumps across, and you carry it. You emit and thereby charge me, and it starts all over again” (74).

These are the questions, aren't they?

And Maxwell offers us the actor as answer.

“A charge jumps across, and you carry it. You emit and thereby charge me, and it starts all over again.”

They reach the perpetual beginning.

By listening.

If we are convinced of the actor's temporal powers, then what do we do with this project?

Do we say, Actor, I know you can make the present in a room. Can we now work on making the future in a room?

Do we say that to an actor?

Maybe.

“You don't ever escape time, no matter how far you come, but you can get dulled by it, cease to be surprised by it. And just as you can lose your place in the script, you can lose your place in life. Usually, the tether back comes in the form of human beings” (81).

This just seems important.

Key Ideas: Rep & Rev/ Relationship & Rupture between spatialized and temporal
 'presentness'/ Elasticity of Time between creation and performance & consumption/ Beginning
 Again & Again & Again/ Perpetually Happening but ruptured actualization/ Perform the Future?/
 Holes/ Paying attention/ Listening/ Synchronicity/ Forgetting & Intentional Forgetting?/
 Anew/Newness.

Beckett. *Not I*.

Samuel Beckett is an Irish Dramatist, who became famous for his 1952 play *Waiting for Godot*, and produced prolifically through the early 1980's. His work helped define modernity, and gave rise to the term "Theatre of the Absurd", a new form of drama that emphasized the absurdity of existence over the naturalistic coherence of earlier dramatic forms. Characterized by minimalism and enigmatic language, Beckett's work is subversive to the known and unambiguous.

Though his entire oeuvre is worthy of examination, we will focus on Samuel Beckett's 1972 dramatic monologue *Not I*, the refrain of which, "...What?...the buzzing?" is physically tattooed on my body. The monologue, which traditionally lasts thirteen or so minutes, is spoken rapidly by what appears to the audience as a disembodied Mouth-contoured in bright red lipstick-floating through an otherwise darkened space. A link to a video of the 1973 performance with famed Beckett collaborator Billie Whitelaw is below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16rSsThMDiU>

Though there is much in the staging to unpack, it is the punctuation of *Not I* which is most striking. The entire passage is pregnant with ellipses and question marks. Independent of Beckett's work, I've developed my own theory that the ellipsis is the most ambiguous of all punctuation. And a question mark suggests the unknown. Unless it is rhetoric? Don't answer that.

? = Unknown

... = Ambiguous (in a more specific sense, often as though the person is experiencing a strange, abstracted, ambiguous state.)

So,
in Beckett's *Not I*, the recurring phrase:

"...What?...the buzzing?"

can be translated:

"(ambiguous) What (unknown) (ambiguous) the buzzing (unknown)"

What we're left with is a couplet built from a sense of ambiguity, leading to an attempt to name the ambiguity, and a recognition of the futility of naming relenting to the unknown.

Since the unknown and the ambiguous are our descriptors for artistic futurity, we see from this translation that Beckett's *Not I* may well hold futurity. However, we have the added stipulation

that the difference between merely being mired in ambiguity/unknown and the ambiguity/unknown in a temporal dimension is the temporal element, we must ask is there a temporal element to *Not I*?

What immediately stands out is the relationship of this repeated phrase to sound and listening:

“went silent as the grave . . . when suddenly . . . gradually . . . she realiz— . . . what? . . . the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all dead still but for the buzzing . . . when suddenly she realized . . . words were— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . [Pause and movement 2.] . . . realized . . . words were coming . . . imagine! . . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize at first so long since it had sounded . . . then finally had to admit . . . could be none other . . . than her own . . . certain vowel sounds . . . she had never heard . . .”

Here we see a silence being interrupted by this perception of sound-- “the buzzing?” and later we realize that this ambiguous sound can be recognized as “words”, which are then recognized as “a voice she did not recognize” and then finally claims the sound as “her own.” But, this is not a resolution, for her own voice is making “certain vowel sounds...she had never heard...” .

The phrasing of this leads us to the ambiguous phrase “she had never heard”, which in this instance, could hold two distinct implications: first, her own voice had never made certain vowel sounds before, which is why she had never heard them. This leaves us with the question: why had her own voice never made certain vowel sounds before and how could this be?

The second possible implication is that her own voice actually had made certain vowel sounds before, but she had never heard them, because she had not listened. This leaves us with the question: why had she never listened to her own voice make certain vowel sounds before and how could this be?

“ . . . if only for a moment . . . and no response . . . as if it hadn’t heard . . . or couldn’t . . . couldn’t pause a second . . . like maddened . . . all that together . . . straining to hear . . . piece it together . . . and the brain . . . raving away on its own . . . trying to make sense of it . . .”

Further in the monologue, we see again this connection between “...straining to hear...” and “...trying to make sense of it..” Just as we saw in Maxwell’s *Theater for Beginners*, there seems to be a clear tactic here for listening as a method for fixing oneself into the present. For Maxwell, it is his performers who must find their way in time to the present through listening. For Beckett, it is this disembodied Mouth, this entity of past trauma, that is trying to tether itself to the present by listening. Here, listening is also a way back to “sense”, which is the opposite of the ambiguous or unknown, and thus the past or present. The context of *Not I* suggests it is the present. In a complicating way, the trauma of some past event that seems to be perpetually beginning in Mouth’s memory is the main temporal issue at play. As though psychologically, because trauma can carry a sort of ambiguity with it, her punctured memory masquerades as her present so that she cannot be in her actual present.

Does this reading complicate our understanding of the artistic future? We'd categorized the known or unambiguous as present or past, but here, a traumatic past seems unknown or ambiguous. There's an understanding of this where we claim that past trauma can somehow shapeshift to be the victim's future. It would account for our grammar showing the Mouth in a perpetually confused state. This is a harrowing and brutal conclusion.

Another possible reading is that the traumatic past of Mouth actually *is* known and unambiguous to Mouth's *unconscious*, and that it is only in her *conscious* mind that it is presenting itself as unknown and ambiguous. Thus, the psychological fissure that is occurring in *Not I* is a temporal reckoning of the disparate parts of Mouth's mind.

We'd be remiss not to mention how the first line of this passage is utterly reminiscent of the opening line of Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur*.

Not I:

“ . . . if only for a moment . . . and no response . . . as if it hadn't heard . . . ”

Le Voyeur

“It was as if no one had heard. The whistle blew again-- a shrill, prolonged noise followed by three short blasts of ear-splitting violence: a violence without purpose that remained without effect. There was no more reaction--no further exclamation-- than there had been at first; not one feature of one face had even trembled” (1)

A bit eerie, no? A momentary noise, eliciting no reaction, and suggesting a failure to hear.

Next, let us also think back to our discussion of Suzan-Lori Park's use of repetition as augury. This repeating phrase, “...What?...the buzzing?” acts as a refrain. After the second usage, we assume that we will hear it again. Isn't this potentially as dangerously reductive as the earworm radio pop hit? Taking the future and turning it into the present? It would be, if not for the fact that Beckett is using this very expectation as leverage for an even more destabilizing acknowledgement. The Mouth *doesn't know where this repeated phrase is coming from, or even what it is*. It is in the discovery of the ambiguous origins and nature of this phrase from the character's subjective point of view that we interrupt all audience expectation.

We see a similar strain in the unreliability of Mathias in Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur*. Can't we see this as a form of Suzan-Lori Park's Rep & Rev? Rather than the actual grammar or language being repeated and revised, the protagonist's *understanding* of the repeated phrase is constantly being revised. And we've already linked understanding to listening and seeing. So it is the protagonist's listening to and looking at this repeated gesture that are constantly being revised. But these are the very faculties with which the human beast interacts with the world! If looking and listening are no longer sufficient to understand the repeated phrase, and the constant revising of these perceiving faculties cause the mystery to remain...I believe we might have just stumbled onto modernism.

It is why Mouth and Mathias are creatures of a new epoch of humanity. They are the humans whose ability to *listen* and *see* no longer can make sense of an obscure world, and neither theology, mysticism, nor paganism suffice as answers. They have actually become subservient to Rep & Rev, and we as readers are as well, caught in this cycle of constant beginning but no resolution. The thought divorced from the sense. The question divorced from the answer.

The contemporary human in an iterative nothingness.

Key Ideas: Grammar/Listening/Paying Attention/ Phenomenal Rupture/ Demonic relationship between sound & image/ Transgressive framing/ Forgetting & intentional forgetting?/ Rep & Rev/ Beginning Again & Again & Again/ Perpetual Happening but ruptured actualization/ Augury through repetitio/ Phenomenal interruption through perception.

Act III: A Unified Theory of Future Art

The way we begin is by looking and listening.

The phenomenal images and sounds allow us to see and hear.

Seeing and hearing lead to Paying Attention.

Paying Attention can ground one in the phenomenal present.

Unless there is a phenomenal or semiotic weakness which appears as mere indication.

Paying attention to an indication is a way of trying to find its source.

The source of the indication can be obscured by a transgressive frame.

In a transgressive frame, we do not have our presumed access to a source.

In a transgressive frame, the indication and the source have been divided by framing.

The demonic relationship between image and sound distorts indication and source.

We do not know whether to look or listen for the source if we do not know if the image or the sound is the indication.

Because we cannot find the source, we cannot resolve our experience.

So we must begin again.

The way we begin again is by looking and listening.

The phenomenal images and sounds allow us to see and hear.

Seeing and hearing lead to Paying Attention.

Paying Attention can ground one in the phenomenal present.

Unless there is a phenomenal or semiotic weakness which appears as mere indication.

Paying attention to an indication is a way of trying to find its source.

The only way we can begin again- by looking or listening anew- is by forgetting that we had already begun.

The only way we can find the source is by beginning again.

The only way we can find the source is by forgetting.

When we forget, we repeat.

But we repeat *anew*.

We suspect the source is in the future.

We try to imagine the source by breeding exact and false memories.

But we can never imagine the source or the source would not be in the future.

That is how we build a methodology to manifest, in present theatrical performance, a *temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous*.

We manifest, in the present, an indication (*the unknown and the ambiguous*) of a source that is elsewhere, the future (*a temporal dimension*).

...Act III: A Unified Theory of Future Art...?

...The way we begin is by listening and looking...?

...The phenomenal sounds and images allow us to hear and see...?

...Hearing and seeing lead to Paying Attention...?

...Paying Attention can ground one in the phenomenal present...?

...*Unless* there is a phenomenal or semiotic weakness which appears as mere indication...?

...Paying attention to an indication is a way of trying to find its source...?

...The source of the indication can be obscured by a transgressive frame...?

...In a transgressive frame, we do not have our presumed access to a source...?

...In a transgressive frame, the indication and the source have been divided by framing...?

...The demonic relationship between sound and image distorts indication and source...?

...We do not know whether to listen or look for the source if we do not know if the sound or the
...image is the indication...?

...Because we cannot find the source, we cannot resolve our experience...?

...So we must begin again...?

...The way we begin again is by listening and looking...?

...The phenomenal sounds and images allow us to hear and see...?

...Hearing and seeing lead to Paying Attention...?

...Paying Attention can ground one in the phenomenal present...?

...*Unless* there is a phenomenal or semiotic weakness which appears as mere indications...?

...Paying attention to an indication is a way of trying to find its source...?

...The source of the indication can be obscured by a transgressive frame...?

...In a transgressive frame, we do not have our presumed access to a source...?
 ...In a transgressive frame, the indication and the source have been divided by framing...?
 ...The demonic relationship between sound and image distorts indication and source...?
 ...We do not know whether to listen or look for the source if we do not know if the sound or the
 image is the indication...?
 ...Because we cannot find the source, we cannot resolve our experience...?
 ...So we must begin again...?

..& again...?

...& again...?

...although each time we begin again, we might listen or look in a new way...?
 ...Then the phenomenal sounds and images allow us to hear and see in a new way...?
 ...Then Hearing and seeing lead to Paying Attention in a new way...?
 ...Then Paying Attention can ground one in the phenomenal present in a new way...?
 ...*Unless* there is a phenomenal or semiotic weakness which appears as mere indications...?
 ...Then Paying attention to an indication is a way of trying to find its source in a new way...?
 ...The source of the indication can be obscured by a transgressive frame...?
 ...In a transgressive frame, we do not have our presumed access to a source...?
 ...In a transgressive frame, the indication and the source have been divided by framing...?
 ...The demonic relationship between sound and image distorts indication and source...?
 ...We do not know whether to listen or look for the source if we do not know if the sound or the
 image is the indication...?
 ...Because we cannot find the source, we cannot resolve our experience...?
 ...So we must begin again...?
 ...We begin again by listening or looking in a new way...?

...This is Rep & Rev...?
 ...We use Rep & Rev because there is a separation between indication and source...?
 ...The only way we can begin again- by listening or looking anew- is by forgetting that we had already begun...?
 ...The only way we can find the source is by beginning again...?
 ...The only way we can find the source is by forgetting...?
 ...When we forget, we repeat...?
 ...But we repeat *anew*...?
 ...We suspect the source is in the future...?
 ...We try to imagine the source by breeding exact and false memories...?
 ...But we can never imagine the source or the source would not be in the future...?

...That is how we build a methodology to manifest, in present theatrical performance, a temporal dimension of the unknown and the ambiguous...?

...We manifest, in the present, an indication (*the unknown and the ambiguous*) of a source that is elsewhere, the future (*a temporal dimension*)...?

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Act IV: Project Proposals

Based on our Unified Theory of Future Art, here is a project proposal.

...Based on our Unified Theory of Future Art, here is a project proposal...?

The Last Cue Left

Working Synopsis:

ONA and SCRAGGS enter the auditorium using flashlights. They talk about the difference the recent apocalypse has made in their fashion sense. They proceed to the stage. ONA reveals she used to practice Stage Management. She heads to the Stage Management booth and is shocked to find that the QLab is still functional, and the last show file before the apocalypse is still saved. Over the duration of *The Last Cue Left*, ONA and SCRAGGS cycle through the old show cues, re-imagining the story based solely on the tech design. They begin making their own meaning out of the design cues, mixing their past, their future, and their fictions with the lights and sound (and projections?) of the actual theater space.

When Intelligent Design seems so stupid, can we design ourselves a life with meaning? The world already ended, so what happens when ONA and SCRAGG get to the end of the show? Who will take the final bow?

Conceptual Scenographic Ideas:

*The show would be run with the actual SM booth of the theater in real stage time. One of the actors would need to know how to operate and cue out of QLab.

*This also means there should be absolutely no cueing or design outside of what we see the character trigger. This should be true pre-show, as well as in the scenes within the play that the character is not actively using QLab. If this means we sit in the dark and quiet for those scenes, that's great! Or maybe we actively find and plug in a ghost light?

*A sort of reshuffling of the hierarchy between Time, Design, Stage-Management, and the production process could give this a radically different feeling from a traditional play. It would also exist in a really interesting spectrum of meta-theater—the audience wouldn't necessarily be seen, but there would be no pretense about the light and sound design. There would be no design fourth wall, yet a fourth wall in performance might still exist? A *temporal* fourth wall? It might make the audience feel even more voyeuristic in an exciting way.

*What is a temporal fourth wall? How do we manipulate it? Because what if one big element of live performance is the audience in temporality. We know it is because of Stein's synchronicity. And I'm not sure the thesis before this really ever touched on this, but what if-- and this now relates to Maxwell-- what if the creators can't create a future product, but all products have inherent futurity so long as it leaves a space for audiences of the future to interact with it? Or even study it hermeneutically? Which would then give literature futurity?

* We'd work with designers in a more active way throughout the process. In the play, there'd be an element of these characters trying to define themselves and find meaning within the design of this show. Maybe in the process of making the show, this same spirit could exist, where my writing could be partially informed by the generative ideas of the designers on the show. By radicalizing the process with reshuffled hierarchies, the temporality of the show also becomes radicalized. In this case, made ambiguous to the audience. The audience will be experiencing a show that is radicalizing the hierarchies in process, but won't have definite access to how this process played out, thus leaving them in the unease of not knowing where they are in time.

Very Preliminary Story Points:

*I've sketched out an opening scene of entering the auditorium space and discovering the Q-Lab, but beyond that, it will be an ongoing process of collaboration with designers to discover what happens next.

*As they live on the stage, maybe one of the characters begins imagining a ghostly audience where the audience sits. Starts performing in the middle night. Finds a microphone? Maybe starts to interrogate whether this is the ghostly audience of past performances or the ghostly audiences of future performances? He wonders if he is in the old show or the new show?

*Maybe an old actor from the show makes an appearance? Who has been hiding there? And he only knows some of the lines from the original production? And there's this temporal fold between the original writing, the first performance, and the iterative performance in the present? And this throws a wrench in ONA and SCRAGGS feeling of authorship?

*One of the Q-Lab cues is a piece of media that is created for the show, or is a piece of media that has been talked about being made by people but never has, so imagined but never made, and now it is made, but it is clearly unfinished. Like a video that still needs editing. Or a filmed puppet show where we see the strings. Or whatever future media exists in the present when this play is happening.

Once ONA finds out there is a media cue, she stops it from playing, and is like, we need to make this a movie night. And it's weird, because with the other stuff, they were just guessing, there was this ambiguity, this unknown, they were just crafting this material into whatever they narratively needed for their life, but now, this piece of media is more definite maybe? And so it gives them a clearer depiction of what the authorial intent of the play is? Maybe it disappoints them? Or disappoints one but not the other?

Or maybe, like Lance Weiler talked about, this future piece of media is intensely interactive. It is meant for audience participation. And maybe they realize that this whole piece that they themselves have been narrativizing was actually meant as an interactive experience in which each person narrativized their own experience? What would be the implications of this?

First Scene Sketch:

SCRAGGS and ONA enter the auditorium using flashlights.

There are no stage lights, no sound cues, nothing should be run through QLab until ONA triggers it.

We are likely in the dark, or there is a ghost light that has been plugged in for a long time.

SCRAGGS wears a pretty nice coat.

SCRAGGS

Can you believe I found this coat?

ONA

Can you believe there was a time we shopped on-line instead of off-corpses?

SCRAGGS

I prefer corpse shopping. It's easier to size. The internet was guess work. Here, if you find a corpse that is roughly your size, you know the clothes are going to fit.

ONA

Gross.

SCRAGGS

What? Just think of them as mannequins. Or fashion models, if it's less creepy for you. Listen, I thought we'd be in rags or like ripped shredded whatever, but this is honestly the best dressed I've ever been.

ONA

I think that's more a commentary on your pre-pocalypse life—

SCRAGGS

Prepocalypse?

ONA
Yeah pre-pocalypse.

SCRAGGS
Whoa.

ONA
What...

SCRAGGS
That's cool.

ONA
Thanks?

SCRAGGS
I didn't know we were saying that.

ONA
I mean. I am? I don't know if *we* are.

SCRAGGS
No, we definitely are. It's great. Really great.

ONA
Alright. So what is this?

They take in the theater.

SCRAGGS
It looks like it used to be a theater. But not for, like, movies. Like the other kind that no one went to.

ONA
It's still a theater.

SCRAGGS
Listen we have a fundamental difference on this, let's not always argue every time this comes up.

ONA
I think this theater is still a theater like the taco shop is still a taco shop even if society has changed and you think no customers, no business. Or in this case, audience.

SCRAGGS

And I think once the function of say a taco truck is not able to be fulfilled any longer, to serve tacos to living humans, then it is no longer a taco truck.

They make their way to the stage.

ONA

Do you know anything about, like, plays?

SCRAGGS

Like Shakespeare?

That's all.

I've heard of Shakespeare.

Do you?

ONA

Actually, a little.

SCRAGGS

Really?

ONA

Yeah.

SCRAGGS

Wow, I never knew that about you.

ONA

Yeah.

I was in, like, theater club in high school.

SCRAGGS

You *acted*?!

ONA

No! no.

God no.

I was a Stage Manager.

SCRAGGS

What's-?

ONA

I, like, made things happen. Like the lights and sounds and all that, I made sure they all fired correctly and made sure everyone was organized and basically just made the shows happen.

SCRAGGS

Oh, cool. I've never heard of that.

ONA

Yeah it's an important position. The show actually can't happen without it. You have to be very organized.

SCRAGGS

Cool.

ONA

I'm very organized.

SCRAGGS

Yeah I know. You always sort your cans of food by the color of the label.

ONA

Yeah.

There's probably a booth around here.

SCRAGGS

Booth?

ONA

Like a command station for the production. Look I'll—maybe I could make some light--

SCRAGGS

Light's good!

She looks around for the SM booth. Finds it.

ONA

Yeah see this is a booth for Stage Manager. It's where you cue things.
Oh weird.

SCRAGGS

What?

ONA

The computer is still here.

SCRAGGS

?

ONA
There is—one second.
Oh super weird.

SCRAGGS
What?!

ONA
The QLab file is intact.

SCRAGGS
Is it tasty?

ONA
What?
It's not food.
No.

SCRAGGS
What is it then?

ONA
One second!
I'll try to show you....
There's no way it'll work though...
But I'm going to try something.

SCRAGGS wanders the stage imagining they are playing some sort of character.

At a pivotal moment in his acting, we abruptly enter our first design look.

It is a dramatic spotlight and ringing sound. This scares SCRAGGS to death.

He runs and hides like he is under attack until it stops. Then dark and silence, no design elements.

ONA
It worked!!

SCRAGGS
What the hell?!

ONA
Are you okay!

SCRAGGS
What the hell Ona!

ONA
It's fine, everything's okay!
One sec let me see if the next cue--

SCRAGGS
Holy shit.

The next cue is a non-intrusive light look.

ONA
There! How's that!

SCRAGGS
Where am I?

ONA
Oh nooo you're fine.
I'm supposed to, like, yell something first like "loud sound!" so I don't startle/ you when you-

SCRAGGS
/I actually thought I was going to DIE Ona!
I thought I was being smote by some residue of the ending!
Are you kidding/ me!?!

ONA
I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.

SCRAGGS
Fuck.
Okay.
I'm alright.
What was that?

ONA
That was QLab.
Very loud sounds and bright lights.
Produced by localized sound speakers and PAR Fours.

SCRAGGS
What?!

ONA

There is a computer in that booth. That computer has a software program called “QLab.” QLAB is the program that all the design cues of a play are built and then triggered during the show. What just freaked your fuck was me opening that computer, opening QLab, and finding that the last show that was here before *the ending* was still saved in the program.

SCRAGGS

Huh?

ONA

It means that there are a whole bunch of lights and sounds that make up the last play that were on this stage, and I can basically make the show happen by pressing a few buttons.

SCRAGGS

Oh.

Why is that exciting?

ONA

Hm.

I am really excited aren't I?

Why *is* that exciting?

SCRAGGS

It's not food.

Usually you only get excited about food.

ONA

It's not food.

Hm.

Maybe because one, it's like an artifact, or a remnant from before *the ending*.

SCRAGGS

So are all the Coca-Colas.

ONA

Yeah but this different.

SCRAGGS

Okay...

ONA

Or maybe it's like-

We should figure out what show it is!

SCRAGGS

Will we be able to?

ONA

If it's a popular one.
Wait, where are we?

SCRAGGS

You think it's a theater and I think it's just a big room.

ONA

No, I mean what part of town?

SCRAGGS

Oh.

Well let's see we passed the old [relevant neighborhood landmark]. And there was the [relevant neighborhood landmark.] So we're like in [name neighborhood of theater].

ONA

Okay I know this!
I know where we are!
This is [name theater]!

SCRAGGS

Never heard of it.
What's that mean?

ONA

It'll be like, kind of a weird sort of play probably.

SCRAGGS

Weird?

ONA

I just mean we probably won't have heard of it. Like it's not Shakespeare.

SCRAGGS

Oh then yeah I haven't heard of it.

ONA

So we probably won't guess it with the cues.

SCRAGGS

Are you disappointed?

ONA

No.

No!

It's still cool to be here.

SCRAGGS
I'm ready to sleep.

ONA
Okay.
Do you want dark and quiet?
SCRAGGS
Huh?

ONA
I mean I could look at QLab and see if there's like a good sleeping cue. Like soft low light and maybe like, maybe a white noise machine?

SCRAGGS
Ugh no my partner used to sleep with a white noise machine. It's one of the reasons I'm glad everything ENDED. I like the silence and the dark.
ONA
Okay, let me quit QLab then.

She goes to the booth. Quits QLab. Darkness and silence.

SCRAGGS
Should we just lay on stage?

ONA
Yeah, let's!

SCRAGGS
We didn't do a sweep of the place.

ONA
Yeah. But someone would have heard all that noise and come and checked it out.

SCRAGGS
Unless they're waiting for us to sleep.

ONA
Whatever. It's so dark they'll never find us. Goodnight.

SCRAGGS
....goodnight.

...End First Scene Sketch...?

...?

...?

...?

There are worse times than this.
I am remembering the worst times.

...?

...?

...?

There are worse rooms than this.

....?

...?

....?

I am waiting for the worst rooms.

*An artifact is not a fact
 until it is found.*

Lost, it was obscure.

Obscurity is the state of being unknown.

Prior to being found, an artifact is unknown.

Facts are known.

These are no facts.

I found this artifact.

I know it for

I know it for...

a fact...?

Post-Script

I am the author.

I am the eternal being that lives in the embarrassing labor again & again.

I am the past of what is written.

The origin point of this project sounded simple.

Sounded simple when I said it.

Simple sounds being said.

...

...

...

Adapt the Future.

The resulting year involved reckoning with my own simplicity.

My mind is an antagonist. It plays a childish game; a purely linguistic game in which it rephrases a term in its opposite without considering the resulting meaning.

Childish Game

My tongue + Adapt the Past = Adapt the Future

Many artists want the future to hold a utopian world and work towards that end.

I want the future to hold a world where meaning is achievable. But that is not the same as a utopian world. I don't know that I would feel any better in an utopia, so I find myself at odds with the utopian ideals projected by the arts.

I speculated that adapting the future might demonstrate the future as a place where meaning is possible. If I adapted that future into the present, then art could create a context in the here-and-now in which meaning is possible.

That was my base desire in beginning this project. It has hopefully grown past this desire, but it's important to admit the baseness of its birth.

I start with a post-script because it is indicative of the organizing principle of this ...?

I had to decide what the spirit of a ...? should be, and it seems like the sweat and labor of critical thought per annum.

In this ...?, we will try to show our work, and Smith's thought processes, and how if one keeps digging their hole they can find the beginning of their digging of a hole.

A shovel.
Some dirt.
The only beginning in the world...

...in the *Earth*.

Some dirt.
A shovel.
The only beginning begins in the Earth.

something is buried...?
something *must* have been buried.
a beginning?
Or you're digging a hole to begin...?
to bury something...?

My hands hold raw flesh.
I'm digging again.
I'm beginning to dig again.

This ends the post-script.

Now the words travel back.

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