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McPhee, Molly Amanda

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Miasmatic Performance:  
Carceral Atmospherics in the Theatre of Clean Break

Molly McPhee

ORCID: 0000-0001-7729-9061

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Department of Theatre, Victorian College of the Arts,  
University of Melbourne

*This thesis is submitted in total fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

# Abstract

In this practice-informed doctoral thesis, I investigate the aesthetics that allow Clean Break Theatre Company, who work with women in prison and women at risk in the United Kingdom, to plunge audiences into atmospheres of imprisonment, resilience and subversion at the theatre. Through an exploration of six plays made while I was a company member (2009-2015), I propose that concepts of prison and criminality in Clean Break's theatre become porous, atmospheric events – *miasmas*, as I argue here – which both elicit, and simultaneously confound, a collective desire to attribute a clear function to prison in society. Instead of treating prison as a setting through which storylines of incarceration move, in these productions 'prison' becomes a carceral logic, organising the dramaturgical semantics, temporalities and atmospheres of the play, to signify the conditions of carceral society at large. I call this 'miasmatic performance.'

Miasmatic performance, I suggest, conjures juridical atmospheres, policing atmospheres and contagious atmospheres within audiences at venues such as the Royal Court, Soho Theatre, or Almeida Theatre, the majority of whom do not have lived experience of the criminal justice system. Section One, 'Miasmatic Aesthetics', develops decomposition and secretion as two key aesthetics of miasmatic performance. Section Two, 'Miasmatic Contagions', theorises the capacity of the miasmatic performance register to simulate and critique concepts of 'contagious crime' and social contagion. Section Three, 'Miasmatic Investigations', explores activations of the carceral imaginary through casework at the theatre. A miasmatic register in these Clean Break productions becomes both hopeful, and encourages collective responsibility, as it provokes an affective experience of carceral power within audiences who are often only latently aware of their own participation in carceral society.

# Declaration

I confirm that this thesis, 'Miasmatic Performance: Carceral Atmospherics in the Theatre of Clean Break', comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. This thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length.

Signed

Molly McPhee

26 April 2020



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Each time I type the word 'miasmatically' into my computer, it asks me if I perhaps meant 'miasmatic ally' instead. Now I must give into my document's frantic desire! There have been so many miasmatic allies over the years, who have sustained me throughout this research. To my supervisors, Alyson Campbell and Paul Rae, thank you for your wonderful insight, care and generosity across all our conversations. To the women I met when I walked through the door at Clean Break and who are now my dear friends, thank you for the incredible courage, wisdom and tenacity each of you bring. Helen Pringle, I miss you.

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2. Excerpt of *Pests* used as epigraph to the Introduction (9-11), granted by the playwright Vivienne Franzmann
3. Excerpts of the unpublished play *Sweatbox* included in Chapter Two, granted by the playwright Chloë Moss
4. Excerpts of the unpublished play *Little on the inside* included in Chapter Four, granted by the playwright Alice Birch

# Introduction

## Miasmatic Performance for Miasmatic Times

*Knock on the door. Nothing.*

*Another knock. Another. Nothing.*<sup>1</sup>

Driving home one day in 2018, Mark Leech, editor of the *Prisons Handbook for England and Wales*, tuned in to a prison inspection report on the radio. It revealed that ‘cells were vermin-infested and overcrowded, sewers and toilets were blocked, windows were missing, the few staff in charge were overwhelmed with work, physical attacks were at record levels’ (Leech 2018). Having jumped in midway through the report, Leech wondered which of the UK prisons could be its subject. Could it be Liverpool prison – recently damned as ‘squalid [...], so dirty, infested and hazardous to health that it could not be cleaned’, except by specialist external contractors? Or Nottingham prison, declared ‘fundamentally unsafe’ by health officials that year (Travis 2018)? Leech was shocked to realize that, in actuality, the descriptions seeping from his radio related not only to another place, but to another time: the infamous Bedlam asylum, over a century ago.

*Louder. Much louder. From a pile of shredded newspapers, a face darts out.*

What shock the public may experience when confronted with headlines of prisoners forced to live, and die, in the ‘worst conditions ever seen’ by inspectors (Travis 2018) is tamped down by perceptions of the prison, as a specialist institution, designed to

---

<sup>1</sup> The italicised quotes interspersed from this page through to page 11 are extracted from the opening stage directions from the play *Pests* by Vivienne Franzmann (2014, 5).

sequester those who encroach upon and ‘pollute’ a hegemonic socius (Bauman 2000, 2004, Wacquant 2009). As Leech points out,

Despite the wealth of evidence to the contrary, the public view of prisons is still that they’re “holiday camps”. The longer the sentence and the harsher the regime, the better. Ask about deaths in custody and often the answer is: “Who cares?” (2018)

In *The Prison and the American Imagination* (2009), Caleb Smith notes that since European and American prison reform movements began in the late eighteenth century, public imagination of the prisoner has coalesced into two radically different figurations. In one, the prisoner is a soul, infinitely capable of reform through self-governance; in the other, the prisoner is a body in abject form, ‘a cadaverous, dehumanized body’ (Smith 2009, 6). These two ‘irreconcilable’ representations are, Smith argues, fundamental to the way that the public imagines prisoners, and correspondingly, to the way that the prison system has developed over two hundred years. The modern condition of the body as vehicle for the soul – and the prison as a site of redemption and reform – is contradicted by the equally modern role of the prison as site of dehumanisation, degradation and violence. The public’s imagination of prisoners is thus constantly confronted by a central question: ‘How can the same captive stand at once for self and other?’ (Smith 2009, 6).

*A sequence of knocks. A secret sequence. PINK goes to the door. Twitch. Smells the air.*

Perceptions of the prison flick between prison as shaping and forming productive members of society and prison as waste management: ‘transforming those waiting to die from sociologically and psychologically rich human beings into a kind of untouchable toxic waste that need only be securely contained until its final disposal’ (Lynch in Pratt et al 2011, 79). Who becomes designated as ‘untouchable toxic waste’ determines and is

determined by racist, classist and nationalist ideologies, which in turn shape policing and legislative practices in the UK, and in nations around the world, today.

These are miasmatic times. Times in which public imagination of who is in prison, and who should be – of what the conditions of life are for those inside, as well as outside of prison – manifests in a haze of waste landscapes and fears of contagion. In this thesis I propose such hazes, wastes, and contagions as contemporary articulations of the ancient concept of *miasma*. Dating to seventh century BC Greece, *miasma* is a concept that has, over thousands of years, taken on a wide range of meanings and interpretations, from religious pollution, to climactic contaminant, to discredited disease etiology, as this thesis will explore. Although by nature *miasma* resists definition – offering instead a perpetually multifarious (and nefarious) elusiveness – what *miasma*'s many meanings and applications hold in common with each other is a sense of badness, of corruption, circulating through a place, and creating its atmosphere. As such, though never defined, *miasma* will be interpreted in a very specific way in this thesis: an atmosphere, which, in its corruption and corrupting properties, becomes a *performance atmosphere* of the criminal justice system.

*Opens the door.*

I approach *miasma* cautiously, as one would a very bad air, yet one whose badness nevertheless yields something compelling, strange and sensorial. When considered as a performance atmosphere of the criminal justice system, *miasma* offers, through sensorial experience, an expanded way of comprehending how prison itself seeps, bleeds and permeates throughout the entirety of the social field. Thinking through *miasma* is a way of understanding how carceral society produces atmospheres, sensations, imaginaries and suspicions of badness as a means to legitimate policing, racism, social stigma and hyperincarceration.



It is one thing to conjecture that miasmas drift freely through contemporary society. Yet if, as I suggest, miasmas are so prevalent (though invisible, undiagnosed) in contemporary society, where *can* they be seen, tangled with, opened up, expelled? In this thesis, I propose the theatre as one key environment where miasmas of the criminal justice system can be encountered; moreover, where they can take on a subversive role. Here, I am specifically interested in what happens within audiences when miasmas of waste, contagion, and seepage become activated, and even generated by, the institutions of theatre and prison in confluence with each other. What potentials do miasmas within this theatre hold to test the audience's imaginaries of prison and criminality? Can they subvert, challenge or overturn some of the trappings of these imaginaries? If so, how?

To explore these questions, I turn to the performance practice of Clean Break Theatre Company, who work with women in prison and women at risk in the United Kingdom. Founded by two women prisoners at HMP Askham Grange in 1979 and now globally 'the oldest prison theatre project still running' (Pensalfini 2016, 10), over forty years Clean Break has deployed a wide range of theatrical forms, including devised, site-specific performance and new writing, to stage representations of women impacted by the British criminal justice system. I was a Clean Break company member for six years, from 2009 to 2015, primarily in the role of General Manager. Drawing on this experience, I build – perhaps more precisely, accrete – a concept of what I call *miasmatic performance*, through chapter-by-chapter case studies of six Clean Break plays commissioned and produced while I was working with the company.

Clean Break's performance practice offers a particularly rich site of inquiry into the potential of theatrical representation, and the forms of spectatorship these representations incite, to reproduce – and challenge – the prejudice and violence of carceral society. One of the key elements driving this potential in Clean Break's work is

the fact that, though this is a company which commissions and produces work on prison and the criminal justice system, ‘prison’ is frequently not represented within the staged environment of the plays. In the six Clean Break plays I investigate here, the company instead stages scenarios of carceral society, which, through narrative or setting, situate the play in complex and often obfuscated proximity to prison’s usual representational sites of incarceration. In doing so, they provoke a cloud of questions on what these proximities call forth within the audience’s social imaginary, and on what, precisely, these plays cause to occur on sociocultural, dramaturgical and atmospheric levels in the theatre.

When, for example, two rat women scurry up and down a rake of rotting mattresses in Clean Break’s *Pests* at the Royal Court Theatre (2014), what is being evoked, by what means, and why? When audiences cram into a prison van to watch performances inside the holding cells (*Sweatbox*, Latitude Festival 2015), what slicks through this prison van, as audiences and performers become drenched with sweat together? How does an audience parse innocence and guilt in carceral narrative environments, when from within the sinister intimacy of a Soho basement in *Dream Pill* (Soho Theatre 2010), two sex trafficked girls speak, and later, their lines recombine into a prison love story of mandrake trees and cut-out tongues (*Little on the inside*, Almeida Theatre 2013)? In *Charged* (Soho Theatre 2010), Clean Break puts audiences on the case of a charged woman – yet the charge is never given or resolved: in this collective ‘casework’ of *Charged*, what are audiences actually investigating? From the charge, to the ghost: *Joanne* (Soho Theatre 2015) reanimates a dead woman, slipped through the cracks of social services. How do these odorific fleshies, once-fleshies and enfleshed-others form a comment on bodies and law?

‘Miasmatic Performance: Carceral Atmospherics in the Theatre of Clean Break’ investigates how Clean Break’s strategies and methods in these productions propose a distinct type of theatre-making and theatre-spectating, *miasmatic performance*, as audiences become immersed, engaged or otherwise invested in carceral territories and temporalities. In this Introduction, I provide context for Clean Break’s practice, as well as for those concepts and theories drawn from sociology, theatre studies and performance practice that will be crucial to the development of miasmatic performance throughout this thesis. I begin with a discussion of the ways that Clean Break addresses its audiences, and how these modes of address inform my own methodology for writing about audiences. I then introduce the concept of ‘carceral society’ and its importance to Clean Break’s theatre. Having posited some key aesthetics and politics for activations of carcerality at the theatre, I proceed to explore how theatrical paradigms such as ‘porosity’ and ‘atmosphere’ connect to these elements. Through junctures of atmosphere, porosity, and carcerality, I thicken the case for miasma as offering the most pertinent rubric for understanding both how carceral conditioning occurs at the theatre, and what subversive potentials theatre can offer in the face of such conditioning. I conclude with the cultural underpinnings of miasma, proposing what value these hold for the politics and aesthetics of Clean Break’s work, and how they will inform my concept of miasmatic performance.

Of the six plays under consideration in this thesis, *Pests* by Vivienne Franzmann (Manchester Royal Exchange, Royal Court and national tour 2014), was the first to inspire me to recognize the company’s work as aesthetically and discursively navigating a particularly *miasmatic* zone. The play combines waste aesthetics with a clearly articulated campaigning aim, clarifying much about how Clean Break addresses its

audiences in the process. For these reasons, the exploration of miasmatic performance begins with a brief plunge into the rat's nest of *Pests*.

### Inside the rat's nest: Campaigning to audiences through carceral fantasy

*PINK's nest. One room. A state. Newspaper torn up and shredded everywhere. A mattress slumped in the corner. A yellowing duvet – shredded paper all over it. Stained sofa. Old food. Cans. Sheets of newspaper randomly stuck up on some of the walls with parcel tape. An old and battered telly in the corner. The walls are streaked with blood/shit/food/who knows.* (including italicised quotes from beginning of chapter, Franzmann 2014, 5)

In Clean Break's *Pests*, two rat-women scamper around a debris-strewn 'nest' of rotting mattresses. The play begins as Pink's sister, Rolly, returns home after a short prison sentence. Pink has also been in prison and is at constant risk of being sent back: an untreated mental health condition and active addiction to what Rolly and Pink call 'gnaw' (heroin) leads Pink to attack people on the street, to shoplift and perform sex work. Through seventeen short scenes that chart the course of several months as Rolly and Pink adjust to living together again, Rolly tries to get a job, and maintain her sobriety, while Pink retreats further into the gnaw, and fantasies of her childhood with Rolly before they got split up and put in care.

From its opening rodent roll, *Pests* gives an unflinching examination of the ethical and social abscess of stigma arising from severe poverty, within a landscape of toxic waste. Pink and Rolly have been in care since they were 'pups', subject to sexual abuse, physical violence and deprived of education. *Pests* addresses social conditions of dispossession in the United Kingdom by conflating discursive thematics of social disposability, waste and animality within a literal trash floe on set.



Figure 1. Ellie Kendrick as Rolly and Sinéad Matthews as Pink and on the set of Vivienne Franzmann's *Pests* (2014). Set design by Joanna Scotcher. Photograph Jonathan Keenan.

It is within this configuration – one to rival the ‘worst conditions ever seen’ by prison inspectors – that *Pests* links the social exclusion of its characters, Rolly and Pink, to criminalisation in British society. Frantically pacing around her nest, Pink rattles a timeline of their short lives to date: ‘Alkie nutnutjob dad, piss, shit, punch, junkie mum, no shoes, lice, black eye, care, fucked, excluded, bullied, foster home, gnaw, prison, gnaw, prison, gnaw, prison’ (Franzmann 2014, 39). She anticipates the response of a middle class audience by interrupting herself to gush: ‘Oh my gosh, it must have been so terrible for you. I can’t imagine what it must have been like to have been born into a life of such deprivational violence. Horrifying. Absolute horrification’ (39).

Written following residencies in six women’s prisons and secure mental health units in the UK, Franzmann intended *Pests* to be a ‘campaigning’ work to middle class audiences (Gentleman 2014). It toured first to the Royal Exchange and Royal Court, who co-produced the play with Clean Break; it then continued on to Edinburgh’s

Traverse Theatre, the Liverpool Everyman, and the Plymouth Drum, concluding its run at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 2014.

‘[*Pests*] is brutal, but it is authentic,’ says Franzmann (in Gentleman 2014). She wrote the play to raise awareness on what women in prison frequently report as part of their lived experience: poverty; domestic violence and sexual assault; and childhoods spent in local authority care. Speaking to audiences at a Royal Court post-show talk, Franzmann expressed her aims in clear terms:

The main thing for me is: what are we doing? Why are we locking these women up for hours at a time, giving them meaningless jobs to do while in prison, not helping them? The treatment of women in prison feels immoral. ... I feel it [*Pests*] opens the door on a world that [audiences at the theatres on the tour] don't fully understand, and on people that those audiences don't necessarily have any contact with. ... There's no way I could have written this play if I hadn't had access to prison, and to this place [Clean Break] ... It feels like the experience is authentic, the play is authentic. (in Clean Break 2014)

Where, as Franzmann suggests, there is immorality alive in a society that could allow vulnerable people to be locked up, *Pests* drives hard at engendering outrage and shock at that immorality. Yet where does the claim to authenticity reside? What is authentic, in other words, about women performing as rat people within a trash floe? Here what is paradoxically authentic about rattified women relates to the structural impacts of criminalisation conveyed through an irreality of waste landscapes. In *Pests* the rattification of vulnerable women distends the aesthetic and performative space of the play enough for Franzmann to argue that its narrative of criminalizing conditions becomes highly ‘authentic’, perhaps even more authentic than what the same play written within the conventions of social realism could achieve.

In claiming this authenticity, the question immediately arises: why enter into a schematic of full-blown degradation – does *Pests* risk entrenching the dispossessions inherent to a ‘horrorification’ of poverty porn, in which abjection and victimhood become overrepresented, appropriative and silencing? If not, how does it move beyond this –

how might *Pests* foster on the contrary an ethical encounter with dispossession, one that might, as Athena Athanasiou proposes in *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, ‘encounter the challenge of conveying broken human corporeality – at once all too represented and radically unrepresentable?’ (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 132).

In this thesis, I investigate the ways in which Clean Break ‘campaigns’ to middle class audiences by engaging them in performances of a collectively held social imaginary about women, crime and the role of prison in British society. The example of *Pests*, in which rat women scrap, dream and shoot up in a waste landscape, provides a useful starting point in that it illustrates that what is conceived as ‘authentic’ by the playwright aligns to, on one level, her experience and impressions of the voices and lives of women in secure settings, and on another, to an authentic fantasy of a collectively held social imaginary around women and crime. And it is this imaginary, through carceral fantasy, which itself authentically materialises the dispossession and criminalisation of the urban poor. Fantasy is never free from relations of social power, as Judith Butler notes:

However, what fantasy can do, in its various rehearsals of the scenes of social power, is to expose the tenuousness, moments of inversion, and the emotional valence – anxiety, fear, desire – that get occluded in the description of ‘structures.’ How to think the problem of the ways in which fantasy orchestrates and shatters relations of power [is] crucial. (in Kotz 1992, 86-87)

This thesis asks: in precipitating carceral fantasies, that are yet researched, written and performed in close collaboration with women in prison and women at risk, how does Clean Break provoke a recognition of carceral power in audiences who are often only latently aware of their own participation in carceral society? – What ‘emotional valences’ and tenuous properties does the company draw out, draw on, or otherwise roil, in producing a fantasy with such proximity to ‘authentic’ experience? In the range of performances explored in this thesis, Clean Break draws on the domains of what is

‘at once all too represented and radically unrepresentable’, as per Athanasiou above, in order to precipitate an awareness of how fantasies of ‘wasted’ lives, ‘criminal’ bodies and estranged voices contribute to carceral conditioning in the United Kingdom.

Clean Break tours plays to a variety of settings, including custodial and community settings, as well as to what I will term ‘conventional’ theatres and festivals – my use of the term conventional here is only to demarcate these as venues purposed for staging theatre, rather than environments such as magistrate courts, town halls or, indeed, prisons. In this thesis, I track the impact of Clean Break’s productions on audiences at these latter venues: the Royal Court (Chapter One), Almeida Theatre (Chapter Four), Soho Theatre (Chapters Three, Five, Six), and Latitude Festival (Chapter Two). I characterise audiences in these theatre spaces as themselves not constituent of demographics routinely policed and targeted for criminal sentencing. During the years that these productions toured (2010-2015):

The Audience Agency’s [UK theatre] booking data from 2011/12 to 2014/15 ... showed that 90% of bookers ... were white. [In London] ... 79% of London bookers are white, 12% Asian/Asian British and 4% Black/Black British. (Arts Council England 2016, 53)

UK theatre audience demographics carry high socio-economic status and cultural capital: again as per the Arts Council, ‘Audiences from higher social groups are over-represented in the theatre audience – literature and data demonstrate a link between educational background, affluence and attendance’ (2016, 52). It is in small part (and by no means exclusively) through statistics such as these, that disparities in racial and class-based involvement shared between the institutions of theatre and the criminal justice system becomes evident. Black and minority ethnic women are 25% more likely than white women to be sentenced to custody at crown court (Women in Prison 2020). Poverty and lack of education are main factors in the backgrounds of women in prison: 82% of women’s prison sentences in 2018 were for non-violent offences, and theft



offences accounted for nearly half (46%) of all immediate custodial sentences given to women in 2018; acquisitive offences frequently relate to addiction and poverty (Women in Prison 2020).

There is a further rationale for understanding audiences in these terms, one that relates to Clean Break's own approach to theatre audiences. Franzmann describes *Pests* as a 'campaigning' work, and as a representative example, *Pests* clearly shows that the play was commissioned, written and produced in large part *with this audience demographic in mind*. Far from an unusual approach in Clean Break's commissioning and producing history, Franzmann delivers on a key component of Clean Break's mission to directly address audiences who do not themselves have lived experience of the criminal justice system as part of the company's social advocacy work. Of course, there are immediate problems inherent to homogenizing any audience into a monolithic status: even when characterised as middle class, as majority white, and as without lived experience of the criminal justice system, certainly any audience consists of radically heterogeneous minds, backgrounds, emotions, sensibilities, desires, and not least, expectations of theatre.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, I am not undertaking a reception study of Clean Break's audiences; instead, I am interested in how Clean Break imagines its audience, and addresses it accordingly. The chief concern here is to investigate the *carceral function of audiences*: what role Clean Break ascribes audiences as part of the company's social advocacy work – or 'campaigning' – as well as how carceral society seeks to eliminate agency within a particular model of carceral spectatorship. I attend to both Clean Break's approach, and models of carceral spectatorship at length in this Introduction. It is the work of this thesis to document and test the ways in which Clean Break's theatre agitates, and possibly comes to overturn, a carceral function within

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<sup>2</sup> For example, as theorised by Stuart Hall (2006 [1980]), and more recently Claire Bishop (2012), Jacques Rancière (2004), Susan Bennett (2006) among others.

audiences; with such an aspiration in mind, I align myself to Susan Bennett, who writes of her own critical approach on theatre audiences, ‘Cultural assumptions affect performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions. The role of those productive and emancipated audiences occupies centre-stage throughout these investigations’ (2006, 17). As such, in this thesis I investigate how Clean Break’s address to its audience implicates the audience carceral in its work; as a key part of this investigation, I also examine *how audiences manage this address* at specific performances where I was myself an audience member.

Inherent to the ‘centre-staging’ of audiences here is my own position as a kind of specialist audience member at each of the performances I discuss in this analysis. As Clean Break’s General Manager, I was involved in every aspect of the company’s work, from operations to education programme, outreach to leadership initiatives; and for the productions commissioned, produced and toured while I was at the company, I led on marketing and audience development. I was also in the audience for hundreds of hours across six years, watching and engaging with each of the productions I write about here, at rehearsals, on tours, filming productions, post-show talks and panels; and generally observing the audience and myself-as-audience. Though this thesis does not undertake a reception study, therefore, its contribution to audience research occurs through the many ways I engaged with audiences over the course of my work with Clean Break. These experiences led me to develop what performance scholar Susan Melrose has called the uneasiness of the ‘expert spectator’, in which

the expert-practitioner-researcher’s undertakings are likely to involve ... a ‘disciplined unknowing’ – an apparently curious and fragile knowledge-state ... This quasi-unknowing operates effectively as a ‘model of intelligibility’, or way of knowing and understanding, that the expert practitioner recognises. It renders the researcher’s investment relatively fragile, and ... it is thus ‘affectively-undergirded’. (2007)

As a kind of specialist audience member, the intimacy of my knowledge of artistic process, as well as the social justice work of the company – the women’s prison estate; the challenges faced by women at risk of offending; and structural inequities in the British criminal justice system – creates an affective, ‘disciplined unknowing’ in my observations of audiences, and of myself. I found myself experiencing a range of emotional responses at each occasion of spectating; sometimes these correlated to what I felt occurring around me, and at other times I felt uniquely isolated by processes of knowing/unknowing; at times attempting to suppress background expertise in myself. These effects and affects of uneasiness become further compacted as I write from memory of myself, and others around me, as spectators.

As I uneasily spectated, it became clear to me that *all* audience members around me were also experts. Our shared expertise was in carceral spectatorship. Yet as Clean Break put on several productions that complicated the barriers between audiences and performers, made use of unusual sites for performance, and deployed dramaturgical techniques that prevented catharsis or resolution, I noticed that some expectations of what a play about criminal justice would be *like* became overturned, and turned over unexpected emotions in the audience. At *Charged*, for example, one reviewer was surprised to find it was not ‘an orgy of narrowly issue-driven drama and tub-thumping political correctness’ (Taylor 2010); another was delighted that the plays allowed ‘you [to be] free to feel scared, angry, dismayed, uplifted, uncomfortable or happy as you wish’ (Tsoi 2010). These responses in themselves encapsulate some of the expectations of carceral spectatorship: tough, finger-wagging material, in which you are not ‘free to feel’ whatever you want. But that’s not what happens here: in these productions, something in the audience’s sensorium shifts, and sparks unexpected responses.

Penal sites of brutality, confinement, grief, hope and freedom dreams give shape to, yet do not limit, the affective dimensions of the carceral condition that comes across in Clean Break's theatre. Something about the distanced-immediacy of prison, its invisible-pervasiveness, its exclusionary-collectivity, touches audiences, expresses those zones of incarceration that are inaccessible to many audience members, but in which they nevertheless participate.

### From affect to miasma

When audiences express surprise at their experience of a Clean Break play, they may be coming close to what applied and prison theatre scholar James Thompson calls *bewilderment* within applied theatre performance: a bridging of affect and effect in audiences as 'a perplexed state created by transition [connected to] the dislocation of communities caused by exclusion, violence, poverty or imprisonment' (2003, 1-2). Within this bewildered state, a dislocated-connection itself creates the potential for a newly politicised social awareness. Similarly in *Applied Theatre: Aesthetics* (2015) Gareth White advocates for ways in which applied theatre, perhaps more than any other art practice, creates aesthetic forms out of heteronomies of experience: alongside conventions of beauty considered by the canon of philosophy of aesthetics as 'autonomous', applied theatre engages aesthetics of direct effect, including conceptual and societal underpinnings of a piece of work, as they provoke multiply-layered emotions, experiences, feelings, and affects. These heteronomous aesthetics connect performers and audiences to an engaged situatedness in the world around them.

Within scholarship around Clean Break's practice, Aylwyn Walsh (2016) makes a strong case for the particular role of affect in the company's 'dramaturgy of the cage', as she calls it. She identifies two Clean Break productions, *Fatal Light* by Chloë Moss

(2010) and *it felt empty when the heart went at first but it is alright now* by Lucy Kirkwood (2009), as moving outside the realm of realism to impact audiences on an affective level. These plays become 'valuable for the possibility of multiple, contradictory, and messy affect they promote. The female protagonists are rendered complex, rather than simplified' (2016, 315). Proximity to this messy affect, she suggests, enables transgressive audience recognition of institutional power structures. Theatre that engages form beyond realism – *it felt empty* is a promenade piece; *Fatal Light* deploys a dramaturgical strategy in which the events leading to a suicide in custody are relayed in fractured order – stimulates an affective engagement within the audience 'with both trauma and the banality of the cell' (2016, 322). I agree with Walsh's perception that it is through an affective engagement with audiences that Clean Break's work becomes criminologically efficacious – and perhaps even revolutionary in the promotion of an intensely sensorial awareness of the role of the criminal justice system in British society. 'Theatre's unique function,' suggests Walsh, 'is the possibility it provides to point towards potential trajectories of undoing the fixity of victimisation, crime and justice' (2016, 322). However what I am interested in here is not only how, in Clean Break's theatre, affect makes the criminal justice system live to the body of the audience member, but how particular kinds of affect conditioned through stagings of carcerality can in this theatre 'undo the fixity' of the prison system in part by making audience members' bodies briefly no longer their own by infusing them into atmospherics of carcerality within the theatre.

Here Brian Massumi's perception of affect as 'the doubling of the body in the situation' is directly relevant to how such an infusion or plunging of the body into an atmosphere may occur:

If affect is direct, it's in the sense that it's directly in transition – in the body passing out of the present moment and the situation it's in, towards the next one.

But it's also the doubling of the body in the situation – its doubling over into what it might have been or done if it had contrived to live that transition more intensely. A body doesn't coincide with itself. It's not present to itself. It is ... doubling over on itself, bringing its past up to date in the present, through memory, habit, reflex and so on. Which means you can't even say that a body ever coincides with its affective dimension. It is selecting from it, extracting and actualizing certain potentials from it. (2015, 7-8)

I seek to trace up what an experience of being atmospherically disaggregated from one's 'own' body can then afford in terms understanding or rationalising one's interpellation into a carceral collective, within and beyond the theatre audience. When people experience affect within theatre about (or of) the criminal justice system, how do these affects draw on carceral habits and reflexes? How does (not-)'coinciding' with the affect or emotion of staged narrative perhaps create a response to carceral scenarios within carceral citizens who are affectively, if not intellectually, invested in maintaining the fixity of the criminal justice system? If we are experiencing theatre within a collective imaginary, to what degree are these affects collective – do they become contagious amongst audience members? How does this theatre, in causing the body to not coincide with itself, bring it into co-incidence with a carceral collective in the audience? For theatre to change the criminal justice system, do audiences need to then rationalise this in a certain way, and if so, what is the role of a theatre company like Clean Break in engaging a particular rationalisation?

In order to engage these questions, this thesis incorporates considerations and circulations of affect, as well as of culturally constructed emotion. Yet, as befits a resistance to containment protocols of any kind, to approach the tentacular workings of carceral performance in Clean Break's theatre an even broader framework of analysis is required: this is why I turn to atmosphere, and specifically to *miasma* as a carceral atmosphere. The productions I discuss in this thesis, *Pests*, *Sweatbox*, *Dream Pill*, *Little on the inside*, *Charged* and *Joanne*, share several distinct discursive features and

aesthetic qualities. Through these shared features, I notice a performance modality beginning to form:

- A clearly articulated **campaigning** aim;
- Aesthetics of **waste and decomposition** (*Pests*); **secretions**, of sweat and urine (*Sweatbox*), of tears (*Dream Pill*); **contagion** and body parts (*Little on the inside*);
- Investigations into **causality in the criminal justice system**, via dramaturgies that are themselves causally complex, organised via multiple sites of performance, multiple roles performed by same performer, and collaborations between multiple writers and directors (*Charged*, *Joanne*);
- Narrative and staged settings **completely outside of prison spaces** (with exceptions of *Little on the inside* and parts of *Charged* – but even these are complexly rendered);
- **Site-specific** (prison van of *Sweatbox*) or **unusual performance spaces** (dressing rooms, foyers, court chambers, veterinary examination rooms – *Dream Pill*, *Little on the inside*) which activate heterotopic awareness of carceral conditioning throughout social field
- A focus in each play on the circumstances of women's lives – for example, poverty, mental health, addiction, or abuse – brought into direct or indirect relation to criminalisation, thus highlighting the **relationship between social stigma and criminal sentencing**.

A confluence of aesthetics of waste, thematics of stigma, and forms that question causality in the criminal justice system, all within a practice of theatre-making with particular audiences in mind: we are treading on ancient territory here. Precisely this confluence of elements has in fact existed since (at least) seventh century BC Greece, when the concept of *miasma* first declared itself, initially as a term to describe religious pollution and social staining. In the intervening millennia *miasma* has accrued many meanings, relating to air, to suffering, to staining, to disease and, very powerfully, to theatre – all connections I explore in this thesis.

In our contemporary period, *miasma* is most widely understood as a disease etiology predicated on an idea of foul air as climactic contaminant, discredited in the late Victorian period in favour of germ theory. In this Introduction, I lay out a poetics of *miasma*, which will demonstrate its relevance to contemporary British society far in excess of this limited connotation. For the moment and more abstractly, (as if all of

these terms were not at the moment abstract enough), I want to assert the particular value of miasma *as an interpretive mode*. This thesis approaches miasma not as a stable ‘concept’, but thinks through its hermeneutic value: through miasma, I propose, people perceive, understand, explain and justify the role of prison in contemporary society. Miasma offers a rich, if hazed, lens through which to discuss the intersections of theatre and the criminal justice system precisely because it is a kind of hermeneutic pollution; and in this role as pollution miasma crosses eras, fostering connections between past and present, across boundaries of specialisms (medicine, law, humanities, governance, among others), becoming what classicist and scholar of miasma Fabian Meinel calls ‘a medium of negotiation ... a tool to “construct worlds of meaning” and coherence out of incoherence, chaos and disorder’ (2015, 20-21). Within this interpretive mode, I suggest, miasma can give audiences and performers the opportunity to negotiate, experience and reflect on one of the most frightening and pervasive features of our contemporary society: carceral power.

These elements of miasma at work in the theatre propose to me an overall performance strategy, what I call *miasmatic performance*. Miasmatic performance is located in, and counteracts, the discursive, interpretative and aesthetic modes of miasma, and it seeks to articulate how carceral society performs. Through the case studies of six Clean Break productions, in this thesis I interpret miasma as a carceral performance mode, one that articulates the relationship of stigma to the penal system, making it into a climate or an atmosphere of performance. Miasmatic performance is a mode through which Clean Break interrogates the conditions of carceral society by challenging a collective imaginary of what prison is in British society, and who it is for, amongst audiences primarily without lived experience of the criminal justice system at venues such as the Royal Court Theatre, Latitude Festival, Soho Theatre, and Almeida



Theatre. Concepts of prison and criminality in these Clean Break productions become porous, atmospheric events – miasmas, as I argue here – which both elicit, and simultaneously confound, a collective desire to attribute a clear function for prison in society.

Where stigma is often stuck in static interpretations – a mark, or branding, often applied to delineated identity groups, and which can portray stigmatised groups as powerless victims (Link and Phelan 2001) – *miasma* is a stain, a bleeding, an atmosphere of stigma that envelopes and implicates all who are in it as co-creative of its manifestation. The exclusionary ‘marking’ or ‘branding’ of *stigma* is closely related to the concept of *miasma* in that each concept informs carceral paradigms: where social stigma motivates ‘moral panics’ and puts social normativity at the heart of the judicial process, *miasma* moves the moral panic into a terrain of ‘moral horror’ (Parker 1983).<sup>3</sup>

The ability of stigmatic social labelling to catalyse legal sentencing and to assign criminal identity in society is of fundamental importance to the research that follows, and indeed to Clean Break’s overall practice. In that it routinely focuses on the relationships between social stigma and incarceration, Clean Break’s theatre can be said to generate a critique of carceral society, over and above practices of imprisonment. What is carceral society, and how does Clean Break engage this concept in its theatre?

### ‘Clearly not prison theatre’: how concepts of social stigma and carceral society animate Clean Break’s practice

As a significant body of critical work by British sociologists, feminist criminologists, activists and legal scholars attests, the backgrounds of women in prison and women at

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<sup>3</sup> In ‘Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies’, cultural and legal studies scholar Colin Dayan describes stigma as an insidious fog of blood: ‘The degraded essence flows, like blood itself, in and out of bodies either literally or figuratively stigmatised, through the enslaved and the freed, the legally dead and the metaphorically incarcerated’ (2001, 10). *Miasma* is precisely – if ever it can be precise – this degraded essence.

risk demonstrate that the assignation of the criminal identity, the ‘at risk’, and the becoming-criminal stems from a terrain where legal identity is vastly overdetermined by cultural norms arising from prejudice and stigma (Zedner 1991, Kennedy 2005, Pemberton 2013, Gelsthorpe 2010, 2004, Tyler 2013). Stigma-driven gendered sentencing (and its analogon, gender enforcement) leads most women in the British criminal justice system to be arrested, cautioned or sentenced for non-violent offences linked to poverty, mental health, addiction, racism, and lack of education. Physical health (including HIV and Hepatitis-C diagnosis), disability, and parenting status are also factors (Corston 2007). The most recent ‘Women in Prison’ report at the time of writing lays out the relevant data as follows:

- Over 60% of women in contact with the criminal justice system have experienced domestic abuse.
- 53% of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse during childhood.
- 31% women in prison have spent time in local authority care as a child.
- Women in custody are five times more likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population.
- 39% of women report having a problem with drugs upon arrival into prison.
- Black and minority ethnic women are 25% more likely than white women to be sentenced to custody at crown court (Women in Prison 2020)

In *Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice*, criminal barrister Helena Kennedy QC reflects on decades of representing women in court: ‘None of these women require traditional incarceration but they are squeezed into a system that was designed for male offenders. Imprisonment is used as a means of social control, and that is particularly true in relation to women’ (2005, 81).

This is carceral society. First theorised by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1995 [1975]), carceral societies are defined by identification of deviant bodies and identities via an omnipresence of disciplining regulation. Prison provides rationale for stigmatizing concepts of social normativity, in

which fantasies of morality, social belonging, and public health become mixed up with adjudications on civic matters. In carceral societies, the concept of ‘prison’ seeps through national consciousness, regulating space, socio-economic frameworks, culture, temporality, and identities. ‘Prison’ becomes discursively ubiquitous as a fixed, even generically mundane concept: an undisputed *fact* of modern life.

Writing about the company’s practice in 2009, Clean Break’s Anna Herrmann, now Joint Head of Artistic Programme, states: ‘This is clearly not prison theatre. In a similar way in which the women we work with talk of the disabling effect of labels on their lives, Clean Break has also found labels of theatre practice limiting’ (329). One of the reasons that Anna Herrmann gives for disavowing a prison theatre label for Clean Break is her rejection of any labels at all. To resist labels of practice mirrors a resistance of social definitions – definitions that lead to the extreme restrictions of incarceration – at the crux of the company’s ethos. A resistance to the label arises from a perception of the label as itself an agent of imprisonment. Here the ‘not’ of prison theatre relates to a rejection of both the penal and stigmatic label; speaking through a ‘not’ of practice carries an immediate, politicised resonance for a demographic of women offenders and women at risk, who are routinely told they are not participating appropriately in society.

In disaffiliating Clean Break from prison theatre, Herrmann rejects the restrictive elements of representational politics. To produce the meaning of the company’s work via an exclusive site of prison restricts the identity of the company, when it is actually oriented toward breaking down categories of theatre making, just as it is oriented toward challenging the criminalizing role of stigma in society. To be ‘prison theatre’ also risks universalizing the company’s difference against a supposed ‘centre’ of theatre making practice, one which does not incorporate incarcerated groups and/or narrative of imprisonment into its theatre. Rejecting the label here indicates that neither a marginal

model, nor a hegemonic centralised model, of theatre is helpful to Clean Break when attempting to work both with and against the penal system. This movement away from a concept of a singular ‘prison theatre’ model is actually not at odds with trends in prison theatre practice. As Caoimhe McAvinchey notes, ‘there is no such thing as a single “prison theatre” model’:

Rather there is a panoply of innovation and reflective practice, some of which is driven by cognitive rehabilitative aims, some of which is about experimentation in an attempt to find the possibilities of theatre practice in sites where issues of power, dignity and humanity are constantly in question’ (2006, 27).

In line with McAvinchey’s articulation, Clean Break’s model is one of theatre practice, advocacy and education in the community (which includes prison environments), about, against, despite and because of prison.

Clean Break may be ‘not’ prison theatre. Not prison theatre and yet, this is theatre that does not ever dismiss an engagement with the institution of prison. Clean Break’s practice is perhaps more aptly situated within a double ‘not not’ of prison theatre practice: this is not prison theatre, but it is also *not not* prison theatre. Here I borrow from Richard Schechner’s concept of shifting identity in performance in which ‘theatrical role-playing takes place between “not me... not not me”’ (2006, 72, ellipses in original); and from Rebecca Schneider’s use of the double ‘not not’ as a performative site of reenactment. Where Schechner addresses the performance of liminality between self and other through performance,<sup>4</sup> Schneider further discerns the ‘not not’ as ‘generative of a relationship to history that partakes of the double negative’ (2011, 43).<sup>5</sup> While Schneider focuses on American Civil War reenactments (‘a reenactment *both* is *and* is not the acts of the Civil War’ [43, original emphasis]), among other sites of performance, to develop this relationship to history, her concept can be adapted here to

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<sup>4</sup> This liminality is key to making theatre with women in prison, as Caoimhe McAvinchey discusses in her work on the importance of ‘possible fictions’ in prison environments (2006). I explore McAvinchey’s application further in my analysis of Clean Break’s prison van play, *Sweatbox* (Chapter Two).

<sup>5</sup> I apply Schneider’s ‘not not’ of reenactment specifically to *Sweatbox* (Chapter Two).

express how histories, and I would add here *futures*, of imprisonment, become generated through the performance of prison as distributed throughout the social field. In other words, what is carceral society itself, but *not prison... not not prison*? Rather than theatre located in prisons or about penal sites, this is theatre about the overall social condition of carcerality, which articulates the bounded pastness, or over-there-ness, of prison as miasmatic haze into the field of the present. It is through this understanding of the carceral condition that the first and primary aesthetic of Clean Break's theatre can be articulated: prison is not over there, it is dispersed throughout the social field, including right here in the theatre. Accordingly, the way that the company interpellates its audiences derives from a subjectification of audience members as carceral citizens, performing an important function within carceral society through spectatorship. There are no innocent bystanders in carceral regimes. How does Clean Break create the conditions for this carceral function to become evident within audiences? Furthermore, how might an evidencing of carceral function become productive or subversive in this theatre, rather than a reification of carceral conditioning?

### The carceral function of audience in Clean Break's theatre

Clean Break describes itself as a 'women's theatre company changing lives and changing minds – on stage, in prison and in the community' (website). The company's emphasis on 'changing lives and minds' gives an indication of its own perception of the impact of its productions and education work: one that is broadly transformative for people who participate in it – this 'changing' of lives and minds reaches across demographics of women theatre makers both in prisons, and in community settings, to

theatre audiences in many different settings.<sup>6</sup> The identity of the company moves between spaces and narratives of imprisonment, community, and established theatre venues, troubling perceptions not only of what Clean Break's theatre is *about*, but whom it is *for*.

A primary way that carceral society functions is via a social imaginary of crime and punishment: what the public imagines is happening on the inside of prisons, and who the public imagines is, or should be, inside prisons. Carceral society creates and relies upon this collective imaginary to maintain its 'continuity of punitive criteria and mechanisms' (Foucault 1995, 299). In what is termed the 'carceral imaginary' within cultural studies, prison metaphors and cultural assumptions about criminality accrete or 'congeal' into a collective imaginary that reifies the institution of prison and practice of imprisonment (Fludernik 2005).

The carceral imaginary plays a strong role in constructing what cultural criminologist Michelle Brown terms 'penal subjectivity' (2009). Every citizen has a penal subjectivity, argues Brown, formed of, and regulated by, media transmissions of discipline. In the maintenance of penal subjectivity within carceral society, 'when distant from actual punishment, [performances of punishment] nonetheless provide frameworks for ordinary citizens to step into or out of self-conscious modes of awareness as moral spectators and deliberative citizens' (2009, 5). The penal subject proposes 'a temporal possibility and proclivity, a logic that expresses durability and prevalence in a contemporary framework – one in which we all engage' (2009, 26). When individuals engage penal subjectivity, they participate in a collective sensibility, negotiating a macro-imaginary of carcerality – an imaginary of security that is itself

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<sup>6</sup> Aylwyn Walsh draws attention to the debates around using 'transformation' for Clean Break's work: 'In my own sub-discipline [prison theatre], claims for transformation are viewed critically in light of funding agendas and policies such as payment by results. Nonetheless, as ... Anna Herrmann describes in a moving discussion of journeys through Clean Break's education programme, narratives of transformation are significant for women who have been involved with the company.' (2018, 24).

secure and durable as part of the process of normative temporal progression, and regulation.

For film historian Alison Griffiths, the carceral imaginary occurs through collective movement across shifting narrative sites: the public passes through ‘carceral topoi’ to produce collective ‘carceral fantasies’ (2016). Such topoi include death row and public executions, mess halls, transport buses but they also include media events based on fictions, like *The Shawshank Redemption* or *Orange is the New Black*. Everyone ‘knows’ what the space of prison looks like; you can walk down the corridors in your mind; hear the sounds of prison right now. This points to what Loïc Wacquant identifies as the ultimate *predictability* inherent to collective movement through the carceral imaginary. For Wacquant, everybody is a ‘penal pornographer’: like ‘carnal entanglements that fill pornographic movies, [carceral narratives] are extraordinarily repetitive, mechanical, uniform, and therefore eminently *predictable*’ (2009, xi-xii, original emphasis). How might theatre upset this predictability?

As a cultural product predicated on proximity, liveness and social collectivity, theatre carries the ability to dispel paradigms of mass-mediatised distance: carceral ‘topoi’ in the theatre become immediate, material, and specific to the context of the audience. In the Clean Break productions I investigate in this thesis, the hyperbolic sites of prison become diffuse; they are all but evacuated from the setting of the plays. What remains is an atmosphere of prison; a rumour; an unsettled shadow remanded to the edges of the theatre. In these ways, Clean Break’s theatre is more precisely defined as speaking to carceral conditioning because it throws audiences into scenarios in which prison has lost its position as a narrative framing device; ‘prison’ has been stripped of its designation as separate space, delineated by walls and wardens, over there (and emphatically outside of the theatre auditorium).

In 2018, Clean Break's then-Executive Director Lucy Perman MBE wrote of the specific value of challenging audience perceptions through theatre practice:

New research from the [UK] Prison Reform Trust confirms that more women are being recalled to prison than ever before. [...] Challenging and changing public attitudes and perceptions is an important part of the solution. Theatre brings stories to life and captures hearts and minds – enabling people to find a way into a world that can seem far from their own experience. (Perman 2018)

Perman's articulation places an emphasis on altering social attitudes by fostering a live proximity to stories of the criminal justice system. Through this reduction of perceived distance – a path-finding 'a way in' – theatre can 'capture' (to use her carceral idiom) audiences' collective social imaginary around women and crime. Here, it is interesting to note Perman's disambiguation of the 'heart' from the 'mind' (and vice versa), a turn of phrase that gives bodily articulation to an awareness of the range of theatrical techniques that might be required to provide a way 'in', within audiences who have become wary of rationalist or moralist appeals for change (Willet and Willett 2014). The use of 'capture' here similarly denotes an instrumentalisation of the imaginary as a place of detention, as audiences' hearts and minds are called to participate within a rubric of capturing.

In the appeal to audiences' social imaginary in the productions discussed here, artists without lived experience of the criminal justice system – here I include the directors, designers and performers, as well as playwrights – generate a rich terrain for critique of the function of prison in society, in that they themselves draw heavily from a social imaginary around how women function in penal environments. In Clean Break's commissioning model, playwrights spend long periods (typically several months, and up to a year) working with women in prison, at Clean Break's studios, and/or with at risk women in the community, as part of their commission. As Aylwyn Walsh notes in a 2016 article on Clean Break:



The resulting plays are often critically acclaimed for their engagement with the important issues that rarely get discussed outside policy circles (Gardner, 2010). What is important here is that the artist, rather than the prisoner/participant is the author of the representation of the criminal justice system; it is for this reason that the plays merit critical attention, since the professional platform draws public attention to issues of criminological importance (not always unproblematically). (311)

When a playwright without lived experience of the criminal justice system begins to work with women in prison and in the community, the ideological and physical distance upon which the carceral imaginary is predicated (and which the playwright herself carries) becomes distorted and politically activating. As Walsh notes, this is not always unproblematic and this is the case, at many points, for the productions I investigate here, as I discuss in the chapters to come. The risks taken by both the artistic teams, and the audience, in navigating these problems are part of the articulation of carceral consciousness at the theatre.

One immediately problematic area is in the classification of the audience itself. In the language cited above, *Pests* playwright Franzmann both affiliates herself to audiences, and homogenises them into a middle-class whole – ‘what are *we* doing? Why are *we* locking *these women* up for hours at a time, giving them meaningless jobs to do while in prison, not helping them?’ There is an undeniably contradictory impulse alive in this approach to audience: a company that advocates for the right of women’s individual circumstances to be recognised when under threat of criminal sentencing, nevertheless interpellates its audiences as a white middle class monolith. It is an idealisation of the audience that suppresses difference. Yet, by explicitly connecting the social stigmatisation of Pink and Rolly to criminalisation, Franzmann’s ambition for *Pests* is to urge audiences toward an understanding of how *she and they* – a carceral *we* – participate in creating the material conditions for women to enter the criminal justice system.

Mass mediated narratives that draw upon the carceral imaginary tend to purposefully restrict individualisation, and it is in this sense that Clean Break takes a similar approach on the audience in its specific function as a carceral collective. This carceral functionality becomes strenuously exercised within live performance events, in which narratives of criminal justice and imprisonment – a type of narrative which, the vast majority of the time, comes at audience members through heavily mediated channels without the possibility of live response – suddenly become live encounters. These reveal the fissures and cracks of carcerality, pressuring the audience not as passive spectators, but as Jacques Rancière terms them, ‘emancipated spectators’ (2009). This may appear paradoxical given the notion that carceral imaginary is predicated on positioning audiences as passive. In the production *Charged* at Soho Theatre, which I discuss fully in Chapter Five, the audience moves between three sites of performance to experience six narratively unconnected plays, on the case of a woman charged. Without any sense of what they are actually investigating, however encountering narratives of addiction, sex trafficking, discrimination, among others, the audience is caused to enter into various ‘at risk’, or criminal justice adjacent spaces. The production precipitates a dramaturgy of criminality as an *interpretive* act. This dynamic can be understood as itself emancipatory because, as Rancière explains,

[e]mancipation begins ... when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. (2009, 13)

As audiences explore the case of a charged woman, the ‘fact’ of the charge becomes less and less ‘self-evident’. Yet where this might become a dramaturgical problem to the frustration of audiences, the three different physical spaces of *Charged* immediately emphasise the audience’s movement through sites of carceral narrative production.

‘Seeing’ risk states connected together as carceral topoi, the audience is ‘doing’ carceral narrative: as audiences participating in the ‘viewing’ activities of Rancière’s emancipated spectator – actively ‘confirm[ing] or transform[ing] this distribution of positions’ – *Charged* makes a clear relationship between the power structures relevant to the viewing, emancipated subject position of the audience member attending this production, and the viewing subject position of that same audience member in other domains of carceral narrative production. What *Charged* offers by way of the breakdowns of linear causality in the formation of the criminal subject, as such also translates to an understanding of audience as sensorially, intellectually and socially present within carceral narrative production; audiences, in other words, are not passive here as they are (intended to be) within carceral society.

As such the ‘not not’ of prison theatre here creates a liberating blurring of the label ‘criminal’ in which the stigmatizing, and criminalizing, impacts of assumption about cause and effect in the criminal justice system become apparent. Going beyond a recapitulation of the criminalizing figurations of stigma (and in service of challenging these), a Clean Break play aims to draw the audience member’s attention to their own carceral subjectivity as continuous with domains in and out of the theatre.

## Not not not: porosity and seepage in Clean Break’s theatre

To this point I have indicated some of the criteria that establish Clean Break’s theatre as about, and within, the carceral state. Yet Clean Break’s theatre is not simply oriented towards a declaration, or illustration, of how multiply-networked carcerality is in British society; this is theatre that goes beyond establishing the reach of the carceral, to challenging, undoing the carceral – creating resilience against this reach and its

technologies of punishment. What happens to the symbiosis of prison and carcerality when it is pushed to a radical negation: a triple ‘not not not’ of prison theatre?

Radical negativity, as Shoshana Felman suggests, is ‘not simply “negative”; it is—in a very complex way—positive, it is fecund, it is affirmative’ (2002 [1983], 103). It moves beyond binaries of positivity/ negativity, creating what Felman calls a ‘scandal’ of nonopposition:

Radical negativity ... belongs neither to *negation*, nor to *opposition*, nor to *correction* (“normalization”), nor to *contradiction* (of positive and negative, normal and abnormal, “serious” and “unserious,” “clarity” and “obscurity”)—it belongs precisely to *scandal*: to the scandal of their nonopposition. This [is a] scandal of the *outside of the alternative*, of a negativity that *is* neither negative nor positive. (104, original emphasis)

When considered as *radically not* prison theatre, Clean Break’s practice engenders an affirmative ‘fecundity’ which challenges audiences to enter an indeterminate zone: prison and carceral society are not the opposite of something else, like ‘freedom’; instead it seeps beyond inside/outside; freedom/imprisonment binaries.

In contrast to statements like Perman’s, in which she positions theatre as ‘enabling people to find a way into a world that can seem far from their own experience’ (Perman 2018), thinking through the politics of performance as a radical negative underscores the fact that we are *already* in, surrounded by, and living within a society permeated by carcerality. Clean Break’s theatre is radically negative because it depicts the boundary between an inside and outside of prison as very diffuse, if there is one at all. Not a ‘not’, nor a ‘not not’ but rather a ‘not not *not*’ that leaves the territory of punitive dyads. As a radical negative of prison theatre, Clean Break’s theatre creates a poetics of representation around, through and via the ‘criminal’ and ‘prison’ that itself overflows the constraints and limits of representational systems.

Thinking through representations, activations, and negations of carcerality in these terms – something overflowing, that you are already in – meets a current trend

within carceral geography, part of a growing sub-discipline of criminology, which interrogate prison ‘as spatial, emplaced, mobile, embodied and affective’ within carceral society (Moran 2015, 1). Carceral geography extrapolates the empirical bent of prison research into new articulations of porosity, fluidity, spatiality and non-binary logics. As carceral geographers Moran and Schliehe suggest: ‘In the context of hyperincarceration, with porous carceral boundaries, the seepage of carceral techniques and technologies into spaces far beyond the prison, there is untapped potential [for] subversive counter-mapping’ (2017, 5). The porosity of carcerality provides more, rather than less, opportunity for intervention. This kind of thinking is fundamental to my inquiry into Clean Break’s performance aesthetics because it is multi-agential, ecological, and above all hopeful about intervention. In Clean Break’s theatre, I suggest, innovative performance strategies build on precisely these kind of subversive porosities to complicate and trouble dramaturgies of the woman offender and woman at risk.

In this thesis I pay particular attention to the ways in which Clean Break’s work engages dramaturgical techniques and settings that allow the ‘carceral’ to haze the edges of sensory perception, to engage porousness, and to become an atmosphere. My efforts here are in line with current trends in applied theatre theory. In their introduction to *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre* (2016), Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson discuss applied theatre as formed through an ecology of divergent practices, which together can debate

theatre’s relationship to temporality and cultural memory, the politics of place, environment and attachment, and the material and relational dimensions of human and non-human agency ... respond[ing] imaginatively to the ways in which the loci of power have become diffuse and fragmented in the twenty-first century, and to new questions about how increasingly nuanced ideas of authority can be harnessed for social change. (2)

Considered as an interrelated ecology of practices, applied theatre becomes concerned with relations across borders, as well as ‘encounters with borders ... characterized by

openness and commitment to a *process* of making relations rather than staking out a secure or fixed position' (2016, 7). These conceptual repositionings or torques on applied theatre are welcome in a field that often is beset by a concern with balances of power within performance making in communities (Prentki and Preston 2009). Such concerns have been crucial to mapping the ethics of applied theatre, but have dampened progress on discussing inventive ecologies and aesthetics of applied theatre. It is in the spirit of Hughes and Nicholson that I explore Clean Break's work as negotiating, enquiring and provoking a range of aesthetic experiences around the phenomena of carcerality.

This is important because the conditions of carcerality are very difficult to conceptualise. Carcerality is porously effective, and affective, because of its omnipresence, and its diffusion throughout the social field. The very idea of carcerality is almost impossible to 'take in' on the many and multiple levels on which it operates; in this way carcerality / carceral society convene to Timothy Morton's concept of the 'hyperobject':

When massive entities such as the human species and global warming [and carcerality] become thinkable, they grow near. They are so massively distributed we can't directly grasp them empirically. We vaguely sense them out of the corner of our eye while seeing the data in the center of our vision. These "hyperobjects" remind us that *the local is in fact the uncanny*. Space evaporates. The nice clean box has melted. (2016, 11, original emphasis).

In Clean Break's theatre it is not that prison has suddenly become 'thinkable', but rather that the conditions of carcerality throughout society become thinkable. In line with Morton's articulation of peripheral perception or awareness – a hovering at the edges of vision – I propose in this thesis that a similar effect in Clean Break's work is what makes the distance between theatre and prison 'evaporate', 'melting' the perception of the cell as a bounded space with particular social function. Through a porous, peripheral

hovering, pulling on and activating multiple agencies in the social field, carcerality may become evoked.

Cathy Turner and Duška Radosavljević propose a ‘porous dramaturgy’ to suggest the ways in which audience co-create and interact with a piece of theatre through ‘reciprocal movement or resistance’ (in Turner 2014, 199). The porosity of performance allows for an infinity of meanings to seep through, in an inclusive model of theatre making that would allow any proposed narrative to become fractured or eroded. Porous dramaturgy is ‘work that attempts to engage the audience in co-creation through its underpinning concepts and formal structures, including interactivity, immersion and sitespecificity’ (2014, 200). Yet porous dramaturgy can also be directive, treating the body of the audience as a single site into which, and from which, meaning soaks and seeps. There is such a dramaturgy at work in the prison van of Clean Break’s production *Sweatbox* (Chapter Two), in which audiences crammed into the van to watch performers locked up in cells. The interactions of the audience with the performers involved a looking, a straining to look, and a looking away – a sweating in the July heat that slipped across bodies of performers and audiences alike, and which, as I argue in detail in Chapter Two, caused a breakdown of the representational system of the van. The ‘nice clean box’ has not only ‘melted’, but sweat-pooled into the social groundwater at Latitude Festival.

Conditions of porosity replace concepts of stable identity – and the stable identity of the prison, and its role in society, is one that we most struggle to shake as a society. As carceral geographers Sarah Armstrong and Andrew Jefferson write, ‘When it comes to prison our imagination seems to clog up. It is the political solution to its own failure, and the preferred metaphor for its own representation’ (2017, 237-238). When theatre is able to perform prison as a seeping, porous, and multi-agential confluence, it

destabilises prison's ability not only to represent itself, but also to determine itself as its own metaphor. One of most powerful potentials of theatre, Marvin Carlson writes, is to cause 'porous or contested borders [to] replac[e] centers as the focus of interest' for an audience (2013, 206). Though porosities of performance, for Carlson, meaning and interpretation become a matter of constant negotiation for audiences:

The audience's expected "role" changes from a passive hermeneutic activity of decoding the performer's articulation, embodiment, or challenge of particular cultural material, to become a much more active entering into a praxis, a context in which meanings are not so much communicated as created, questioned, or negotiated. The "audience" is invited and expected to operate as a co-creator of whatever meanings and experience the event generates. (2013, 215)

When from within its carceral function, audiences become engaged by aesthetics that edge and threaten stability of the social field, these aesthetics problematize the audience's sense-making capacity. As co-creators of the meanings and experience of such a moment in a piece of theatre in which carcerality is suddenly and *locally* affective and effective in the audience, is precisely the moment that prison environments can become gestural and atmospheric. Plunged into zones of indistinction, prison walls become pulverized; what was once a seemingly impervious, impenetrable site of representation becomes fractured. The capacity of sense-making in theatre in these ways responds to Judith Butler's call in *Precarious Life* to evoke the 'frailty [of] representation as it is currently cultivated and maintained ... to interrogate the emergence and vanishing at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense' (2004, 151). Porosities and seepages of performance are useful ways of thinking through how audience interacts with aesthetics and narrative, just as they are useful in thinking through how carcerality functions in the social field itself, within and outside of the theatre. However these approaches do not yet go far enough to articulate the full range of aesthetic and discursive properties activated by Clean Break's theatre.



There is a performance strategy that relates to something deeper, fouler, more nebulous and staining than what these rubrics can offer. It relates to ancient concepts of pollution, morality and disease as imbued with carceral atmospherics: *miasma*. When I write about miasmatic performance in this thesis, it is a way to describe carceral conditioning as related to principles of exchange, invention, ecology and agency at the theatre.

## Miasma and carceral atmospherics

*How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs*  
Juliana Spahr (2005, 10)

What ‘is’ miasma, how does it function and what does it do? Although my deployment of miasma is a new one, I draw on a set of ideas that have been circulating within western societies for thousands of years, and which encompass air, seepage, pollution, social normativity within dynamics of performance, in both social and theatrical senses. It is the work of this thesis to demonstrate miasma’s value to theatre and performance, through specific examples of Clean Break’s theatre, chapter by chapter. Rather than offering an immediate definition, therefore, a brief return to *Pests* helps to signal its discursive and aesthetic attributes.

*Pests* offers a scrum of rats, filth, violence and extreme poverty, at an intersection with criminality; yet the confluence of these elements is far from new. The depiction of two ex-offenders, stuck within the figurative and material pollutions of *Pests*, stresses a set of Western cultural practices that has long equated moral hygiene with environmental hygiene (Welton 2012). And it is here that the material decompositions of the staging intersect with an inheritance of ideology around pollution, infection, badness, prison and theatre, which continues to profoundly inform

carceral society today: what I call ‘miasmatic’ thinking, and which becomes, in my interpretation in this thesis, miasmatic performance.

The ancient concept of miasma extends across millennia to seventh century BC Greece, when it first developed as a term to describe contagious religious pollution or danger of pollution, often through contact with a corpse or a murderer (Parker 1983) – associations to which I will return throughout this thesis. The term quickly took on more interpretations and applications. In fifth century BC Greece, a growing awareness of the medical implications of a ‘connection of everyone with lungs’, as poet Juliana Spahr puts it, led the physician Hippocrates and his followers to develop miasma theory, one of the world’s oldest extant disease etiologies. The Hippocratic Corpus treatise *Breaths* tackled the pervasive belief in a supernatural pathogenesis of sickness when many or most of a population became afflicted, regardless of individual constitution and overall health. Instead of a divine ordination, *Breaths* suggested miasma as the common cause of illness: volcanoes and earthquakes expelled fetid gases held deeply within the earth, lakes and marshes incubated rotten winds, piles of human corpses released putrefaction, and stale, long-locked rooms coughed up a vile weather. Whoever went near these sources risked contamination unto death, as the ambient poison entered the body and compromised the healthy balance of the humours. From these early Greek origins as an environmental and medical diagnostic, miasma theory hung about for more than two millennia as a disease etiology – even achieving primacy in the field from the 1347 Black Death until the late nineteenth century, when it was discredited in favour of germ theory. Yet beyond its emphatic, admonitory translation as ‘bad air,’ miasma circulates within a giant fug of catachresis, peripheral meanings, half-thoughts, guesses and suspicions. Its relationship to the *badness* of air is more complex than as a carrier of disease.

To illustrate the contemporaneity of miasma as a carceral atmospheric it is best to materialize it during the Victorian period, where the miasmas of *Pests* are most evocatively located. Transmissions of illness – and also criminality, poverty, and immorality – were widely thought during the Victorian period to occur through miasmas: travelling, infectious atmospheres redolent of foul air, which held the power, purportedly, to plunge the socius into moral and physical decrepitude. Miasmas are perceived through the air – through smell of rot, fogs, and other atmospheric events – and in some ways they *are* air. But they were not always considered *of* the air. ‘Miasma theory did not simply conceptualize air as a vehicle for the *transmission* of disease; rather, ... miasmata were understood to actively mediate the atmosphere’ (Waples 2015, 22). In *Pests* audiences do not *see* environments of prison, or the street and car parks where sex work and assault occurs. They see only the interior of a putrefied nest, and it is this nest, with its gaping, punctured, ill-defined, and totally unprotected edges, which both transmits and mediates a *carceral atmosphere*. When Pink feels threatened and anxious, she experiences hallucinations visible to the audience – video projections of red blood, knives, and crackling electricity pass across the audience to invade the stage. As the sisters burrow and lounge on the set, it continues to decompose: mattresses slump and trash flutters. The foulness of the air becomes further activated as the scent of aftershave wafts through the theatre. ‘It a plague pit. Da whole place is stink’, growls Pink (Franzmann 2014, 33).

These stinks, seepages, decompositions and air-borne plagues recall the early decades of sanitary reform in England of the 1830s and 1840s, where a debate was raging on the nature and causes of disease: contagion versus climate. The principal disease construct for contagionists revolved around carriers, usually identified as social interlopers, who circulated from place to place, thereby transmitting the disease to new

areas and populations. Contagionists relied heavily on social perceptions of the impact of expanded trade routes, particularly slave trade routes, to attach disease to xenophobia. Anti-contagionists argued an introduction of disease via decomposition within the climate arising from putrefaction of a combination of vegetal matter, corpses and excrement that led to a circulation of miasma. As the contagionists developed a suspicion of disease carriers as interlopers (worthy of deep suspicion and requiring control), so the miasmatic disease construct relied on targeting areas that were seen as social, physical and moral cesspools.

Chief among these cesspools were theatres, prisons and hospitals (Hannaway 1993: 305). In *Feeling Theatre* Martin Welton describes the young physicians Landirani and Moscati, who in 1775, trapped air from the pit of a Milanese theatre during carnival time. The air:

was found to be as foul and “infected” as that in the city’s tombs [...] Not only did [the experiment] give a medical reinforcement to millennia-old worries about the theatre’s moral status, but it also allied itself to a movement in Western culture in which moral and physical hygiene were made equivalent. (2012, 131, 133)

Miasma theory, therefore, in its focus on environment, and the inescapability of breathing and sharing the same air with many types of people in the lanes of the city (whether stinking or perfumed), also legitimated suspicions of theatre as a site of production of moral miasma. *Did I catch it at the theatre?* became a suspicion that influenced auditorium reform in the mid nineteenth century. Tracy Davis explores the possibility that a preference for the dress circle arose after 1858, in direct response to cholera epidemics and the thought that theatre boxes would trap vapours from, as she writes, ‘the great unwashed... Normally, a mixed “mob” was not uniformly putrid, but an economy of the body developed within theatres, which reduced all visitors to a common plight, suggesting that something must be done to ensure the patronage of the

better-off classes' (2000, 106). This prompts the question: Could this be one of the reasons *Pests* was in every case programmed for the small studio spaces, never the mainstage, in all the theatres it toured to? A residual resistance to cross-class contamination, in spite of star performers?

Within the miasmatic economy of the body, Gothic and Victorian imaginations ruminated on “invisible Agents” [which place] the embodied subject in a heightened state of suspicion. This suspicion extends in two directions: outward, toward the inscrutable atmosphere, and inward, toward the body’s inaccessible anatomy’ (Waples 2015, 19). Aspects of the unknown in the atmosphere infiltrated the body, making one’s own body stranger than the atmosphere itself. Opacities, suspicions, and an impossibility of knowing: these factors are at the core of Pink’s experience within *Pests*, as her nest becomes infiltrated by hallucinations at moments she does not anticipate. Yet Rolly can’t see these hallucinations, although the audience can; as such, the body of Pink and her nest, extend into an uncontrollable, suspicious body shared with and imposed upon the audience as the projections seep across the auditorium to the stage.



Figure 2. Video projections across the set of *Pests*. Video design by Kim Beveridge; lighting design by Fabiana Piccioli. Photograph Jonathan Keenan

In the years leading up to, and following the Great Stink of London in 1858, during which time ‘da whole place’ really *was* stink, public sanitation projects became explicitly bound up with segregationist policies that characterised, and disciplined, the impoverished working classes as contaminated and contaminating agents (Herbert 1988). Social reform was concomitant with sanitary reform in Victorian Britain, and this vector was nowhere more plainly articulated than in the penal system. Fears of cholera outbreaks, memories of plague, combined with an interest in exclusion to define the new disciplinary order: as Foucault identifies in *Discipline and Punish*,

it is the peculiarity of the nineteenth century that it applied to the space of exclusion of which the leper was the symbolic inhabitant (beggars, vagabonds, madmen and the disorderly formed the real population) the technique of power proper to disciplinary partitioning... in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital. (1995, 199)

Yet while sequestration into prisons and other institutions became a way of controlling ‘disorderly’ bodies, the exponential growth of populations in cities meant that physical overlapping began to complicate (or enhance) acts of outright dismissal of otherwise stigmatised groups.

A prevalence of miasma in the Victorian social imaginary also indicated an interest in continuity of self and other, and an expression of commonality, as miasmas expressed collapsed boundaries between someone, someone else and the world around (Choi 2015). As the author and actress Mary Elizabeth Braddon wrote in 1862, ‘I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely’ (2013, 144). Braddon’s evocation of an atmosphere of crime is overtly connected to unclear causality – something diffuse, pervasive, air-bound, in which ‘we’ participate yet do not know it. In her sensation novel *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the Victorian feminine ideal of the ‘Angel of House’ descends miasmatically into criminal madness as ‘atmospheres of crime’ emanate from landscape, just as much as

they do from character. Critics of the book in the 1860s felt that these criminal atmospheres could haze out of the transgressive object of Braddon's novel itself: 'by merely opening a sensation novel [the reader] could hardly escape being implicated in its questionable morality and guilty knowledge, becoming an accessory to its secrets and crimes' (Hughes 2007, 262).

Miasma's prevalence as a disease etiology underwent a last great gasp during the nineteenth century. Yet, what of the connections that miasma encouraged between sanitation, criminality and morality, within a public health framework that fostered social segregation and incarceration? Are these aspects *also* discredited? In fact miasma's discredit is important to, even allows, the concept to function unabated today. We may think that miasmas are gone, but it is within their nature to linger.

In part this is because miasma did not originate as a medical term. As historian Jacques Jouanna writes: 'Derived from the verb *miaino*, which means 'to stain' (for example with purple, and hence, by analogy, with blood), the noun miasma is first found in connection with the stain of blood spilt in a crime' (2012, 141). In archaic and classical Greece, as a religious, social and – crucially for a reading of miasma as a carceral atmospheric – *legal* term, miasma initially related to corruption: not (purely) of air, but corruptions of persons passing through the commons. Bearing written, unwritten and not yet written sanctions, a polluted body's moral and civic stain – with its spilling, expanding edges – was feared in ancient Greece as uncontainable, and criminally violating. As corruptions that both emanated from a (suspected) staining person, miasmas immediately drew the surrounds of the socius into continuity with that stain, making it contagious corruption. As such miasmas carry threats of unclear causality: while they may not be difficult to 'identify' in the air they are difficult to assign to a clear causative agent.

Miasma and pollution beliefs entered the semiotics of Greek politics and religion at a time, in the seventh century BC, when the legal system was ‘still underdeveloped’ (Osborne 2011, 163). Punishment and purification of stained, tainted or otherwise marked persons were held in correlation with other processes of adjudication on crime through ‘sacred laws’ issued by civic authorities (Meinel 2015, 83). It is possible to trace the powerful role of othering and stigmatization in civic adjudications through the extremely wide parameters of what constituted socially polluting encounters at the time. Analysing a passage on the superstitious man in Theophrastos’ *Characters*, historian Robin Osborne notes that social pollution could result from encounters ‘with various animals in particular circumstances, with the dead, with birth, with dream visions, with men engaging in certain dubious practices or suffering madness’ (2011, 166). Miasmas were thought to be produced at points of birth and death, so that anyone who had contact with a corpse, or who was related to or familiar with the person who had died, became tainted by miasma; equally, miasmas flowed from mothers in childbirth and by anyone associated with ministering to the birth, e.g. midwives.

This meets a general focus on women as highly polluting, in multiple ways and in multiple situations in classical Greece, as Anne Carson points out:

Women are pollutable, polluted, and polluting in several ways at once [...] the female body, the female psyche, the female social life, and the female moral life are penetrable, porous, mutable, and subject to defilement all the time [...] with] a special tendency to go out of bounds, to lose their boundaries, to ally with the unbounded. (1990, 158-159)

Much of the scholarship on dirt and pollution discusses these and comparable polluting states as violations of social categories; this taxonomic approach is largely predicated on the work of structural anthropologist Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2003 [1966]). For Douglas pollution beliefs are inherent to clearly defined social structures; social ambiguity performed by



‘a polluting person’ poses a direct danger to ‘someone’ (2003, 114) – undoubtedly a majoritarian someone. Crossing, or falling between socially delineated categories, provokes a pollution that disciplines, identifies, and thereby nullifies the danger to the *socius*. Recent scholars of miasma, including Osborne (2011), Bremmer (1994), Meinel (2015), Parker (1983), rebel against these strictures on pollution as mainly a taxonomic or classificatory heuristic. ‘Allying with the unbounded’, in a sense, their scholarship points to the inherent inconsistency of pollution.

These illustrations of miasma as a socio-legal as well as a religious term indicate its strong investment in questions of causality and collectivity. Within these causally unclear semantics, propelled by fears of contagion and pollution, the word miasma itself claims a body count of variegated and distinct meanings: a discredited disease etiology, a religious pollution, a social stain, the grounds for persecution, prosecution and removal from the commons. This blood-mist of the word is deeply apprehensive: catching and fearing (disease, criminals); being caught and being feared (by society, as criminal). Across more than two millennia these semantic ‘forkings’ have lent the term something akin to the status of Daniel Heller-Roazen’s concept of an ‘occult idiom’: ‘itself [...] a doubtful thing, a hypothesis of a hidden object that one might affirm or deny’ (2013, 17). Yet if we posit miasma as fundamentally a performative secretion of a socio-legal system predicated on inequality, the productions I discuss in this thesis suggest that although unaffirmed in our contemporary moment, miasmas persist in extraordinary, and extralegal, force today.

Moreover, it is especially through theatre that these miasmas can be tangibly, sensorially appreciated. Miasmas enable the authenticity of *Pests* also because miasmas are inherently, ‘authentically’ *theatrical* atmospheres. As with no small number of conditions, an illustration of miasmatic identity can be found in the classical Greek

tragedies. Where, in ancient Greece, the transmission of religious and social miasma was broadly accepted to occur through touch, sight or speech, the theatre offered a crucible in which to experience and test miasma's range of properties:

Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, with its blood-dripping, polluted protagonists [...]; the plague of Sophocles' *Oedipus tyrannus* and its apparent cause, wretched Oedipus, 'pollution of the land' [...]; or the pollution exuding from Polyneices' corpse in *Antigone*[;] Euripides' plays, from *Medea* and *Heracles*, with their child-slaying protagonists, to *Hippolytus*, in which we encounter [...] the curious notion of a mind (Phaedra's) 'polluted' as the result of errant erotic desire. (Meinel 2015, 1)

As dramaturgical frameworks, these miasmas of classical Greek drama carry a disciplinary logic predicated on identification, alienation and sequestration. In this sense, in ancient Greece, miasma, theatre and legal process developed and co-substantiated each other in efforts to control and contain polluting persons. Miasmas of the classical Greek examples above emanate from a hyper-congestion of both visible and invisible stigma that posits one or more polluting subjectivities as the originators of social threat and abjection. Of the gory line-up above, consider Oedipus, Swollen Foot, who not only engenders and proliferates plague via his moral miasma, but also carries the stigma of disability, having had his ankles pinned together as a child. Sophocles' *Oedipus tyrannus* cross-contaminates notions of ritual and medical miasma through manifestations of illness and disability, giving miasma at the theatre an all-purpose diagnostic function that 'affords understanding and comprehension of the individual's (or society's) experience of disorder by providing a cause to the visible effect' (Meinel 2015, 53). Social stigma becomes aspirated into a miasma of suspicions, convictions, purifications and consequences.

To relate this back to the example of Clean Break's *Pests*, Pink and Rolly navigate a decomposing materiality of the stage set in which the narrative of the stigmatisation of Pink and Rolly manifests 'prison' as a porous, seeping and disciplinary haze that forms a key aspect of the play's miasmatic aesthetic. Miasma is

here created through fogs of stigma: Pink's complex mental health condition, expressed as projections of blood seeping across her nest; the sisters' active addiction to heroin, which they each struggle to control, leading them to acts of both solidarity and violence; and their discursive pest/peste identities as rat women, bringers of plague.

This thesis is not only an investigation into the ways and means by which miasma becomes produced within the theatre, but into the ways and means that miasma *spreads* through the theatre, becoming what I have discussed as a corrupting atmosphere of carceral performance. Because of miasma's relationship to air, to seepage, and to porosity at the theatre, the concept of 'atmosphere' has been evoked to this point as a key way of interpreting miasma. My use of atmosphere here draws on a substantial body of scholarship produced over the last decade, during an 'atmospheric turn' in which scholars and artists across a range of disciplines, from architecture to sociology to philosophy, have been engaged in theorizing the aesthetics of atmosphere, and atmosphere's role in creating environments (Bille et al 2015). Theatre is routinely evoked across these theorizations as a form of particular relevance to the analysis of atmosphere, in that it deploys sound, light, site, space and other properties to actively construct and shape atmosphere. Where mechanics of theatre staging are instructive to understanding how atmospheres are 'made', however, atmosphere is also instructive to understanding theatre's capacity to target and troubleshoot social and political issues. It is in this regard that considerations of atmosphere become most relevant to my investigation into miasmas produced by the theatre. Thinking about theatre through atmosphere, Martin Welton writes,

usefully allows a linking of the sensory and the affective within the practices and environments in which they are engaged, which resists a temptation towards the atomization or reduction of their various elements to a singular point of significance or awareness. (2012, 151)

This is in my view critical to understanding the full flow of impacts that carceral conditioning has on society – on affective, emotional, discursive and rational levels. Its multi-agential, tentacular impacts require attention through as many zones of approach as possible.

Miasma, as a gaseous emission and a very bad air, is not only atmospheric (it also contains elements of seepage, secretion, porosity), but its atmospheric properties allow it to powerfully transmit affects of the carceral condition at the theatre. In part this occurs due to the ability of atmosphere at the theatre to reposition ‘prison’ itself as what Derek McCormack terms an atmospheric ‘thing’, rendering it both materially present, and an intersubjective, relational condition. McCormack writes, ‘The promise of the concept of atmospheric thing is that it points to the existence of a kind of worldly entity that makes its presence felt as something discrete but only insofar as it foregrounds the durational mattering of diffuse atmospheric fields in which it is a participant’ (2014, 16). Prison exists; prison exists outside of the theatre in ‘thingness’ and it also exists in this theatre as atmosphere, though in radically different ways, and with radically different impact on people’s lives. Yet, prison’s atmosphere within the theatre also generates its atmospheric thingness outside of the theatre. It requires other ‘atmospheric fields’ in order to exist in the theatre, just as it does outside the theatre; these atmospheric fields are sensible to each member of the audience, again extremely differentially. But the dependence of the *thing* on *atmosphere* demonstrates prison’s existence in relation to each member of the audience because it creates an idea of prison as discrete only because of its participation in other atmospheres: prison only exists through material rot on the set of *Pests*, for example. Paradoxically, the miasmatic fog clarifies these atmospheres as working within an interdependent carceral nexus.

At once spreading, and carceral, as an atmosphere miasma has the potential to catch the audience up as a socius; through this catching and enveloping, miasmatic performance engenders a complicated act of interpellation, in which co-witnessing and recognition of carceral structures may become possible. An illustration from social anthropologist Tim Ingold further articulates what I mean here. Ingold writes of the atmosphere of a glacier as an ‘all-enveloping experience of sound, light and feeling’:

In this atmospheric manifestation the glacier so saturates the consciousness of perceivers that when they listen, it is the glacier that listens through them, in its sound. Likewise when they look and touch, it is the glacier that looks and touches through them, in its light and in its feel. (2015, 82).

To hazard a transposition, a carceral atmosphere at the theatre similarly ‘saturates’ audiences – ‘when they listen, it is the *prison* that listens through them ... it is the *prison* that looks and touches through them, in its light and in its feel.’ At the theatre, audience members may not necessarily *want* to be engaged in this way – listened, looked and touched through prison as a carceral atmosphere – but it is an attribute of atmosphere that they catch people. Gernot Böhme describes being ‘caught’ by atmosphere in his *Aesthetics of Atmospheres*: ‘atmosphere is something in between subject and object [...] you can be surprisingly caught by an atmosphere. But [they] are not beings like things; they are nothing without a subject feeling them. [...] Thus atmospheres are quasi-objective or something existent intersubjectively’ (2017, 2). This is to say that atmospheres, for Böhme, do not float around; they are not roving environments, into which we then enter. As Ingold notes, ‘it is from the coming together of persons and things that atmospheres arise: they are not objective yet they inhere in the qualities of things; they are not subjective yet they belong to sensing beings’ (2015, 77). In this sense, a carceral atmosphere cannot exist, even categorically *requires* a co-creative impetus from the audience’s carceral imaginary to come into

being. The materiality of the polluting mist blankets over subject and object: a mist that unites as much as it obfuscates, occasioning an inter-subjectivity of its own.

This articulation edges close to what Clean Break's former Executive Director Lucy Perman means when she says that theatre 'captures hearts and minds – enabling people to find a way into a world that can seem far from their own experience' (2018), as discussed earlier in this Introduction. In this atmosphere 'hearts' and 'minds' become 'caught' or 'captured'. In Perman's articulation, hearts and minds become disaggregated from each other – and the person – during a piece of theatre, as if these organs function independently or become appealed to on different levels within an atmosphere. Within its carceral atmospherics, miasma may make one person's heart and mind into various subjects and various objects simultaneously. Progressing this idea to a macro level: disaggregated hearts and minds, swimming around in a haze of theatre, also indicates processes of social attachment and de-attachment as embodied events within atmospheres of theatre. These attachments and de-attachments can conjure both the material experience and the epistemological problem of prison as an event. The thing about miasmas is that they can easily get out of hand. If an audience member does not *want* to be 'captured' by carceral atmosphere, how can we possibly know whether it has succeeded, but even more importantly, is it a categorically good (or bad) thing if it has?

Atmospheres produce explicit power relations. For social scientists Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen, atmosphere 'underlies the realm of discursive politics, but cannot be controlled in any simple and unambiguous way by political agents' (2015, 34). Using the example of theatre staging, they raise the problematic of atmospheres staged with 'objective' feelings intended to 'seize' the individual's 'subjective' feelings (2015, 34). Such power relations extend to audience experience, and intentions for audience experience; they also extend to perceptions of audience experience, and my

own ways of writing about audience. As Sara Ahmed writes, ‘We do not [...] feel the same way about an atmosphere, or even feel an atmosphere in the same way, even when or if the atmosphere can be something that we are ‘in’, like being in air made thick by smog’ (2014, 218). Atmospheres produce explicit tensions in which power relations become more evident, via a variety of responses, affective, emotional, intellectual – when I write about carceral atmospheres in this thesis I am examining not only how these produce power relations, but how they are generated *by* power disparities. They both articulate the processes that generate a prison wall, and they cross over, suffuse, decompose that prison wall.

Sara Ahmed identifies the productive ‘tensions’ of atmosphere:

In naming or describing an atmosphere, whether to ourselves or others, we also give it form. If there is tension we might search for an explanation: someone or something becomes the cause of tension. Some attributions ‘take hold’, becoming shared explanations for an event or situation. Once someone or something is agreed to be the cause of tension, then shared feelings are directed toward that cause. Something ‘out there’ which is sensed and real, but also intangible, is made tangible. In ‘finding’ cause, feelings can become even more forceful. Political discourse is powerful as it can turn intangible feelings into tangible things that you can do things with. (2014, 227)

The tensions I explore in Clean Break’s carceral atmospheres revolve around a participation in carcerality and a carceral imaginary, which touches each person who enters the theatre – any theatre. Miasmatic performance makes these tensions ‘tangible’ in a society predicated on maintaining carceral paradigms as a quotidian, banal, normality. In making them tangible, they carry a potential to awaken acute feelings around what is stigmatizing and destructive about carceral society.

## Miasmatic writing

Miasmas are additive, accretive and accumulative. Miasmas are crowd-sourced. As such my research moves through epistemic domains, gathering and bringing perspectives

from a range of disciplines. Affect theory, medical epidemiology, performance theory, cultural criminology, queer theory, and critical race theory are chained together in the chapters that follow. I have been influenced in this approach by Kéline Gotman's recent book *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (2018), in which Gotman similarly draws from disparate discursive zones – sociology, medicine, dance theory, among others – to trace how the concept of choreomania, or dancing disease, became culturally solidified in multiple strata of social and institutional life. Gotman's choreozones are 'moving clusters of ideas about motion, aesthetically and politically, [which] denote a mobilizational force – a capacity continually to reassemble and transform' (2018, 2). Like Gotman's research into choreomania, miasmatic performance is deeply concerned with how ancient notions continue to inform and limit contemporary understandings of imprisonment, contagion and public space, and it seeks to point out seepages of carcerality through multiple discursive structures which, together, manifest fantasies of disorderly bodies. As such I engage excavations of discourse very much like those the choreozone creates and describes.

In this way my uptake of the choreozone in a miasmatic frame proposes thinking and writing as seepages of discourse, pollutions across disciplinary boundaries. In this effort it is important *not* to think linearly. Queer scholar Elizabeth Freeman writes of 'deviant chronopolitics' that emphasise a porosity of temporal relations, subversions of disciplinary and heteropatriarchal expectations: what Freeman calls chrononormativity (2005, 2010). Nothing could be more crucial to 'doing time' in prison research. In some ways, there could be no time more chrononormative than the distillation of punitive, prison time. In other ways, prison time presents a wildly distended temporality that allows for relations, voices and freedom dreams that could not otherwise be possible. For Freeman, as for me, 'pleasure is central to the project – that queers survive through



the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies. We do so, I argue, across time' (2005, 58). This is very much true in my experience working with ex-offenders and women at risk. Stuck, stilted, or redacted times are eddies within temporalities of massive resilience and love across boundaries.

Miasma may seem like a folk concept, discredited and obscure, but while the various ways of thinking miasma over two millennia are deeply and perniciously linked to modern perceptions of morality, disease, decay, segregation, sanitation, I propose they are also – more productively – linked to new possibilities of kinship, queer relationalities, politics and performance. Looking at a moment of punishment – a play about women in prison, for example – as a temporally deviant choreozone, then, attenuates 'that moment's epistemic and kinaesthetic force, its ways of moving and seeing, determining what dialogues it engages in, and what conversations or puzzles it chooses to rehabilitate and to rewrite, and how' (Gotman 2018, 307). They may or may not rehabilitate (in a carceral sense), but as companions to the choreozone and the deviance of chronopolitics, miasmas are *mobilizational* forces, designed to inspire decomposition of knowledge constructs that are sustained by segregation and punishment.

Miasma is both minoritarian and discredited. In the late nineteenth century, it was firmly dismissed as a hypothesis of disease causation. It is thus critical to the politics of this research to activate and celebrate miasma as a discredited research modality, as I write about socially discredited demographics. Within this discredit, I seek what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have termed an *undercommons* of discourse (2013). In the undercommons, (social, moral, institutional) discredit is the source of an empowered wildness, which you are already in, as Jack Halberstam notes in the preface to Moten and Harney's treatise: 'you are always already in the thing that you call for

and that calls you' (2013, 7). Undercommons are resistive environments, intrinsically minoritarian and positively discredited. They are filled with, as Moten and Harney write,

hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you [...] in the contained, amongst the contained, lying together in the ship, the boxcar, the prison, the hostel. (2013, 98)

Like plagues advancing towards a commons and an undercommons, miasmas are bound up with geography and movement, trade and politics and moralities. They do not happen suddenly, but you are already in their atmosphere.

These are miasmatic times. In the UK, US, Australia, among many other carceral states, citizens are aware of new registers of punitiveness. People are aware that racist predictive policing software is being rolled out in nations around the world. If they are not yet able to act against repressive immigration policies, they are aware that families are ripped apart at borders. If they are not yet able to petition lawmakers, they are aware that communities are being destroyed by opioid addictions. There is time, in other words, to prepare. Miasmas are about perceiving and anticipating harm, perhaps to the self but only in radical proximity to other selves; as such, in their identifications of overt harm, they also work to reveal occult harm.

In discussing and framing the indices of miasmatic performance, I seek to remove prison and carceral performance from a clinical gaze of analysis, embedding it instead within large-scale flows of discourse, feeling out prison haptically in the performance environments of Clean Break's work, where I was personally, socially and corporeally present. When I write about audience response in these chapters, I foreground and situate my own experience as an audience member. I draw on my expertise as a longtime company member of Clean Break, but I also draw on my own

background as I scrutinise the audience's social imaginary. As a white woman, raised in a middle class family, as a lesbian, a writer, and as a survivor of domestic abuse, I write through my 'uneasy' expertise in the audience. It is thus that I position myself as an audience member with an ability to critique and celebrate the ways that the productions here, in driving hard at a carceral imaginary, propose a position of carceral passivity within audiences – a passivity that through theatre can become revealed as intensely active.

In the chapters to come, I attend to Clean Break's theatre through dramaturgical and performance analysis, with particular attention to venues, space, and audience, returning throughout each chapter's analysis to contexts of cultural theory.

Section One, 'Miasmatic Aesthetics', develops decomposition and secretion as two key aesthetics of miasmatic performance. In Chapter One, a continued exploration of *Pests* by Vivienne Franzmann, I discuss decompositions both sensorial and discursive in nature between animal and human, audience and stage, poverty and criminality, civic space and waste population. The odorific associations of a set filled with rotting mattresses and debris meet visual bleeds of projections across the stage in what is, I argue, an example of Jenny Hughes's concept of critical mimesis, in which 'a practice of performance [...] materializes protective and habitable worlds in which life might encounter its own decay, whilst also securing itself in the world' (2011, 22).

In Chapter Two, the prison van of *Sweatbox* by Chloë Moss, collective slicks of sweat in the July heat facilitate the miasmatic transport of the play. Convening in the van with performers who have been in the prison van before, and have a statistically higher life chance of being there again, draws the violence of chrononormative temporality into clear focus. Through the sensorial disorder of Jon McKenzie's *perfumance*: the 'becoming-mutational of normative forces, the becoming-normative of

mutant forces' (2001, 203) secretions of sweat labour against the van's status as disciplinary performance. In these ways, as I discuss in Section One, *Pests* and *Sweatbox* each demonstrate an aspect of the hopeful potential of miasmatic performance: that ostensible boundaries between prison and society can decompose, and in this decomposition that they can recompose ideas of living and relating beyond disciplinary mechanisms.

In Section Two, 'Miasmatic Contagions', I theorise the capacity of the miasmatic performance register to simulate and critique concepts of 'contagious crime' and social contagion in two works for the company: *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard (Chapter Three) and *Little on the inside* by Alice Birch (Chapter Four). Across Chapters Three and Four, I argue that *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* activate and interrogate pre/conceptions of social contagion via sites of textual infection and emotional contagion. In particular the line 'I don't know why she's crying' (which opens both plays) proliferates, hosting transmissions of character and complicating criminal affects between the plays. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's necropolitics (2003) and Alexander Weheliye's concept of *habeas viscus* (2014), the chapters position the epidemiological modelling of policing and sentencing as a necropolitical tool; mirroring these social practices, a contagious dramaturgy creates carceral objects out of dissident bodies. In Chapter Three I first investigate a practice of miasmatic crying – or tearjerking – in *Dream Pill*, as audiences are confronted with the story of Bola and Tunde, two Nigerian girls sex-trafficked to the United Kingdom. Chapter Four considers the instance of a double bill of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* at the Almeida Festival in 2013. Audiences first crowded into one of the dressing rooms at the Almeida Theatre, for *Dream Pill*, and then moved to the Almeida foyer for performances by the same actors, now portraying two adult women in prison, in *Little on the inside*. Despite a lack of

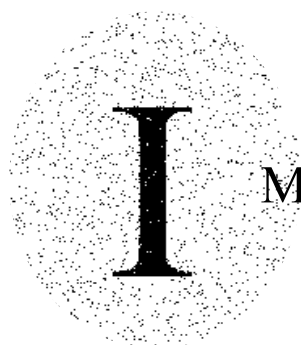
narrative continuity between the two plays, echoes of Bola and Tunde's lines in *Dream Pill* provide the formal structure for *Little on the inside*. Two innocent girls have suddenly become criminalised – but implicitly so; in *Little on the inside* the two characters perform a rumour, or a prejudice, of *Dream Pill*'s Bola and Tunde. Predicated on physical and cultural contact, this is social contagion at work as a performance aesthetic.

Section Three, 'Miasmatic Investigations', explores activations of the carceral imaginary in two of Clean Break's productions with large artistic teams. *Charged* by EV Crowe, Sam Holcroft, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, Chloë Moss, Winsome Pinnock and Rebecca Prichard (Soho Theatre, 2010) is the focus of Chapter Five. I discuss the positioning of the audience as investigators participating in a collective casework. *Charged* presented six short plays, performed in three play cycles over two nights; audiences were split up and saw the plays in different orders. As the audience moves through narratively unconnected spaces under the banner of a 'charged' woman, the only dramaturgical connection becomes the audience's own regulatory body itself.

In Chapter Six, the audience-detectives of *Charged* are now the audience-coroners of *Joanne* (Soho Theatre 2015), investigating the death of a young woman through five monologues. *Joanne*, written by Deborah Bruce, Theresa Ikoko, Laura Lomas, Chino Odimba and Ursula Rani Sarma, is performed in one space, by one actor. In *Joanne*, the title character has come out of prison, vulnerable and alone, and has been left to die on the street; the monologues scrutinise the model of the social contract, revealing it as a fallacy of a state that never intended to hold up its end. *Joanne* and *Charged* each propose a model of the carceral imaginary, in which multiple perspectives converge in a macro-framework of carcerality that includes punishment, discipline and death, but also redemption, hope and resistance. These multiple

sensibilities in each production are maintained through large coalitions of writers, performers and directors; the tension between individual and collective overtly permeates the framework of both productions and is critical to understanding how the carceral imaginary works in carceral society. Miasmatically, these productions each question linear causality in the criminal justice system.

My method in each of the chapters to come is one of close reading, and of memory as I reflect on the situation of each play. The miasmatic mode in each of these chapters proceeds via association and infusion. Instead of treating prison as a setting through which storylines of incarceration move, I endeavor to expose in these chapters how, through miasmatic performance, ‘prison’ becomes a carceral logic at the theatre, organising the dramaturgical semantics, temporalities and atmospheres of the play, to signify conditioning, coercive society at large. Yet while it works to reveal to audiences how the social imaginary of women and crime creates the material conditions for women to enter the criminal justice system, I hope to show that miasmatic performance also creates domains of solidarity and radical subversion, designed to decompose carceral subject positions between performers and audience. A miasmatic register in these Clean Break productions becomes both hopeful, and encourages collective responsibility, as it provokes an affective experience of carceral power within audiences who are often only latently aware of their own participation in carceral society.



## Miasmatic Aesthetics



## **Decomposition**

### *Pests* at the Royal Court Theatre, 2014

*The sewers of the human psyche are clogged with the corpses of children, animals, women, animals, slaves, animals, prisoners, animals, animals, animals...*

Rachel Rosenthal, *The Others* (2014 [1984], 227)

*Sometime will float to da top, I bet.*

Pink, *Pests* by Vivienne Franzmann (2014, 46)

There isn't really a door, only a series of gaps between exposed pipes. Rolly, heavily pregnant and holding a clear plastic bag containing all of her worldly possessions, enters through one of these gaps onto the stage. Brimming with rotting mattresses, takeaway boxes and cans, the stage is a morass, a dumpsite. More specially located still, it is the rat's nest of Clean Break's *Pests* by Vivienne Franzmann, festering Upstairs at the Royal Court Theatre in 2014.

Atop a rake of mattresses another figure is crouched: Rolly's sister, Pink. She sniffs the air. Then, picking her way across '*blood/shit/food/who knows*' (Franzmann 2014, 5), Pink scampers to meet Rolly. The two bounce from side to side, sizing each other up. Suddenly they explode into a roll together, scrapping and chasing each other up and down heaps of debris. The pipework shudders. Rolly manages to get Pink in a headlock:

PINK Violationary. *Beat*. Rule breakage. *Beat*. Your lugs receivin' me? *Beat*. Rule six of da code, never mawl da – *Beat*. Don't pretendy. *Beat*. Do not fuckin' pretendy. Release. *Beat*. Release da fur. (5-6)





Figure 3. Pink and Rolly in the opening scene of *Pests*. Photograph Jonathan Keenan.

*Release da fur*: In states of being between rat and human, Pink and Rolly release both fur, and much more than fur: they chart conditions between once-imprisoned and soon-to-be-imprisoned. Throughout the play, these liminalities become punctured with acts of rape, threats of murder, along a constant ache of Pink and Rolly's life in severe poverty. Pink and Rolly blur across, and decompose, multiple identities, between woman, rat, enemy, sister, jobseeker, addict, human and waste. The young sisters have both been in and out of prison multiple times. The play begins as Rolly returns home after a short sentence, and Pink is at constant risk of being sent back: an untreated mental health condition and active addiction to what Rolly and Pink call 'gnaw' (heroin) leads Pink to attack people on the street, to shoplift and perform sex work. Through seventeen short scenes that chart the course of several months as Rolly and Pink adjust to living together again, Rolly tries to get a job, and maintain her sobriety, while Pink retreats further into the gnaw, and fantasies of her childhood with Rolly before they got split up and put in care.

The audience sees, hears, and smells them grappling with their abilities to cope under near-constant threat to their lives, freedom, and independence from each other. While Rolly and Pink burrow and lounge on the set, the set continues to decompose – mattresses slump and trash flutters. Pink experiences hallucinations, which seep across the stage in bright red or crackling white digital projections. Knife blades slice through the walls of the nest. At other times, the set appears to jump with electric shock. The stench of cheap cologne wafts across stage, causing Pink to retch with the memory of the men who raped her while she was in local authority care as a child. The set hosts these episodes, but it also creates them, articulating seepages, trash-guts, and visions as another wasted body on stage; described by one critic as ‘the architectural equivalent of an anatomical écorché ... instead of a flayed body, veins on show, we are looking at a flayed house’ (Brennan 2014). The set *as* a corpse-host-pit, from which smells, sights and sounds emanate as assaults, generates a pestilential cartography: ‘It a plague pit. Da whole place is stink. Make me puke nestin’ here’, growls Pink (33). As Rolly and Pink’s childhood memories and the current ‘happenings’ unfold (unclear at times the boundaries between the two) the space becomes a diachronically assembled crust of violence, humour, disease and dreaming in disordered imbrication. A miasma.

In *Pests*, ruined landscapes and structural inequalities dominate the play, but they also rot and falter. Decompositions happen on multiple levels of *Pests*: they occur through decomposing materiality of the wasted trash-corpse of the set, and they occur through representations of human subjectivity decomposed into life made verminous. In this chapter I investigate what significance these multiple decompositions may hold for miasmatic performance, and with what political promise.

Informing my analysis of decomposition throughout is Jenny Hughes's concept of *critical mimesis*: 'a practice of performance that materializes protective and habitable worlds in which life might encounter its own decay, whilst also securing itself in the world' (2011, 22). In two works from 2011, Hughes applies thinking around decomposition and decay to the performance of waste and 'waste populations' in times of crisis (2011, 2011b). The concept of a human waste demographic has been advanced and developed in large part by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who suggests that from within our contemporary period defined by consumption and the production of rubbish, modern statecraft creates the conditions for certain humans to be forced to occupy a corresponding social value as 'wasted lives' (2004). Defined as superfluous excess, wasted humans are considered redundant and no longer functional in society; prisons present themselves as prime sites for the disposal of wasted lives. In *Pests*, figurations of prison as a waste site have seeped out and enveloped Pink and Rolly's home in a trash floe. Miasmas in *Pests* articulate a sensibility within public spaces, including and especially the theatre as I shall discuss, around this connection of sanitation to criminality, an atmosphere that is itself a containment protocol.

Building in part on Bauman's concepts, Jenny Hughes proposes a 'critically mimetic' performance register, which can expose the function that performance has in upholding social processes of consumption, beautification, and disposal of waste. For Hughes, critical mimesis must resist the potentialities inherent to mimesis in performance, in which social 'vivification and mortification' are often allowed to exist as unexamined, or unpoliticised, processes: 'Critical mimesis is a term that responds to the urgent demand for an interruption of the atrophic, petrified projections of self and other mobilized by the mimetic excesses of a system in crisis' (2011, 18).

Conjuring decay through the pure, evanescent materiality of a performance is not always enough: as such in *Pests* the *representation* of waste on stage does not, of itself, overcome mimetic excesses and petrified projections of carceral conditioning.

In Hughes's schematic, a mode of critical mimesis proceeds from 'the coexistence of a theatre that enchants and vivifies with a theatre of atrocity' (2011, 25), agitating processes of social decay and decomposition into a material encounter with waste narratives and wasted lives. When this can occur, the abjectification of certain spaces, bodies and ways of life brings productive tension to a sense between audience and performers that it is possible to move through both predictable and unpredictable times of crisis 'without interpersonal violence... in ways that protect rather than annihilate' (2011, 28). Hughes emphasises that

the challenge of articulating and practicing a hopeful and critical politics of performance resides in an examination of performance as a practice of waste and wasted life ... [and] a concerned revaluing of waste as part of aesthetic engagements that materialize equitable encounters with strange and estranging others. (2011, 31)

*Pests* takes waste literally as an aesthetic, perhaps over and above what Hughes herself would expect in her call for 'circulations of waste' (2011, 28). This crucible of literal and cultural waste does not prevent it from becoming critically mimetic, however. In this chapter, I investigate what processes of decomposition and decay in *Pests* propose for miasmatic performance, and how they interact with and inform the indices of the miasmatic under development in this thesis. I organise the chapter around four categories of decomposition: first, between rat and human subjectivities; second, decomposition of English into a vermin vernacular; third, decompositions of the set in the creation of waste agency; and fourth, decompositions between audience and stage in the space of the theatre. Across these four sections, I explore how, through critically mimetic processes of decay, *Pests* proposes a miasmatic re-

distribution, a sensory overturning, of landscapes of biopower shared between the audience and space of carceral narrative. How do the decompositions of *Pests* form a commentary on bodies and law – and how might what is miasmatic about these decomposition further implicate the audience in this commentary?

### Decomposition One: Rat-Human

The decomposing boundaries between human and animal form a key part of miasmatic performance in *Pests*. Despite references to their fur, pups and nests, Pink and Rolly are not rats; do not present as rats, figuratively; they are not rat-headed theriomorphs; they do not perform with rats (visibly to an audience, that is). Though they are not rats, Rolly and Pink are confusingly human; rattily human; other than human; and in fact, due to all of these categories, they come to occupy a kind of sub-human/sub-rat *life made verminous*. These ambiguities along a human-rat spectrum gesture to a murderous tradition in Western culture of aligning rat to human, human to rat, as criminal subhumans. Within a play filled with themes of dispossession, among them dispossession of the child from her family, dispossession of the body through sexual assault, and dispossession of the human from language – Pink's own trauma creates incursions into her nest as psychotic threats of smells, sounds and images that bleed through the walls. Rats, in their cultural role as vermin (as well as disposable sites of experimentation in the laboratory), occupy a similar subject position as waste beings. A miasmatic subject position in *Pests* becomes a rat-human-waste-criminal event, a kind of *becoming-vermin* both decompositional and interspecial.

Here, waste human and waste rat decompose into an abject persona whose main concern, rather than gnawing at the animal-human boundary, is really to suggest that when considered as waste, humans and animals occupy a verminous stratum

before the law. Within the festering wasteland of *Pests*, a rat-human vector enlivens centuries-old fears around interspecies contact and plague, as well as the relationship between vice, morality and higher orders of humanity. The word ‘pests’ entangles pestilential microbes of disease contagion carried by rats and humans; the nonhuman domain of the rat; and the social ‘pests’ category applied to injurious humans: ASBO pests, sex pests, phone pests, etc. Such a pestilential environment represents the kind of zone frequently intervened into by governments motivated to rule through what Neel Ahuja terms *bioinsecurity* (2016). Bioinsecurity describes interspecies interactions and transborder affiliations (cultural and physical) as policed and contained by security forces through an activation of colonial fears and reification of sets of biopolitical binaries: human/animal, alien/citizen, etc. Within the allegorical representations and verminous maneuvers of *Pests*, interspecial rat-human-waste-criminal events confront, and reside, within a domain routinely framed as a biohazard on political and cultural, as well as biological, levels.

In addition to the material putrefactions of the set, *Pests* articulates this biohazardous relationship via an intervention by a walk-on human character in Scene 7. This is the only moment in the play where beings other than Rolly and Pink become visible on stage. One is a human social worker, and the other is a rat baby. It occurs when Pink and Rolly are in a good place together: they’ve decided to dream their way out of their difficulties. Rolly’s pregnancy has almost reached full term, and in Scene 7, Pink is ready to concoct a new future together – she wants to become a fitness instructor, ‘Work at Gym Bollocks dot Com’ (57), and she gets Rolly excited about becoming a nurse at an aged care facility. ‘We ditch da gnaw, yeah? We go full-on clean an’ we, both of us, both of us mind, be bleachy, yeah. Wipe clean, minty fresh, da both of us, both of us, yeah?’ (57). At this moment, in which a positive

future seems almost tangible, a government intervention occurs. A social worker comes in to Pink's nest, approaches Rolly, lifts her shirt, and opens her belly.

Pregnant Rolly is delivered of her baby. I use this strange passive construction deliberately: the social worker literally reaches into her womb, and removes a human-baby-sized rat. She leaves with it immediately. Rolly collapses. Her pup is the only morphically accurate figuration of a rat in the entire play, and it comes during a scene that is about dreaming a life out of impoverishment, sex work and addiction. During the dream of an ordinary life, a rat is born – and simultaneously, the dream and the baby are taken away. In a post-show conversation at the Royal Court Theatre, director Lucy Morrison spoke of being 'blown away' by the resonance of this moment:

[In the playscript] Viv [Franzmann] wrote in that the rat – it was a 'vermin' – ... was removed from her belly, which is a very strong image, probably the image that stayed with me when I put the play down. The language [of *Pests*] resonated and reverberated, but [this] image just blew me away. ... We talked about that and what that meant. And a lot of women in prison ... have [children] – there's a line in the play 'everyone got pups' [Franzmann 2014: 19] – and I've often felt that women have babies removed because they are unable to care for them in that moment and those decisions are not always necessarily wrong in that moment ... and sometimes they *are* [wrong] ... [but having had their babies removed, the women] chase that feeling so there's a sense of a baby being removed and having another one, it just keeps happening, and I suppose the vermin thing really resonated for me because it theatricalises that sense of them being seen like not real people somehow, by society. (in Clean Break 2014)

A becoming-vermin event within *Pests* 'theatricalises ... being seen like not real people' through the enforced removal of children. Given Pink and Rolly's story of removal from their own parents – a story of rape and abuse, to which by this point in the play, the audience have been exposed through dialogue and bleeds of video projection across the set – being removed to local authority care does not equate with protection for Rolly's pup; to the contrary, it represents the site of rape and violence. Rolly and Pink are not only 'not real people' enough to care for their pups, their pups are also 'not real people' in that they will not be offered protection. Through

convening the ‘not real’ with the vermin image of the rat, *Pests* gestures to an inhuman or beast category sustained by society; in the representation of this category the play raises some critical questions about the functions of social exclusion and inclusion in maintaining categories of humanity.

The social worker, on stage for a minute or less, is the only ‘human’ figure in the play. She makes a type of sovereign gesture: walk in; take the pup; walk out. In this sovereign humanness, she appears more beast than Pink or Rolly ever do. In articulations such as these *Pests* locks on the exclusionary power of identifying vermin as integral to securitizing governmentality in carceral states.

Yet the complex signficatory nexus proposed by the play, in which waste, rat, and human become conflated and ambiguous, signals a removal or a suspension of the audience’s *right* to differentiate between rat and human. For Giorgio Agamben, the power to clearly differentiate between life forms – this is human, and this not; this is rat, and this not – represents the very core of sovereign power. This power carries wide ramifications on the legal system through definitions of humanity via, as, and against animal, an argument Agamben develops through several major works, including *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *The Open* (2004). The cultural resonance of the rat has been used to render humans inhuman: to bestialise, criminalise, enslave and to murder. Agamben calls these operations of delimiting the human and inhuman via the animal the ‘anthropological machine’: because humans are ‘presupposed’ in the limits of the animal,

the [anthropological] machine necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is always already an exclusion) ... [it] functions by excluding as not yet human an already human being from itself, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human (Agamben 2004, 37)



Agamben advocates an end to the cultural, legal and discursive exercises of the anthropological machine; only then, he suggests, will society be able to stop defining the human through the ‘capturing’ of the ‘nonhuman’/ ‘inhuman’ animal. As a result, ‘something for which we perhaps have no name’ may come into social being, ‘neither animal nor man ... between nature and humanity’ (2004, 83).

The juncture of rat-human in their shared social function *as vermin* however makes a point of how our collective carceral imaginary heavily mediates ‘the’ criminal *as* a site of subject formation in a way similar to *the* rat – as sitting together in hazy relationship to distinctions between the literal and the figurative.<sup>7</sup> A vermin subjectivity therefore articulates what criminalisation performs in society, in a way that stretches beyond what an unchallenged, presupposed human subjectivity alone could do.

In this regard, *Pests* engages Hughes’s concept of critical mimesis: through embodiments that are not fixable by the audience, Pink and Rolly call up a vacillation within the audience between ‘identification and non-identification ... shifting empirical and imagined realities, tangible materiality and fantastic pretence’ (Hughes 2011, 5). Such processes are themselves political in that, as Hughes notes, they decay ‘atrophied’ subject positions in times of crisis; in so doing, they allow structural forces, such as biopower sustained by a collective carceral imaginary, to become observable. Pink and Rolly go further than portraying a double subjectivity (as humans, and then separately, as rats); instead, it is their excessively doubling, multiplying, subjectivity (human-rat-sister-rat-human-criminal-rat, etc) which moves

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this in relation to animal representation (however not criminal), see Colleen Boggs 2013, 36-37.

them in and out of juridical order. Through this position of excess,<sup>8</sup> they demonstrate exclusionary zones at work within carceral society. Within an impoverished wasteland on stage, this allows the audience a glimpse of how the anthropological machine draws on figurations literally – and how it imposes juridical order through systemic dehumanisation. And as such, where *Pests* delivers characters in a slippage between human and animal, these characters live in a slippage between human and animal *and law*.

The intervention of a human figure on a waste landscape of whelping rat women draws on one of the most enduring theories of western statecraft, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Predicated on a concept of barbaric wildness outside of the protection of civil order, this foundational concept of the commonwealth proposes people in a constant fight against their own tendencies to revert to bestiality. Being ejected from the city, or banned from entering it, the outcast is left to confront the 'continual fear' of brutal nature. On a basic level, Pink shares this view of the countryside outside of London as violently deprived:

|       |                                                                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PINK  | Where da fuck is Hertfordshire?                                                       |
| ROLLY | Outside London.                                                                       |
|       | It like countryside. It like –                                                        |
| PINK  | Full of wankers, da countryside.                                                      |
|       | All shootin' animals. Or if dey ain't shootin' da animals, dey's fuckin' 'em. (23-24) |

Spectrum-animals themselves, there is here an implication of continual fear for Rolly and Pink as hunted creatures once beyond city boundaries. In this scene, Rolly is discussing a 'jobbage' she'd like to take at a hotel in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Pink feels immediately threatened by the idea, both of the countryside, and of Rolly going out there to live. Rolly wants to go, but is also frightened of pure dark nights, and

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<sup>8</sup> The position of animality is itself extralegal, argues Boggs, and thus 'marks an excess that cannot be subsumed to that law, even though it occupies the position of its disavowed origin and supplement' (2013, 131).

owls flying in her face. However the city hardly offers safety and protection for the sisters. Pink's own nest is, in one scene, sliced by projections of huge knives through the walls, disembodied instruments of death invading the domestic space. In another, Rolly returns home, having been assaulted and threatened with murder on the street. Rolly and Pink exist on a gnawing, murderous continuity of beans and death:

ROLLY        Fucked me, spat at me, punched me an' kicked me. ...  
                   Speaked I's lucky he done dint have his weaponry on him.  
                   Telt he usually has a machete in dat jumbo car. ...  
                   I took his spunk up my ting an' all. ...  
                   Never gave me a bean.  
                   Not a bean.  
                   Not a fuckin' bean. (72-73)

Within a landscape where continual fear proliferates both outside *and* inside of city walls, *Pests* offers a precise articulation of the paradox of the Leviathan: the inside of the city is filled with dissolutions of its own protection, in which some become exposed to continual fear, and others not.

Agamben builds the Hobbesian Leviathan into a concept of 'bare life' and biopolitics in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). Here the becoming-vermin positionality of *Pests* relates to Agamben's concept of *bare life*, as stemming from the distinction between two types of 'life': *bios* (how life is lived – quality of life and political belonging) and *zoē* (being biologically alive, a state that animals and humans share). Agamben further connects bare life to the concept of *homo sacer*: in Roman law those designated as *homo sacer* could not be ritually sacrificed, but could be murdered with impunity by anyone. Pink and Rolly function as *homo sacer*, criminalised, miasmatically polluted outcasts who consolidate the sovereign's power to decide who should live and who should die, including who is worthy neither of being saved nor killed. Through the figure of the criminal, *homo sacer* becomes connected to the animal. Agamben illustrates this through various

juridical actions, chief among them the ‘Writ of Outlawry’ of medieval English law, in which the pronouncement of *caput gerat lupinum* (‘let him bear the head of a wolf’) declared a convicted felon without protection from the sovereign. In such cases, anyone could legally kill the felon as if she were a predatory wolf:

[The] lupization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissolutio civitatis* inaugurated by the state of exception. This threshold alone, which is neither simple natural life nor social life but rather bare life or sacred life, is the always present and always operative presupposition of sovereignty. (1998, 106)

By states of exception, Agamben refers to the paradoxical fact that democracy, in order to preserve democracy, suspends and even contraindicates its own political ontology by evoking martial law. States of exception can occur on minor as well as macro scales throughout a wide field of social processes. It is in these ways that a *dissolutio civitatis* – civil dissolution – can and does occur in multiple ways within the Leviathan. Civil order (and dissolution) manifests as a result of a *ban*, not a ‘contract’. To draw the parallel: Having been pronounced *caput rattorum*, Pink and Rolly thus occupy this decomposing zone between rat-beast and human-beast. Pink and Rolly are not only outside the protection of the state, they exist in a bare life state of exception within a decomposing inside (*dissolutio civitatis*) of the state. As it takes a bestial Leviathan<sup>9</sup> to police the vermin of man, it takes Pink and Rolly’s rathood in *Pests* to reveal a decomposition of the state’s own sheen of ‘human’ law and order.

By decomposing the human into rat, and rat into human, *Pests* decomposes the notion of firm boundaries within the securitised, carceral state. In *Pests* this effect

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<sup>9</sup> As the ‘Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth’ the Leviathan connects the idea of absolute authority and civil order against beastliness, to a giant sea monster, a beast itself. Over the centuries to Hobbes’s own writings the biblical Leviathan of the Book of Job had been interpreted as a whale, a crocodile, and as a demonic serpent, and though Hobbes’s manuscript was published with the image of a giant man, rather than a beast, the rhetorical trace remains: to prevent man from becoming beast, a beast is required. There is a problem here however, as Andreas Höfele notes: ‘the image inevitably also intimates the disturbing possibility (which Hobbes all but ignores) that the beast may revert to and act on the untameable impulses of its own bestial nature’ (2011, 179)

of a dissolution or a bleed through civic space becomes propelled by a concomitant dissolution or bleed through English language, into a kind of interspecial, rattified language: a vermin vernacular. The language of *Pests* plays a critical role in how miasmatic performance furthers the breakdown between audience and carceral narrative.

## Decomposition Two: Vermin vernacular

If, through miasmatic performance, a decomposition of language occurs, how does this work: how does language become released, hazed, scuttled around the spreading rat's nest of the theatre? In this section I explore what a vermin vernacular does for *Pests*, and what the politics of this vernacular are. Across this enquiry, I investigate whether these politics become emancipatory of the carceral imaginary of vermin and criminal (as well as criminal-as-vermin), and if so, how.

One useful lens for understanding how what is potentially emancipatory about a vermin vernacular can be found in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal' in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005 [1987]). The becoming-animal bristles with political promise: through becoming-animal, assemblages of state, and family, can be deterritorialised, and can propose new assemblages in place of these. The becoming-vermin of Pink and Rolly occurs immediately and powerfully through language. It appears Franzmann has accepted Deleuze and Guattari's challenge: 'either stop writing, or write like a rat' (2005, 240). Sounds, smells and animal actions replace familiar terms: a beep for mobile, lugs for ears, gnaw for heroin. The love, jealousy and betrayals between Rolly and Pink emerge in a rat-human dialect that resonates to the idioms of criminal canting, to the slang of London youth – and to the imaginary of rats as bringers of plague. From the moment that Rolly enters at the top of scene one,

hesitant yet itching to see her sister Pink, their patois is physically scrappy, conveyed through movement as much as semantic meaning. They roll around the set, shouting ‘Release da fur!’ While they tumble, noun-heavy neologisms become introduced, and fall, accretions of a new trash vocabulary to match the environment of the set. Pink is candescent with violent language – ‘I tear your fuckin’ tits off’ (6) – and bursts of re-jigged song, like her favourite Spice Girls track ‘Wannabe’: ‘Spice up your life! Slice up your wife! Put up da price! Wanna really really wanna wanna zig-a-zig-ah. Zig-a-zig-ah. Zig-a-zig-ah’ (8). *Zig-a-zig-ah* becomes a frequent protective mantra for Pink, as she confronts the visual and auditory hallucinations that menace her in her nest. Its repetitive function also turns this language of Pink and Rolly’s into a flipped zone, a Z-to-A rather than an A-to-Z.

Franzmann’s rat writing, and its political function, forms an example of what Deleuze and Guattari term a ‘minor language’. Minor language, and minor literature, ‘forc[e] each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics’ (2003 [1986], 17).

A writer must endeavour:

To make use of the polylinguism of one's own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points ... by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play. (2003, 26-27)

In one sense, the emergence of a rat language in *Pests* articulates the minor through cultural metaphor: over centuries of western lore, rats have been frequently suspected of secret languages, rogue tongues which defy human attempts to put strictures on their movements.<sup>10</sup> As elusive schemers, the cultural status of rats, and a human

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<sup>10</sup> Rats have long been connected with language, and having their own language as schemers, rogues and lovers. In 2018, *New York Times Magazine* published a sonic landscape of rats in New York City, in which the interpreter of the acoustics says ‘Rats are chastising their kids [in downtown Manhattan]... There’s no mistake – [these sounds] are rats laughing’ (House et al 2018). In a tradition that has profound relevance to *Pests*, rats and their appreciation for language has often been used to lead them to their deaths. For centuries in Europe, rats were ‘conjured’ through their love of rhyming. This technique of ‘rhyming’ rats was prevalent in Ireland and Scotland, as Ben Jonson writes: ‘Rhime

dream of their language, generates an ‘occult idiom’ (Heller-Roazen 2013): language to facilitate physical escape from tight corners, as well as to escape a master tongue. The minor quality of this language, rendered by Franzmann, is as much about the dream of how rats, or rat-humans, might speak, as it about a desire to decode that speech – the human will to divine and predict the nefarious plans of rats. A similar tension accompanies the obscured vocabularies of criminals, known since the Renaissance as ‘cant’ (Heller-Roazen 2013). For an invented rat-criminal tongue, therefore, the cultural resonance instantly pulls on centuries of suspicion that what can’t be understood from a certain class of being, is being used in commission of a crime.

In a post-show conversation at the Royal Court Theatre, an audience member asked Franzmann about the language of *Pests*. Obviously, Franzmann replied, the women she met in prison:

don’t really talk like this, but there are some phrases in [*Pests*] that I heard. [...] [One woman] was talking about how she was about to run, ‘I was on my toes, I was on my toes’, and I just thought – that’s so simple, but I know exactly what she was talking about – you were on your toes, you were ready to get out that door because the police were coming – and I remember really focusing in on the clarity of that, but the energy of it. ... The language is a heightened version of London slang / dialect / colloquialism with a ... childlike resonance to it. ... Also the violence in language, it’s brutal and it’s childlike but it’s beautiful and poetic, and it’s storytelling. ... the language took on a life of its own, it started moving in that poetic, hyper hyper way, that was how it had to go. (in Clean Break 2014)

Creating a minor language means drawing attention to the fact people are dominated and owned by language: ‘How many people today live in a language that is not their own?’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 19). This is political territory in current global

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‘em to death, as they do Irish rats, in drumming tunes’ (in Evans 1906, 130). Rats were also considered able to read summons to court (the criminal prosecution of animals has a history in Europe that goes as far back as 824, as Edward Payson Evans details in *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (1906). Evans reports on evidence of polite written requests laid out for rats to read, so that they may depart the house before further action against them would have to be taken. Human literacy was also rat-oriented in many ways, including, as Marjorie Fissell (1999) notes, the fact that in early modern England, children were taught to read with handbooks on rat killing.

conditions experienced by refugees and other immigrants, as well as for minority languages in any nation-space with declared majority language. The language of *Pests* also proceeds from an adjacent territory, the language of prisoners. On the post-show panel with Franzmann was Jennifer Joseph, who had not been on the artistic team for *Pests*, but who did her actor training with Clean Break after serving a sentence in prison. '[Prison] is a different world,' she added to Franzmann's comments. 'It doesn't matter what's going on in the outside world, once you're in there, it's a different world, [...] you create a different world, different languages' (ibid). These languages are themselves minor, acts of subversion to the master language of imprisonment. The childlike aspects of the language, Franzmann and director Lucy Morrison clarified in the post-show, were about childhood trauma, and the stuckness many women feel in reliving those moments of violence. When she was taken into state care at age twelve, and began to endure years of rape, Pink in some major ways stopped maturing. She finds it impossible to express the magnitude of this violence: 'It makin' me all... It makin' me feeled... It makin' my brains all... Where da --? ... Where da zig-a-zig-ah?' (35). Her oppression reveals itself in songs and chants with her sister, in the repetition of 'zig-a-zig-ah', as well as the visual language of her hallucinations.

To make a subversive, minor use of the trauma experienced by women in prison, the child comes in, and, even more crucially for this piece – the animal comes in to the terrain of *Pests*. 'Locating animals at the core of language inevitably means confronting its limit, its outside, its enabling and negating conditions,' writes Colleen Boggs in her work on animal representations and biopolitical subjectivity, *Animalia Americana* (2013): 'That confrontation is one where language and reason emerge but also unravel' (7). One of the negating conditions of language in *Pests* dampens Pink's



ability to express her extreme fear when trauma (past and present) tips into her life. She can at times only shiver through the cramped space of ‘zig-a-zig-ah’. But Franzmann turns to the rat in places where Pink expresses the desecration of the child: ‘Push his claws in my -- / Scratch me, hold me down, bite me -- / Scrape my fur -- / Stretch me till I bleeds / Stretch me till I bubble / Cram a sock on my mouth to stop da whimper’ (82). The in-betweenness of the language here, so evidently human *and* so evidently animal, creates a kind of polylingual attenuation in which, as Franzmann herself says, ‘You’ve really got to listen, haven’t you, you have to tune in, wake up – it is about opening your eyes and ears to this situation’ (in Clean Break 2014). These entanglements of animal and human, within language, smash up embodiment with symbolism. The abject violence of animal vocabulary to describe the rape of a child, within a minor language here, allows Franzmann to transcend binaries of literal meaning and figurative meaning. This is an ability that is both rare and revolutionary for conversations about trauma, violence and abuse, in which unspeakable events can bypass the limits of oppressive language to find alternative expression.

In his meditation on animals and ethics *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida finds himself dreaming of a similar kind of linguistic attenuation, ‘an unheard-of grammar’:

in order to create a scene that was neither human, nor divine, nor animal, with a view to denouncing all discourses on the so-called animal, ... with a view to recognizing in them animal strategies, precisely, in the human sense of the term, stratagems, ruses, and war machines, defensive or offensive maneuvers, search operations, predatory, seductive, indeed exterminatory operations as part of a pitiless struggle between what are presumed to be species. (2008, 76)

To actively dismantle the anthropological machine; to reveal the hominisation of the animal as part of exterminatory operations; to dream of ‘unheard-of grammars’: particularly in the theatre, considerations of human-animal engagement on stage

question the limits of animals and humans, as well as their supposed separations.<sup>11</sup> Frequently collapsing and interrogating the boundaries of theatre ‘with’ animals and theatre ‘about’ animals, recent scholarship in theatre studies has engaged broad spectrums of animal representation and materiality. Una Chaudhuri (2003, 2007) proposes *zooësis* as a performance mode with the potential to consider and situate both material and discursive representations of animals within a wide cultural field; critical zooësis consciously engages literary and dramatic representations of animals as well as social practices with animals, in order to interrogate and challenge them. In so doing, a practice of critical zooësis can promote a radical revisioning of modes of being, speaking, writing and performing, in which ‘animal acts *can* change the times’ (Chaudhuri 2014, 6). An animal act need not always include physical animals in performance; whether it does, or does not, for Alan Read one key aspect revolves around recognizing animal-human power disparities in performance. In Read’s view, theatre can never fully disengage from the gears of the anthropological machine, as it is *itself* an anthropological machine (2009, 81-101); within and because of this, however, theatre can ‘move beyond ... the acknowledgment of a shared history of violence [between humans and animals,] towards a material sense of how the suffering and loss that arises from that history can be encountered and acted upon’ (ibid 82). And in a series of questions much of a feather with Read’s and Chaudhuri’s sense of the radical repositioning afforded by exploratory performance with/about animals, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck asks:

Is it possible to slow down the anthropological machine enough to consider the possibility of being other than we are? Can humanity first re-cognize the hiatus that separates us from the animal and then risk ourselves in this emptiness? In this emptiness, might we risk the contagion that may connect all living beings as parts of a whole? (2006, 663).

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<sup>11</sup> Key thinkers who have elaborated this tendency include Baker (2013), Chaudhuri (2003, 2007), Fudge (2004), Orozco and Parker-Starbuck (2015), Petersen (2007), Read (2009) and Ridout (2006).

Parker-Starbuck's term *hiatus* reverberates with the territory beyond (exclusively) human comprehension, which Agamben calls 'the open' and Derrida the space of 'animot', if I may briefly bring these three terms in alignment; each indeterminate space designates an infinite multiplicity and meaning beyond the human, in which the human is divested of an exclusive right to language, judgment and reason.

Rats and humans do share a history of suffering,<sup>12</sup> and it is the shorthand of this history, condensed and recapitulated in two strange beings on stage, that works to campaign for a different future. The rat/human investigation within *Pests* is precisely this kind of 'hiatus', in which exclusionary social and carceral practices are brought to the fore *because* of the risk of a staged subjectivity beyond what is 'known' to any human or nonhuman animal in the audience. To return to Franzmann's claims on authenticity, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, what becomes authentic in this hiatus between/through rat and human is a macro illustration of suffering and inequality.

To this point we have engaged decompositions as they relate to language and biopower, primarily via figurations of life and language in the crevice between rat and human. But what of the spatialising forces of trash and filthy mattresses? These too propose a miasmatic condition of extralegal excess. Pink's walls are permeable and she experiences them as living, mutable and transgressed borders:

*PINK sits, she turns and stares at the wall. Blood trickles down it. She gets up. She gets a piece of newspaper and packing tape from the side and sticks the paper over it. It seeps through. She gets another sheet and does the same. It seeps through. She gets another. And again and again until it is covered. She*

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<sup>12</sup> Rats are a 'companion species' (following Donna Haraway 2008), both the companions of change in western society, and in many ways (not least due to grievances about the rat as plague-carrier) they are blamed as the *cause* of change. Rats and rat-like others create the conditions for catastrophe, supposedly, and this is used to justify in large part the necropower inherent to depicting rats and people as vermin, or vermin-adjacent. Ideas of rats and rat life express coalescing liminalities of the modern subject: trade, pollution, morality, class, money and commercial life, xenophobia and immigration, and erotics. These associations interact as contagions themselves through the figure of the rat.

*sits down. A long time. She looks at ROLLY's bag. She turns to look at the nest. She looks over at the paper. Blood seeps through. (44)*

Vermin are themselves always-already spatially decompositional agents, who do not naturally adhere to property lines, walls and other segregations of space: the 'infiltrative, decompositional role [of animals is] both literal and figurative' (Raber 2013, 143). Vermin desecrate the organisation of thresholds, rooms, walls; nesting, scampering, snacking on insulation, they might even realign the walls. How do these discursive decompositions of the subject within the state, yet outside of its protection, and within human subjectivity, yet beyond it, connect to what is happening on the staged environment of the set? What implications does the deteriorating trash of the set hold for imaginaries of not only rats and humans, but of the prison wall?

### Decomposition Three: Waste agency

Parker-Starbuck, in her set of questions quoted above, ponders whether 'we [might] risk the contagion that may connect all living beings as parts of a whole'. That contagious connection is precisely the hope of miasmatic performance, in *Pests*, as in each of the works discussed in this dissertation. It is also the disciplinary fantasy of carceral control – to blanket all beings as potentially contagious carceral subjects/objects. Bleakly but above all politically, such contagions of connection within *Pests* place an emphasis on expanding the field of what constitutes the 'human' within a vast biosocial assemblage, which includes animal beings, viruses, waste, and other matter; it includes a carceral network of discipline and control as part of this contagion. From within the miasma of a festering, putrid environment, *Pests* performs this contagious connection as a zoonotic event, jumping from animal, to human, to

amorphous visual projections inching across the set. As it moves, it both enacts multiple degradations and it campaigns for change.

The rat, and the deteriorating trash of the set, helps us to understand prison and the criminal justice system as what Jane Bennett terms ‘vibrant matter’ (2010) – an assemblage of performing materials, among them stone and electricity; prison vans and shackles; stacks of paper, court orders and love letters; but also other actants of the criminal justice system: the giant fabric of law, and rats, who as vermin crossing borders undermine a bedrock cultural trifecta of health, decency and containment. The sighting of a rat corpse, in and among some ‘debris’, with which Jane Bennett begins *Vibrant Matter*: from a ‘pile of trash’ comes ‘*Thing-Power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle’ (2010, 6). In my own perception, a corpse – of a rat or of any other being – may be a thing but I struggle to name it debris or trash. However, in this brief exposition of thing-power, Bennett manages to make an ontological bridge between her imagination of the rat’s action in life (enjoying trash / debris) and being trash. Rat-human Rolly articulates some of these complexities of material agency and equating action with liveness or being, when she talks to Pink about a project she did with her friend May in prison. May, having never tried drugs, wanted to understand how Rolly experiences her addiction to heroin. She gives Rolly a camera and asks her to take a picture of everything that makes her ‘wanna fill up my veins an’ forget’:

I clicked my cell, a roast dinner, da outside walkin’ place, a nasty screw, a nice one, da blue sky, da grey sky, da sun, da grass, a pigeon, some stars, da bars, da door, my teeth, my fingers, my veins, da lock, a spill on da floor, an old one on my wing an’ my toothbrush. (94)

Rolly’s addiction is active and acting upon her, everywhere she goes, and everywhere she looks. It brings all human and nonhuman objects around her into an assemblage of crave: her toothbrush is *extremely* vibrant matter. It may or may not be acting in a

way that Jane Bennett would also perceive; and in a way, that is Bennett's point – that objects of all kinds, inorganic and organic, act together and alone in multifarious ways, and these actions are not uniform, nor are they expected to be uniformly received. Yet Bennett does not address how differential distributions of power might affect perception of agency. Getting at this vein, Rebecca Schneider delivers a riposte to Bennett's rat scene:

When does a trajectory of human or nonhuman agency begin and end, and whom does it sweep along with it, where? What part rat, what part human, and where do we account for difference? ... some thinkers, like Lauren Berlant in "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," have been keen to note that romantically expanded liveness for some comes at the expense of others' "slow death"—those within capitalism who are "marked for wearing out" (2007:762n20). For some people, in some neighborhoods, dead rats may be no surprise. (2015, 13)

For some people, like Rolly and Pink, there has always been nonhuman agency in restrictive material boundaries, just as there is a certain kind of freedom in a wrap of heroin waiting on the table. For Pink, living with psychosis, it would come as no revelation that nonhuman objects have energy, purpose, emotion, action and power. 'I'd while away da hours / Conferrin' with the flowers / Consultin' wiv da rain...' sing Pink and Rolly to each other in four scenes when Pink starts getting frantic and paranoid (19, 36, 58, 97): what banishes fear is the idea of conferring with flowers and consulting with rain. Their return to these lines – themselves first sung by a vibrantly animated bundle of hay, the Scarecrow, in *The Wizard of Oz* ('If I Only Had a Brain', 1939) – underscore a sensibility of space around them as populated by a panoply of agential materials, substances, and beings. 'If I only had a brain', the sisters round off their recitation. The 'brain' that aspirationally circulates is a suspect one: what kind of brain? A brain that would be deemed healthy and smart, clean and moral? Possession of a 'reasoning' brain has, since the early modern period, been used to define human against animal: as Thomas Nashe wrote in 1596, impossible to

‘defend a Rat to be Animal rationale ... because she eate and gnawd his books, and except she carried a braine with her, she could neuer digest or be so capable of learning’ (in Fudge 2006, 2). Despite these declarations of the incommensurability of gnawing and learning, Pink seems defiant in her own intelligence: ‘Notify Mensa, dere a new pup in town’ (24).

Pink is not treated as if she has a brain; she is treated as part of a waste world, an abject thing. As her rat identity helps to convey, being forced to live outside of what is considered the apex of ‘human’ within ‘humanness’, causes Pink to sense she does not have the right *kind* of brain. Sylvère Lotringer makes a distinction about social abjection that illustrates Pink’s (enforced) identity quandary: it is ‘when [people become] invaded and exposed to the vertiginous experience of existing apart from the human race, that abjection comes about. ... People don’t just become abject because they are treated like a thing, but because they become a thing to themselves’ (in Tyler 2013, 43). Although Pink is rendered at least partially thing, she sees herself as one amongst many things, inorganic and organic, endowed with agency. Her revolt of thing-ness brings some new considerations and expands the field around what Jane Bennett refers to above as ‘*Thing-Power*’.

Pink does have thing-power as a thing unto herself and others, through her decomposing identity between rat, human, hallucination, sister. Her first experience of belonging within a matrix of things happens in conversation with the environment, not with other people in a social space, and is prompted by a perception of herself as blood:

I was eleven. I ‘member cos my bleeds started. I ‘member in da middle of da night, diggin’ a hole on da beach an’ sittin’ down. .... Lookin’ down an’ dere a pool of blood dat was me. In da sand. It was me. ... an’ I thought I am part of dis world. I am part of dis. I am part of dis world. (58)

Pink's blood in the sand, then merging with the wave, causes her to feel part of not just a world, but *this*/'dis' world. These lines bring across not only a realisation that it is only at eleven that Pink first experiences a sense of belonging in her world, but that she had not before felt a sense of intertwining connections with the space around her. It is the first time that she felt 'all meshed up' with her environment (58). Thinking through Pink in this way, a socially isolated subject occupying multiple states (between and beyond rat, human, pool of blood) and suffering from this, protesting it wildly, means that Pink's materiality questions the slippage between policed '*states of being* (human life) and *states of belonging* (political life)' (Tyler 2013, 3, original emphasis). Questions of being and belonging become intertwined, 'all meshed up' in fact, in contemporary British society. They account for conditions in which the socially abject-object is made outcast, written off as unworthy of the protection of the securitised state, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter.

In the violent absencing of state protection, much of Pink's differential distribution of agency thus revolves around her perception of who or what can provide protection to her and her sister. Pink's mental health condition leads her to experience an invasion of her nest in the majority of the play's scenes: vivid hallucinations crawl across the stage, threatening her, backing her into corners or out the door. She confers an enormous amount of talismanic agency to two items: her Spice Girls CD, and a pair of sparkling red 'No Place Like Home' Wizard of Oz shoes, both of whom protect her from the assault of her visions. Pink tells Rolly that when she saw the shoes, she was in the parking lot outside a TK Maxx, first being fucked, then assaulted by a punter she had picked up: 'Seed these shoes. Winkin' at me. Seed these fuckin' unbelievable red shimmy shoes ... shimmying an' winkin' out at me, teltin' me, teltin' me [her protective phrase] zig-a-zig-ah' (60-61). She tapes



the red shoes onto Rolly's legs to protect her; at another point in the play she violently assaults a little girl who has stolen them. The girl loses an eye; almost dies. The shoes are live to Pink in a way that a human girl simply is not. In a roundabout way, this is an evocation of what Schneider (via Berlant) gestures to above – a notion of liveness allocated at the expense of others. As part of a waste population, Pink and Rolly each articulate the slow death that they experience; at times, that articulation occurs as reciprocal violence toward others, within a landscape in which debris, trash, objects and drugs slice and punch with liveness. Some human parts lose human agency: 'This is not just an ordinary cunt, it an M&S cunt' (60). The rat-human-waste collaboration of *Pests* signifies the thinking beyond normative concepts of human agency (and complacency) that is needed to confront the predations of biopower within carceral society. As such, the rat-human-waste collaboration is really nothing at all without the audience; with this in mind, I come to a fourth and final miasmatic decomposition, between performance space and audience.

### Decomposition Four: A haze of absent referents

As a studio space, the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court can take any kind of audience seating arrangement. For *Pests*, it was raked seating. Raked, row on row piled up, mirroring the rake of rotting mattresses on the stage. In the nest on stage, Pink and Rolly indulge in mis- or grotesque uses of space and equipment. There's no bed, no toilet; the plaster covering the pipework has fallen away. Inspired to give healthy living a shot, Pink brings home a juicer; Rolly does not know what it is or what it's for. After Pink explains 'It juices shit':

*PINK looks round. Finds a half-eaten pizza on a plate. She opens the juicer, scrapes off the tomato sauce and onions into the juicer. Looks at the solid*

*result. PINK finds a half-drunk mug of tea. She adds this to the mix. Blitzes it. She finds a glass and pours the results into a glass. (54)*

This action resulted in disgusted groans from the audience – a kind of euphoric nausea – each time I was in the audience. The actors don't really drink the concoction, but Pink might as well have been really juicing shit and chugging it. It is gross, of course, but it is also *incorrect* use. But then, none of the properties on stage are living up to their material purpose: the walls don't wall, the juicer doesn't juice, women are scurrying, and these incommensurabilities are impossible to ignore.

They offer a carceral semiotics predicated on miasmatic occlusion, in which the thing has been detached from its phenomena. It will come as no surprise in light of the limited sensory prowess of the human (in comparison, for example, to the rat): miasmas are often suspected, but they are very rarely definitively *assigned*. What miasmas provide is common experience of something unusual, suspect, *incorrect* hanging around the space. The audience groans with disgust, but this is in full accordance with Pink's own feeling about her surroundings. Pink lets the audience know that for her, too, 'It a plague pit. Da whole place is stink. Make me puke nestin' here' (33). Franzmann writes in Pink's sense of smell at several points: '*PINK sniffs the air. Covers her nose and moves...* PINK. Can you smelt dat?' (56). What Pink is smelling is aftershave, and like the digital projections that Pink and the audience can see, the scent of aftershave arrives when Pink experiences anxiety or threat. As the play enters its last scenes, Pink's visual hallucinations are accompanied by sounds of men's voices, and their footsteps approaching. Franzmann's notes designate '*A smell of aftershave*' at these points; her intention is that the audience smell what Pink smells, just as we see what she sees, during hallucinatory episodes. Yet Rolly, by contrast, cannot see, hear or smell these events (she never knows what Pink is talking about when she asks if she can smell that). That she is sensorially oblivious becomes

a critical factor within this consideration of miasma: it both assigns the miasma to Pink but it *also* assigns it to the audience. The miasma of *Pests* cannot be reduced to a proscenium experience of Rolly and Pink's circumstances, in other words.

This quality of miasma as a socially bridging, even unifying, atmosphere was noted in the Victorian period. Tina Young Choi notes how miasma shifted into the positive territories of shared experience in Victorian Britain:

While usually perceived as threatening, miasma's social potential could nonetheless also lend a sense of coherence to urban experience. ... where social participation was a matter of the senses and the viscera, of the physiological responses and processes of the body, those collective breaths represent a universalizing, even potentially redeeming physiological experience, shared by all. Thus as miasma theory transformed invisible vapors and breaths into something material and consequential, it also rendered the distinctions and boundaries separating individuals – rich and poor, observer and observed, subject and reader – immaterial. In this involuntary intimacy of organs and orifices, where breaths passed out of one body and into another, the city's population, spread across miles and economic divides, was joined into a continuous whole. (2015, 47)

Through the miasma on the set of *Pests* a boundary between audience and performer decomposes. Flows of scents, smells and putrefactions effervesce as a mode of subverting dominant orders, and confounding a collective sense of hierarchy. This occurs between performer and audience, as swirling miasmas disrupt the space of 'observer and observed'. Where audiences become permeated by the rich tang of a tea and pizza smoothie; the pong of blood from psychotic hallucinations; where they are crammed with the effluvium of rapist aftershave; where audiences are bathed in a gummy scum of noun-heavy rat language: that is when 'something will float to da top, I bet' of the sewers of the human psyche, a something linked to new possibilities of kinship, animal-human relationalities, politics and performance. Sensorial engagement is critical to connecting with audience and floating (positive and negative) things to the top to be experienced and challenged as dominant discourse. In

a critically mimetic function, the decay wafting between audience and performance space performs an ‘egalitarian’ function:

the circulations of waste and wasted life in performance evoke uncertainties relating to how we might live together in the unpredictable and exposed zones of crisis and exception without interpersonal violence. Circulations of waste signal the abjectification of bodies and space – but the egalitarian and vivifying nature of life’s decay perhaps also provides an opportunity to devise responses to the unpredictability and alterability of the world in ways that protect rather than annihilate. (Hughes 2011, 28)

Through both critical mimesis, and through what I call here miasmatic performance, processes of decay and decomposition in *Pests* strive toward, circulate toward, an undoing of the composition of the carceral subject. This includes the carceral viewing subject. Through miasmatic performance in *Pests* the unbreachable semiotic of ‘prison’/ ‘criminal’ becomes filled with decomposed referents. As a performance atmosphere, and as a carceral atmosphere, miasma itself is predicated on – indeed supremely relies upon – obfuscated, foggy referents, moving around in a fug of suspicions that lead people to allocate essentialising traits and re-assign absent referents to criminal identity. Miasmatic performance deliberately evokes these mechanisms, slows them down, and scrutinises carceral practices in which referents are allocated to a particular ‘criminal’ causality.

This process relates closely to what feminist theorist Carol J Adams conceptualises as the *absent referent* (2010) – what is evacuated from meaning when animals and women are oppressed, a semantic ellipsis that allows for continued subjugation and violence in patriarchal society. Adams develops the absent referent initially through the relationship of *animals* to *meat*; both the life of the animal, and the idea of the animal being, become eradicated from the idea of ‘meat’, when the animal becomes a meal. The live animal and the animal’s slaughter become the absent referents within a concept of ‘meat’. Adams proceeds to link the absent referent of

animals to the material reality of rape culture: in an example she gives, the phrase ‘the rape of the earth’, women become the absent referent.

Correspondingly, when women are treated as ‘meat’ in patriarchal society, there is a doubly absent referent, encompassing the violence against the animal and/as a death-threat of fragmentation and consumption of the woman. ‘[The] original meaning of animals’ fates is absorbed into a human-centered hierarchy’, she writes. ‘Specifically in regard to rape victims and battered women, the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women’ (2010, 68). Adams connects conditions of absencing between women and animals, proposing an ‘overlap’ of absent referents which signify and activate violence against animals, and violence against women. Conflating, or subsuming, metaphors of violence between the two, is a way that patriarchal society maintains its ability to apply animality to hierarchies of humanness defined through racism, sexism and classism. By semantically conjoining one oppressive act (against women) to another (against animals), absent referents permit societies to continue to indulge in tautologies of oppression.

In *Pests*, absent referents are not simply made ‘present’; they are allowed to manifest peripherally through a complex semiotic network on stage. The absent referent of vermin as, and within, fantasies of the criminal has been explored at some length in this chapter. Beyond the animal, however, the criminal justice system is filled with absent referents: people moving through the criminal justice system carry commonalities of background that are routinely absented from the figuration of the criminal in carceral society.

Of these many absent referents of the criminal justice system, *Pests* explores a few, including poor literacy, lack of access to education, and addiction. Most particularly, however, the play examines the so-called ‘care’ system, through which

children are removed from their parents and placed in the care of local authority, at a state-run home or with foster parents. It is critical to note here that, though not the case for everyone, for many children placed in state care and certainly for *Pests*' Pink and Rolly, 'care' means exposure to violence. Known amongst criminologists as the 'care-crime connection', care-leavers are frequently assessed as at higher risk of offending: 31% of women in prison spent time in care as children (Women in Prison 2020). In research into risk factors and the criminal justice system, the care-crime connection often becomes teleologically associated with *pre-care* factors: it is often argued that neglected or abused children, after their removal from parents, go on to display chaotic behaviour that the local authority struggles to support.<sup>13</sup> Considering the care system as an absent referent of the criminal justice system means removing these arguments about which site of (non)care created the historic precedence for an entry into the criminal justice system in the present or future. The overriding problem is an elision of care itself from *all* carceral sites, including, critically, the audience at *Pests*.

*Pests* gives a dramatisation of violent actions against Rolly and Pink: a knife coming through the wall, from just outside. The decompositions of the production draw the boundaries between stage and audience into a contested boundary. If material and structural violences exist just outside of Rolly and Pink's nest, then they exist in the *immediate* outside of the staged set, that is to say, the audience. This gets

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<sup>13</sup> These arguments are one-sided, counters British criminologist Claire Fitzpatrick: '[It] has often been wrongly assumed that children in care are inevitably more likely to commit offences. Yet there is nothing inevitable about this. ... Whilst pre-care experiences must not be ignored, the focus on risk factors has encouraged an overwhelming emphasis on individual-level explanations in examining the link between care and criminal careers, whereby the focus of blame is directly located with the individual in care and their families (cf. Stanley, 2017). On their own, such explanations are lazy, one sided and partial. Furthermore, they enable the state in its role of corporate parent to deny or minimise the existence of structural problems and system-level failings' (2017, 136).

at the core of *Pests* as a ‘campaigning work’, motivated by outrage at the injustice of the prison system:

A huge portion of women in prison are suffering from some kind of mental illness; a huge portion of women are from the care system; there are literacy needs; there is a whole wide range of things going on that I wanted to show. [...] I wanted it to be a real punch in the face – I wanted it to be a real: ‘wake up everyone, wake up!’ and also for myself: ‘wake up, what’s going on here?’ I feel really angry about it; prison feels really brutal to me and I wanted the work to reflect that. (in Clean Break 2014)

Franzmann recounts thinking, after her first experiences meeting women in prison, ‘why haven’t I really thought about that myself?’ – her own learning trajectory about the prison system, and how it fails women profoundly, informed the direction of the play (in Clean Break 2014). References that Pink and Rolly make to the middle-class zones around them, as with the hotel manager above, or Rolly’s friend May, become particularly pointed. When Rolly, early in *Pests*, tells Pink she wants to move in with May, in part because they will each soon have babies and can help each other, Pink is vicious in her reply: ‘Share equal da childcare? When done you get so fuckin’ middle class? What, you gonna get a nanny next? Gonna start quaff quaffin’ red wines an’ chattin’ shit ‘bout dem rocketin’ house prices?’ (25). That Clean Break also used this quote as a marketing teaser for the play, on theatre websites and in advertisements, as well as on the back of the playtext further reinforces Franzmann’s clear statement on class disparity in the criminal justice system and in audiences for establishment theatres where the play toured (Royal Court, Manchester Royal Exchange, Traverse Theatre Edinburgh, Liverpool Everyman, Birmingham Rep and the Plymouth Drum).

At the time of the *Pests* tour, British television programming was awash with what became quickly known as ‘poverty porn’: the heavily criticized British Channel 4 programme *Benefits Street* (2014) was airing during the development of the play. Franzmann makes two overt ripostes to poverty porn – one in an interview with *The*

*Guardian*: ‘The way the poor are portrayed is often unfair and hostile and it’s important to me not to be part of this ... not to sensationalise, not to judge, not to shame’ (in Gentleman 2014). But she lets Pink deliver the most zinging critique, as she and Rolly watch a programme called *Life of Grime*:

...All dem tv nobs sittin’ round wiv dere Pret-a-Mange free-rangey baguettes an’ Flatish Whites, ‘Oh I know a filthy fruit bat who resides in da council ’state at da end of my road. She ain’t been out da house fifteen years since the death of her beloved mother. Let us propel a camera crew round an’ get her to sprucify it all up, honestly, it’ll transformify da scuzzy dirtbag’s life, literally, like, literally like literally, like completely literally an’ we’ll be dere to catch it all, as an’ when, as an’ when, as an’ when, honestly, literally, like literally.’  
(15)

For Pink and Rolly to be even watching this programme is a risky act: TV license evasion accounts for a full 36% of prosecutions of women in the British criminal justice system (Prison Reform Trust 2017, 2). Pink’s multiple barbs at the middle class’s viewing habits and articulations when faced with poverty: ‘honestly – literally – so terrible for you’ meet Pink’s imagination of what middle class conversations behind closed doors are really like – they are not actually talking about the poor people they met, just real estate, those ‘rocketin’ house prices’ that force more and more people into poverty, and out of the city, each year. And it is in these ways, among others, that Franzmann addresses the absent referent of the audience in the criminal justice system – writing the audience (insofar as audiences at these theatres can be conjectured as middle class) into Pink and Rolly’s lives. Franzmann is really outraged, as she frequently declares in interviews and talks; she wants the audience to be, too. A miasmatic cartography, as proposed by Pink and Rolly’s frequent descriptions of the outside world, pulls the audience in, refuses the frameless, classless, majoritarian subject at the theatre. Everybody’s present in this pestilential carceral state, even if they think they are absent from it, or it from them.



To circle this positioning of the absent referent in *Pests* back to Adams' connotation: the woman-animal, rat-girl symbiosis delivers a miasmatic potential to draw the audience in. A play about rats and criminals can hardly avoid implicating a Ratcatcher in one way or another. A campaigning play, about rats and criminals (and their Catchers), which chastises and remonstrates to the audience at points about their own part to play in all this mess – could not, in turn, fail to invoke that infamous 'Mousetrap', deployed to 'catch the conscience of the king' in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Any affiliation of conscience-catching *Pests* to the pursuits of a play-trap becomes even more rich under consideration of Hamlet as a Ratcatcher. Just as 'dirty cops' occupy a complex place in the carceral imaginary, Ratcatchers have been historically treated as similarly complex characters: for Catchers to catch rats, they must understand and outthink rats – and by understanding, and by extension *communicating* with rats, they become suspiciously verminous beings (Fissell 1999, Raber 2013). The distinction between vermin and vermin-hunter, muddled and perplexing, demonstrates a decomposing boundary between quarry, scourge, madness and sanity, that is the particular realm of the rat-human interaction. When considered as a triad, criminal-rat-catcher, Pink, Rolly and the audience reveal the human slippage between catcher and criminal.

These contexts and paratexts of *Pests* help to situate it as one of the most powerful examples of Clean Break's artistic model of interdependency between theatre and social advocacy. In public talks and events connected to the play's 2014 tour, Clean Break also 'focussed discourse around the production on the criminalisation of women in society, at a time when the themes resonated with the exposure of largescale child abuse in public institutions across the country' (2015, 3). The 2014 Rotherham child sex abuse scandal was perhaps the most significant of

these, in which reports estimated at least 1,400 children had been raped and sexually exploited over sixteen years. Many of these children were in care of the local authority; the police, Rotherham council and social services were aware of ongoing sexual violence against children and took only limited action to stop it. In *Pests*, Pink is terrorised by memories of being raped as a young girl in care; as the play continues, she faces an ever-increasing likelihood that Rolly will one day leave her, and the men from her memories become permanent intrusions into her space. They are shadows of blood, knives, and crackling electricity that emerge as digital projections from the edges of the mattress-strewn nest.

PINK            Did you telt dem ‘bout da men dat used to come to da home?  
When you was done all tucked up snug at Jayne and Mike’s an’  
I was at da home. Did ya? Did you telt dem ‘bout da men dat  
came wiv da Mars bars an’ da Silk Cuts an’ da teddy bears an’  
da pound coins? (40)

In prison, trauma becomes compacted, compounded, re-enacted. People are retraumatised, both with new trauma, and with the old trauma that lives on in their bodies and minds. When speaking of trauma, the idea of a ‘referent’ – known or unknown, recovered or hidden, absent or present – becomes extremely complex. What *Pests* confronts are the recapitulations of violence that occur on multiple fronts, through multiple powers; Franzmann focuses here on the care system because it can deeply articulate an acute awareness that the ‘absent referent’ of the criminal justice system is, most simply, absence itself.

The functional and routine removal from parents – parents absented from their children and children absented from their parents and siblings – becomes an obsession for the characters of the play. *Pests* revolves around the vagaries of removal and absencing; self-absencing through drug use; and it crescendos through a paranoia of predicted absence. In scene sixteen of *Pests*, the ravages of this absencing become

attenuated as Pink lies wasted downstage. Actors Ellie Kendrick (Rolly) and Sinéad Matthews (Pink) played this scene out over several minutes, letting each line hang in the air:

|       |            |
|-------|------------|
| PINK  | Rolly?     |
|       | Sista?     |
|       | You dere?  |
|       | Rolly?     |
|       | You dere?  |
|       | Is you...  |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | Good.      |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | Gold star. |
|       | Rolly?     |
|       | Rolly?     |
|       | You dere?  |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | Good.      |
|       | Gold star. |
|       | Rolly?     |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | Sista?     |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | You dere?  |
| ROLLY | Yeah.      |
| PINK  | Good.      |
| ROLLY | Yeah. (85) |



Figure 4. Scene sixteen of *Pests*. Photograph Jonathan Keenan

Scene sixteen is but one of the overt articulations of Pink's overwhelming need to hold on to her sister Rolly, and to keep her physically with her. Fear of Rolly's absence both advances the action of the play, and creates morass-like sequences where the two steep in a miasma of stuckness, as in the one above. As Pink returns again and again to the question, 'You dere?', Sinéad Matthew's tone retains its urgency, as if it is the first time she asks it. Her panic that Rolly might not actually be there renews with each fresh volley of questions. Asked so many times, it moves from plea to Althusserian interpellation: You dere? to 'Hey, You There'. Pink's hail. Her insistency brings a tension to the macro social framework implied by *Hey - are you out there (audience)?*, much in the same vein as Franzmann's exhortation 'wake up everyone, wake up!'

Rolly finally walks out on Pink in the last scene, although Pink begs her to stay: 'Please. Dey is all comin'. Dey is all comin' for me' (98). The men from her past encroach upon, and threaten anew, her mind and body. Alone, the lights start to fail and blood-red projections bleed across the set. Pink rips her clothes off and gets on all fours. Her body becomes pawed and pulled from every direction by invisible, 'absent' hands. For almost two full minutes, the audience watch her rape, watch her trying to fend off her assailants with one arm. For me, sitting in the audience, those two minutes stretched to hell and did not really return. Somewhere in my mind, they are still stretching on. Pink's hail. Suddenly Rolly enters the scene again; she pulls Pink onto her lap and begins to cook up.

The idea of a resolution, or even just an ending, has itself decomposed. Through these decays – materially of the set, figuratively within the vermin-life of Rolly and Pink, sensorially as bleeds between set and audience through scent, nausea, despair – audience and theatre become stratified within the same assemblage, one of

extreme damage. Yet within this, miasmatic overflows of trash, vermin and criminality in *Pests* become positive and hopeful acts, insofar as they meet Hughes's thinking around decomposition within applied theatre as performing 'important functions connected to the preservation and regeneration of life as well as its deterioration .... drawing attention to issues of survivability and provoking reflection about the social and political implications' (Hughes 2011b, 206). In part the political implications here involve reconfiguring ideas of humans, animals, trash, and the criminal justice system into an equalized power relation. It becomes impossible to reduce the play into being 'about' violence against certain people and not others, or certain animals and not others; it becomes about environment, biopolitical forces, and the concept of waste as acting objects, just like these other human and rat objects become caused to move in and out of juridical order.

As such, aesthetics of decomposition and seepage, at a crossroads with prison, poverty, and animality, become deployed in *Pests* to generate an extreme landscape of a collectively held social imaginary. Confronted with a distended semiotic of waste(d) life – one predicated on an fantastical imaginary of women living in poverty – the sites of prison, care homes, as well as actions of rape and physical violence *not* portrayed on stage, come under critical inspection as sites of stable representation. As Rolly and Pink, already in a destabilised identity category as rat-women, fall apart, shoot up, disintegrate, 'prison' becomes one of the only stable forces to prop up the world of the play. In order to support the decomposition occurring on stage, ideas of 'prison', 'rape', 'assault' must remain composed, or be continually recomposed, and confronted. The hope of this reconceived relationship is that carceral statecraft can be survived, if it is broken down like this into multiple parts. It is in these ways that *Pests* subtends and twists carceral conditioning in the audience within a miasmatic mode.

In this chapter I have approached decomposition on aesthetic, material and figurative levels as a distinctive element of *Pests*. A decomposing set identifies Pink and Rolly both with literal waste and as wasted lives, bringing an urgency to the social waste-making processes that create slow and fast death in the UK. Because *Pests* depicts this zone as a spillage beyond containment, it carries a miasma aesthetic; yet where it goes further, calling on an awareness within the audience of the force of government that creates this social byproduct, it becomes miasmatic performance. Decompositional sensory zones between audience and staged narrative in *Pests* articulate the ability of the miasmatic to coax carceral fantasies of the audience out of the pit of a collectively held, and deeply embedded, cultural imaginary. *Pests* challenges these fantasies with feral courage. Yet in its retention of the form of proscenium theatre, the decompositions here to some degree retain the audience as empowered and privileged participants in carceral society; and in fact, this very aspect is crucial to its campaigning aim. In the next chapter, we will get a little closer to the armpits of the audience. I build on the performance of miasmatic decompositions to look at some of its by-products, namely the sweat, pee and general funk of the bodies of audiences and performers, penned up together in a prison van. In Chapter Two, Clean Break's *Sweatbox* at Latitude Festival 2015 provides the territory to examine another aesthetic crucial to miasmatic performance: secretion.



## Secretion

### *Sweatbox* at Latitude Festival, 2015

Non-toxic, rainbow sheep meander on the private grounds of Henham Park estate in Suffolk, UK, in observation of Latitude Festival 2015. Around a lake and gentle woodlands, performance tents shudder and flap not only with music acts, but with poetry, theatre, cabaret, comedy, circus, film screenings and book readings. Close to 40,000 people filter in and out of gigs and yoga sessions.

A prison van gathers dew in a field.

*Are we here? Oi, what's going on? Can we get out of here or what?* (Moss 2015)

Decommissioned from prisoner transport, gutted of several of its cells to allow for audiences, this prison van had rolled into a new and unusual zone of discipline and performance as Clean Break's *Sweatbox*. Over three days and twelve performances, approximately 160 audience members crammed into the prison van to watch three women with experience of the criminal justice system perform from within the holding cells. Of the van's original cells, only three remained, each measuring three feet wide, three feet deep, seven feet tall with one, long vertical twelve-inch Perspex window. Audiences of twelve to fifteen at a time stand in the remainder of the space. With a standing audience of twelve, it is close and uncomfortable; with an audience of fifteen it feels rammed.



Figure 5. *Sweatbox* by Chloë Moss at Latitude Festival (2015). Photograph by author.

*Sweatbox*, scripted by Chloë Moss and performed by Clean Break ensemble Carrie Rock, Eddy Emenike and Jade Small, derived its themes and language through workshops and conversations about what goes on in prison vans, with women who had been in them before.<sup>14</sup> With highs of 26° C, the weekend of 16-19 July 2015 was a hot and sunny one by UK standards (at the time): brilliant weather for an outdoor music festival, but considerably compromising for theatre audiences locked into the cramped interior of a prison van. *Sweatbox* audiences stood sweating in the heat, straining to see and hear women who performed through the grime-tinted Perspex a play written in response to lived experience of transportation in other prison vans.

The hot enclosure of the van, and the women shouting for relief through their cell doors, made each of the fifteen minutes of this play strain with urgency. This

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<sup>14</sup> Clean Break wanted *Sweatbox* audiences to be aware that the performers had close, personal experience to prison transport vans: the company publicised the play as performed by two ex-offenders and one woman at risk.



urgency manifests on multiple levels: borne out on one level through physiological extremes, an emotional and intellectual urgency develops through audience awareness that the women in the cells have been locked up in other prison vans before. ‘Of all the things our bodies regularly do in public,’ writes theatre studies scholar Shonni Enelow, ‘sweat might be the most unsettling’:

One of the most unavoidable of all physiological responses, sweat – attributable to climate and environment, physical labour, illness, hormonal change, substance use or withdrawal, stress, anxiety, excitement, terror, or erotic arousal – is also profoundly ambiguous (2019, 129).

Yet given how common sweating is, and how wide its functions, Enelow notes that it is one of the most under-theorised sensory responses. Despite the ambiguities and many possible precipitates inherent to sweat, in this chapter I analyse it through a particular, miasmatic function *as carceral secretion*. When people get the sweats in a prison van, they come unbidden, an uncontrollable response within a control-machine.<sup>15</sup>

The sweats of the *Sweatbox* arise from physical discomfort from the July heat, but these sweats arise too from a labour shared between performers and audience, both carceral and theatrical in form. In this chapter I investigate how this shared labour involves the *Sweatbox* in miasmatic performance. Although it is often expected of performers to sweat – and celebrated, too, as an indicator of ‘real’ theatrical work, as I discuss further along in this chapter – for the *audience* to sweat is altogether more ‘unsettling’, to use Enelow’s term. The audience’s labour here responds to the labour of the performers Rock, Emenike and Small, who had been in other prison vans at other times, and it also responds to their own carceral labour in the van, as participants in a reenactment of prison transport. I explore the miasmatic aesthetics

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<sup>15</sup> This is in particular contrast to another secretion, tears, which can flow in part as a *knowing* response to carceral narrative, as I discuss in the next chapter (*Dream Pill*, Chapter Three).

and politics of *Sweatbox* with specific regard to Latitude Festival's majority white and middle class audience demographic. It bears reiterating here that this thesis explores the impact of Clean Break's theatre on audiences who do not, primarily, have lived experience of the criminal justice system and are not at high risk of being policed or criminalised in part due to race and class. *Sweatbox* has toured and continues to tour to locations around the UK, engaging many different demographics of people as its audiences.<sup>16</sup> Further along in this chapter, I discuss how women offenders and women at risk first experienced the van when it was parked at Clean Break in 2015, prior to Latitude. As I discuss in this chapter, of vital importance to the analysis here is the recognition that the labour in the van is for white middle class audiences to recognise that their conditions of life, their chances of being policed and incarcerated, are very precisely *not shared* with the performers in the van. It is through the articulation of these disparities that miasmatic performance occurs: how this happens, and why, is the focus of this chapter.

I begin with the thematics of the *Sweatbox* through an exploration of the language that the three performers use to communicate across cell divides in the prison van. Three women have been left alone in their cells, while the guards take a break. On an immediate level, *Sweatbox* is a play about waiting. Accordingly, I bring a sustained focus to the way we are 'doing time' in this piece of theatre. As an audience member in that heat, for me the minutes ticked by at an excruciating pace. I was also aware of how very minor my experience was in comparison to what people forced into prison transport undergo. What goes into experience, and what are its politics? I connect the experience of time as an embodied and carceral awareness to

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<sup>16</sup> *Sweatbox*'s full production history to date: Latitude (July 2015), National Theatre (July 2015), York St John University (October 2015), Chichester Festival Theatre (June 2019), Clean Break (June 2019), Snape Maltings (August 2019), Royal Court (September 2019), HOME (September 2019).

miasmatic performance, in that *Sweatbox* strategically invests the audience in a performance space with the power to reveal how carceral temporalities define and transport people's lives from birth to death, and along through generations. How might miasmatic performance develop through a consideration of the communal sweating of the prison van – what pressures does it put on carceral narratives, and spaces and how does it re-enact *the* time of carcerality?

Throughout the analysis here I sniff out instances of performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie's paradigm of disordering performance, *perfumance*, in the *Sweatbox*. I test out the ways in which the play provides what McKenzie calls the 'funky milieu' of perfumance (2001). McKenzie posits perfumance as a performance atmosphere, one that challenges and breaks down modes of hegemonic, disciplinary knowledge and power. A *perfumative* element within performance allows for the 'becoming-mutational of normative forces, the becoming-normative of mutant forces[;] the odor of things and words, the sweat of bodies, the perfume of discourse[;] the ruse of a general theory' (2001, 203). Through perfumance, I argue in this chapter, *Sweatbox* becomes self-referential – a prison van referring to itself referring to theatre referring to prison referring to audience referring to carceral transport, etc – exposing the holes and limits of the power of carceral discipline. As sweats from audience and performers secrete, steam, slide under the cell division; as they evoke other sweats from other times still lurking in the walls, *Sweatbox* becomes a perfumative resistance to sites of prison and theatre that reify carceral practices. Within this resistance, miasmatic performance creates a perspective on what might go into breaking carceral temporalities down, figuring 'time' as a carceral secretion that can, through theatre, possibly become diverted and reclaimed.

## What transpires / perspires in the sweatbox / *Sweatbox*?

Known colloquially in the UK as ‘sweatboxes’, prison transport vans are tortuous environments. In the words of one former prisoner, they provide ‘one of the worst days out that can be had’ (*Comment with Convictions* 2016). In a sweatbox, each prisoner occupies a tiny cell, with barely enough room to look through a tinted window, as they are transported from prison to court, prison to prison, or court to prison. Lack of temperature control means that prisoners either freeze or become drenched with sweat by the time they are released, typically hours later. All prisoners – whether men, women or children, and regardless of physical or mental condition – wait on the whim of guards to assist them if they need help. One major problem is access to a toilet: ‘If you need a slash, the guard will shove a box under the door, if you need a dump – tough’ (*Comment with Convictions* 2016). Prisoners are forced to relieve themselves in their cells, with or without a box, and at the end of the journey they often have to clean it up themselves.

Mirroring this ignominy of prison transport, *Sweatbox* begins, and ends, with an extreme need to pee. The guards have closed up the sweatbox, leaving the performers and audience alone inside. One audience member describes entering the van: ‘the door is unlocked and we are invited in. The heat hits you first, it’s a hot day and it really is a Sweatbox inside. Three locked doors, three very different women inside each cell. The van stops, staff get out...then nothing’ (Evans 2015). In the far left cell, a very pregnant prisoner, Steph (Carrie Rock), is desperate to use the toilet. She hollers, bangs on the walls and windows of her cell to try to get the attention of the guards to let her out. For the women in the cells, as characters and as performers, as well as for the audience in the sweatbox’s increasing heat, the passage of time is excruciating.



Figure 6. Carrie Rock as Steph, Eddy Emenike as Nina, and Jade Small as Rachel in *Sweatbox* at Latitude Festival. Photograph Katherine Leedale.

Steph does not know what prison they've travelled to, and this is not unusual: prisoners are often relocated to other prisons without being advised where, when or for how long. Nina (Eddy Emenike), in the middle cell, has been up and down the country in prison vans over the course of multiple sentences; she recognises this prison as HMP Bronzefield, where '[t]hey do this. Stop the van outside the gates then leave you sat there like battery hens' (Moss 2015). Steph keeps shouting for help, and Rachel (Jade Small), in the far right cell, counts repeatedly to herself (*1,2,3,4...*) as a coping mechanism. Still in her clothes from court, she is having a panic attack. As a first time offender, she never expected a prison sentence from the judge, and now there isn't anyone to pick up Rachel's son Jake after school. 'I can't cope – I gotta get out' she cries. Nina tells her not to 'kick off': 'they'll mark your card [as a] troublemaker – you might as well have it stamped on your forehead' (Moss 2015). Steph jumps in to advise Rachel not to talk about her kid while she's in prison. She delivers the advice in a generic way, but the line carries a sharp undercurrent of a

warning to quit stirring up conversations about children in the sweatbox. Steph herself cannot be sure what the future holds for her own baby. As the two women on either side of her cell become increasingly frantic, Nina tries to keep her cool by singing Kylie Minogue's pop classic 'Can't Get You Out of My Head' (2001). *Boy, it's more than I dare to think about*, she sings.

Struggling in their cells, the women crane their necks to look through the tinted windows at the guards outside. Nina detects a potential love interest burgeoning between the two guards; audiences laugh as she goes on about the guard's 'Chunky Kit Kat' (Moss 2015). But Steph and Rachel do not join in on the laugh; Steph in particular is reaching her physical limit, bursting with the need to pee, and her anxiety is made all the more urgent as Rachel continues to talk about her son Jake. As they shout through their dividing walls, Steph, Nina and Rachel's lines sit in an uneasy waver between monologue and dialogue. They can hear each other – barely – but the pressure of relating in the sweatbox means that when responses come, they are obliquely associated, gripping on to meaning through a sound or a word, rather than a sentence's meaning. Bound up within the body of the present – a body bursting with pee, song, sweat and ragged breath – *Sweatbox* evokes a co-temporality under extreme duress.

|        |                                                  |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------|
| NINA   | I'm just trying not to lose it                   |
| STEPH  | I can't hold it in                               |
| NINA   | Trying to keep it in                             |
| RACHEL | I said I'd keep us together                      |
| NINA   | Trying to hold it in                             |
| RACHEL | He's three                                       |
| NINA   | 4. 5. 6.                                         |
| STEPH  | I can't hold it in ... can't [ <i>she pees</i> ] |

Their lines bind and slick around each other, at once disconnected and suddenly intersectional with each other. Nina's memories of past sweatbox journeys, as she vomited and banged her head against the walls, meet anxieties for futures inside

prison (for Steph and her baby), and outside prison (for Rachel's son Jake). The poetics of holding, keeping, losing; being held, and being kept from holding are deftly braided here as the three women borrow from each other's language. Their language creates a continuity across cell partitions designed to isolate.



Figure 7. Performing in the cells of the prison van. Photograph Katherine Leedale

It is a continuity that reaches across the cell divide to audiences, too. The time of the sweatbox is carceral time, redolent of incommensurate distances, deep isolations and disconnects, sometimes sudden, sometimes prolonged connections over short-long periods. Carceral time joins the sweatbox (object) to the *Sweatbox* (play), where within each – and across each – a monologue might be a dialogue, and a dialogue might be a monologue. Carceral time is predicated on re-enactments, performing predictability and surveillance; it is aligned to recursion, rather than progression. Clean Break's sweatbox is tethered to a field, and is not going anywhere but the zones of imprisonment set up by the carceral imaginary.

## ‘Doing the time’ and chronodeviation

‘We all want to fucking get out!’ shouts Steph. ‘You think it’s bad now? You need to learn how to cope. Keep your head down’ (Moss 2015). She recommends not trusting anyone in prison – ‘Turn your back for five minutes and they’ll fuck you over’ – just get through and do your time. And yet, she engages Rachel and Nina with questions, conversation and advice that do not signify that Steph is about to just ‘do her time’ (Moss 2015).

The themes of *Sweatbox* eddy and pool around each other in their representations of time, timelines and the restrictions of time: the body-time of the present – breath, sweat, and urine as charted above – and the time of Steph’s pregnancy, meet recursions of Nina’s ‘Can’t Get You Out of My Head’ to both move the dialogue forward, and hold it together. Meanwhile the temporality of Rachel’s motherhood takes on an ancient gleam as she periodically lists names of dinosaurs – ‘Brachiosaurus... Ankylosaurus, Stegosaurus, Brontosaurus, Triceratops’ – as she is transported further and further away from her son.

Restoring dinosaurs to the *Sweatbox*, the time signature of the play becomes more and more perfumative in its anachronisms. Channeling what McKenzie refers to as ‘minor’ histories and anachronisms (2001, 25-26),<sup>17</sup> the *Sweatbox* interweaves the minor voices of prisoners into deep, geologic time. The litany of dinosaurs provides both a chthonic reassurance, and a rhythmic reprimand, as Rachel reveals her painstaking efforts to memorise the names of all of them to please her son. Another person in the van, Steph, may never have the opportunity to recite the dinosaurs to her child; it is a wrenching disparity, especially for the family-friendly Latitude Festival audience. The restoration of dinosaurs restores, in turn, a trope of parenting (indulging

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<sup>17</sup> Here McKenzie refers to minor in the sense of politically minor, as per Deleuze and Guattari (see discussion in *Pests*), in resistance to majoritarian discourse, language and culture.



in the delight of dino-worlds), and in this inculcates a catastrophe of parenting: removal from the child (one terrible lizard of parenting fear). Suddenly dinosaurs put prison (as well as other, perfumatively reconfigured dinosaurs) in the middle class parenting imaginary.

Underlying all of this is Rachel's fear that even dinosaurs won't keep Jake waiting for her at the school gates: 'Two nights. That's all I've ever been away' (Moss 2015). The baby won't wait to come out of Steph's body. This 'moving on' of the next generation while mothers are trapped inside prison becomes part of the clear danger of the present: 'Don't talk about your kids' warns Steph, and she speaks beyond her own fears for her child, to the torture that many women experience in being separated from their families while serving sentences. Talking about kids makes it worse, in Steph's opinion. Nina is more sanguine: 'Do what you gotta do. My kids are older now, see. They know it all, they can handle it.' Nina's anguished waiting is located more around her addiction, waiting for it to strike her again: 'Fourth time. Each time's the last. I swear to myself, I can do this.' Yet the women in the sweatbox are slowly flayed by waiting as their guards linger interminably outside.<sup>18</sup>

*Sweatbox's* manifestation of various temporalities test social concepts of the normative progression of time. The time of Steph's body, the time of Rachel's motherhood, and the time of Nina's addiction meet and muddle up with the time of the Latitude festival, the present-tense fifteen minutes of the play, and the multiple passages of the past that the van itself represents. The play does time; more specifically, it does *the* time of chrononormativity and then bucks against it.

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<sup>18</sup> There is, within this time of waiting, a Beckettian tempo – the circularity of the women's dialogue, their sense of extreme urgency within a lost present as they wait on their jailers to return – link the *Sweatbox* to *Waiting for Godot*. The theatre's own past, as such, becomes present within the temporality of the sweatbox, *Sweatbox* waiting on *Godot*.

‘Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time,’ implores Sammy Davis Jr. in the theme to 70s cop show *Baretta*. (‘*Don’t do it!*’ chirp the background singers in agreement.) ‘Doing time’ has been a slang term for serving a prison sentence since at least the mid 19th century (OED: ‘to do (one’s) time’), but *Baretta* added a definite article to the phrase, taking it beyond indefinite time, or doing one’s own time, to making it doing *the* time. The time of a prison sentence is part of the time of the criminal justice system, which is the regulatory and disciplinary time of the *socius*. ‘Doing time’ and ‘doing *the* time’ reaches an even more pointed articulation through the common colloquialism for prison sentences, ‘serving time.’

Becoming a servant to the time aligns closely to rubrics of chrononormativity in the work of Elizabeth Freeman (2010); in what is particularly relevant to a criminal justice context, Freeman discusses chrononormativity as a series of ‘binds’ that ‘turn mere existence into a form of mastery’ (3). Through ‘time binds’ society regulates bodies via temporality ‘toward maximum productivity’ (ibid). In the case of criminalised bodies and demographics, maximum productivity frequently means doing the time of supporting the vast economy of the prison industrial complex (Hernández et al 2015).

Within the *Sweatbox* one palpable aspect of chrononormativity becomes an exposure to a master, carceral temporality fueled by extreme denigration and cruelty across generations.

For the thousands of prisoners transported in this way [in sweatboxes], a large proportion of whom are on remand, many of whom are ill, traumatised, mentally unstable or claustrophobic, the experience recalls the barbarism of a previous era’s transportation of slaves and convicts. (Jewkes in Walsh 2018, 25)

The sweatbox not only ‘recalls the barbarism of a previous era’, it performs the continuity of barbarism that has not relented. The sweatbox is a porous space in which

demarcations of time – or ‘eras’ – become instructive in their confusions, shocking in their violences. From within this carceral palimpsest *Sweatbox* draws performers, audience, and van itself into a complex, fleetingly possible co-temporality.

The problem of possible co-temporality – or the recognition of divergent temporalities held by performers and audience within the same performance space – is not resolved in the *Sweatbox*. It performs instead a dislocation of temporalities to demonstrate the difference in life ‘chances’ and trajectories between audiences and performers: in other words, a witnessing of the dis- within the co-temporality. These disjunctures evince, briefly and searingly, the incompatibility of notions of ‘progress’, ‘future’, ‘past’ (as discrete concepts) for people trapped in the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system breeds what queer and prison studies scholar Stephen Dillon (2013) calls ‘temporalities of violence’, which deny a future to criminalised counterpublics. Acknowledging these temporalities of violence in works like *Sweatbox* can help foster a ‘politics of urgency and presentism’ (2013, 38) to combat these temporalities.

In the sweatbox, Latitude audiences assembled were also held to schedules, other festival acts to get to. ‘How long will it last?’ I was asked more than once as I sat in the van between performances. As Dillon writes,

to believe in the progress of time is tied to the immunity of whiteness from structural forms of racial violence, regulation, and social death.... For those bearing the brunt of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, the past, present, and future are not distinct temporal spaces. (2013, 41)

The experience of the *Sweatbox* puts such a pressure on time that – through thematic content and through physical exertion – the passage of the play felt like a disorientation, or a miasma of time, through a haze of sweat. The violence of imprisonment and policing in contemporary carceral societies becomes an embodied temporality within the sweatbox; this is a temporality made powerful by openly

bridging beyond the theatre to events of racialised violence occurring outside the world of the play. Rachel, performed by a woman of colour, pounds against the walls of her cell in the *Sweatbox*. She is having a panic attack. She pleads ‘I can’t breathe’ again and again. These lines, in July 2015, were performed almost exactly one year to the day following the murder of Eric Garner by New York police on July 17, 2014. Garner was put in a chokehold; he said ‘I can’t breathe’ eleven times, until he lost consciousness and died. Garner’s words continue to galvanise the Black Lives Matter movement today. The prison van here fails to mete out a temporality of violence because it becomes a site of disrupted citational networking, occasioned by performance: ‘in the incessant archiving, transformation, and transmission of statements and practices’ (McKenzie 2001, 209), *Sweatbox* ‘register[s] the inherent ability of performatives to fail and misfire, and, in misfiring, to link up with other referents, other contents, other performances’ (McKenzie 2001, 212). Where the sweatbox acts as a premier signifier of prison gone mobile, and, in this mobility, becomes a performative of prison – *Sweatbox* undertakes a highjack of that performative function. Within the *Sweatbox* the sweatbox fails, misfires, becomes theatre – but also becomes the site of a reclamation of space, sweat, memorialisation and breath by women who, in this moment, will not be destroyed by its violence. In the *Sweatbox*, Nina – performed by a woman of colour – delivers a devastating reply: ‘If you couldn’t breathe darling you’d be dead.’

What is happening in such a powerful moment as this, when cutting across carceral spaces, theatre makes *live*, gives breath, to past exercises of carceral domination and resistance? Here I find an instance of Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of ‘deviant chronopolitics’ (2005). In an article entitled ‘Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography’, later developed into *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer*

*Histories* (2010), Freeman uses the term ‘deviant chronopolitics’ to designate what she discusses as *binding* both in service of and resistance to chrononormativity.

Queer temporalities are critical to understanding how women in prison and women at risk engage and deploy what Jack Halberstam identifies as ‘nonnormative logics and organisations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time’ (2005, 6). Women with experience of the criminal justice system have not only been forcibly removed from inhabiting a space and legal identity constructed by heteronormative patriarchy as ‘free’; they have also been removed, in some ways, from ‘straight’ time’s frames. A deviance from chronormativity creates, sustains and critically dilates cross- and multi-temporal ‘queer lifeworlds’ and continuities via sexual dissidence. Such a ‘carnal continuity’ (Freeman 2005, 60) is filled with binding: “‘Binds’” also suggests the bonds of love, not only attachments in the here and now but also those forged across both spatial and temporal barriers: to be “bound” is to be going somewhere’ (Freeman 2005, 61). Deviation from the disciplines of chrononormativity entails therefore a turning away and a turning toward, a binding toward: a chronodeviation. Doing the time of chronodeviation meets miasmatic performance in the *Sweatbox* as binding continuities created by language, and bound performers in the cells, becomes invested in continuities created through communal sweating. The sweats of the sweatbox join the audience to performers in one miasmatic *continuous whole* – the lubricant of sweat, shared between bodies yet produced independently, evaporating yet leaving a mark – implicates all in the crowd in a wet miasma of imprisonment.

## Sweat and miasmatic labour

As proposed in the previous chapter on *Pests*, miasmatic performance occurs when audiences become aware through the performance environment of being joined to a continuous whole of carceral society. The *Sweatbox* engages miasmatic performance in part because of the inevitability of a physiological response to the carceral environment of a prison transport van. What the *Sweatbox* also proposes for miasmatic performance is a cramped space in which a tightly ‘bound’ performance gives little opportunity to turn away, or around. Performers can barely turn in their cells, and audience members are packed in, standing, with little room for movement. It is impossible to turn away. This inability to turn, as performers and audience members face each other with only inches separating each person from the other, can perform a critical resistance to carceral orientations. It becomes impossible to ‘keep your head down’, as Steph advises. Sara Ahmed (2006) describes ‘not turning’ as a recuperative *disorientation* in the face of the ‘straightening devices’ of social normativity: ‘we hear the hail, and even feel its force on the surface of the skin, but we do not turn around, even when those words are directed toward us. Having not turned around, who knows where we might turn. Not turning also affects what we can do’ (107). Within the *Sweatbox*, deviating, not-turning, binding, provide strategies and alternate temporalities across carceral time and space within the porous, drenching and miasmatic haze of the criminal justice system.

*Sweatbox*, itself a compound noun of ‘sweat+box’ jammed together, is defined as much by sweat as it is by box (as much as it is defined by neither and radically more, that is). As a catachrestic object, ‘[i]ts name moves from site to site, tacking between one performance and another’ (McKenzie 2001, 207). Bound and not turning, sweat lubricates movement between bodies and against walls; the sweats of

the *Sweatbox* register time as a miasmatic secretion. One of the first things people notice in the sweatbox at Latitude Festival is that it is a little bit hot and cramped. A second later, it is *exceedingly* hot and cramped. It is day three or four of a festival mostly without access to showers. Then come the sweats, in their fluid, stinky, and contaminating intimacy. Sweat, with its stubbornly residual qualities, and for its propensity to mark people for a little while at least, is the most immediately identifiable miasmatic secretion in the *Sweatbox*. Sweat fills the space with the crusts of fluids, fear, degradation and hope from other times, and it plunges an audience into the middle of a carceral territory, in the middle of a country field.

The sweats of the *Sweatbox* decompose multifarious divides – physically, between carceral and festival spaces, and experientially, between performers and audience. Sweat gets through barriers and pushes through skin. Like Steph's urine, it can slide under the door of the cell. It leaves a smear when the performance space has been left. It leaves a smear of bodies once in the sweatbox. Like the sweat of a living nightmare, the sweat of the sweatbox is a traumatic shibboleth of the body, rising up through fear of the unknown to come, and what or who has been left behind. In the *Sweatbox*, Nina's lines 'trying not to lose it / Trying to keep it in / Trying to hold it in' relate to this pressure on the barrier (of the physiological skin, the social self, as well as the porousness of the cell wall) to protect what is inside from violent exposition. The sweatbox threatens Nina's mental and physical health; if she isn't able to 'keep it in' she will be punished. At the same time, as her repetition of Kylie Minogue's 'Can't Get You Out of My Head' illustrates, she needs to burst out, get out, push through the barrier; leave the mental possession of the sweatbox behind. *Sweatbox* sweat is thus provoked by both stuckness, and transition - an alchemy of the body arising from a desire to slip out and away to safety.

Some socio-cultural signifiers of sweat create a wariness, a sense of the hidden – a passion, a guilt, an anxiety – becoming revealed. Within sweat's unbidden intimacy, something secret suddenly becomes secreted. One of Clean Break's longstanding company lines speaks to this dynamic: the company describes its work as theatre to 'bring the hidden stories of women in the criminal justice system to a wider audience' (e.g. Clean Break 2018). In the company's theatre here, droplets of sweat contain a society's subcutaneous storylines, beading up on the bodies of audience members: pushing out through discomfort, these are stories that need to come out. Secrets to secretion.

All this secreting is hard work, and it is hard *theatrical* work too. Sweat on stage is a prized phenomenon: before (or with) an audience, it becomes an indicator of artistic, and physical, labour: 'the sweatier the performance, the more the audience engage because something physical is palpably at stake' (Todd 2010). *Sweatbox* does put something physical at stake, and this something revolves around the intensive labour of once-imprisoned women, performing a scenario of imprisonment, in which they are actually imprisoned in cells. As theatrical labours from within the cells, these labours are relentless generators of content old and new about carcerality, and they are emotional, physical and artistic exertions. One woman performs a character at the precipice of going into labour; another labours over her breathing to the point of near-hyperventilation; another laboriously repeats 'I just can't get you out of my head'. To witness these labours on many fronts directly challenges the public perception of what 'hard labour' in imprisonment means. The hard labour that carceral societies require of prisoners may, at least in Britain, no longer include smashing up rocks in chain gangs. But 'hard labours' of other kinds are routinely exacted from prisoners and ex-offenders: mental, physical, sexual, domestic, economic, emotional.



The audience labour hard too, sweat over the effort to get at what is palpably at stake. The performers are as close as a foot away from the audience and yet, behind the locked door, they appear at an incalculable distance, shouting their lines out to be heard. Audience members strain and shift uncomfortably to hear; they crane and edge to see the women's faces, which are at times hardly visible through the slender, grimy Perspex. The very fact of facing women who have been in there before – for 'real' – and who now have to be actually locked inside the cells in order to perform, creates a sweat-immersion into carceral pasts, presents and futures that cannot be denied as physiological events.

The sweats of the *Sweatbox* articulate one of many temporalities at work in the van, the present tense, body time of the here-and-now. This body time of sweat is empowered further by other body times in the play: the urgency to pee, and to catch breath. These body times create an unrelenting proximity to the present, but in their communality, they also help to miasmatically warp time in the sweatbox, connecting a carceral present to pasts and futures. Fluids are historical reminders in the socio-legal object of the sweatbox and the play *Sweatbox*. Sweating here indicates a pervasive continuity with other bodies through other fluids. Bodily residues in the cells of prison vans are rarely cleaned away:

The first thing you notice is whether it's clean. Sometimes there's phlegm on the window or the bulkhead, two foot in front of you. Some stink of shit and piss and vomit. Some have that plus blood smeared about. ... So, you're [sic] first thoughts might be 'Hepatitis, AIDS, tuberculosis?' (*Comment with Convictions* 2016)

These confrontations with fluids become a portal: through a registration of vulnerability to disease, they also register a continuity with, and importantly a vulnerability to, past and future. Clean Break's *Sweatbox* had been cleaned, but the women in the cells remember times in other cells; the text of the play remembers

times in other cells – lived times amalgamated into three fictional characters. It is within these dynamics that we can understand prison vans as ‘sticky’ places, following Sara Ahmed’s formulation: ‘saturated with affect, [they are] sites of personal and social tension’ (2014, 11). Further, ‘[r]ather than using stickiness to describe an object’s surface, we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, *as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs*’ (90, emphasis in original). Audiences pile out of the van too, and the sweat of the sweatbox has poured over and perfumed every body, along with the dried and enlivened sweat from thousands of passengers. The audience members also leave their own sweats on the walls; the sweatbox stains and perfumes their clothes, even as they weave freely through the festival later that day.

## Act of transfer

The stickiness of this particular prison van adheres not merely to the prison van *qua* van, but to its passage into social quotidian, surfacing practically unmarked in an incongruous, constant proximity to social normativity. It stood, in the field at Latitude Festival, side by side with an ice cream van. Like the ice cream van (a Mister Whippy), the prison van was open all day long for people to visit and explore. I sat in the doorway to the vehicle most hours, inviting people to come inside to explore it outside of performance times; I listened to impressions, stories, surprises at what it was like to be inside an actual prison van. Children zoomed around the cells, their faces sticky with ice cream. People pretended to lock each other up and leave, and the momentarily ‘imprisoned’ called out in horror. But these antics often morphed into more serious conversations, as people who did not otherwise know much about prison vans, or the criminal justice system, asked a little bit more about it. An early line in

*Sweatbox* comes from Steph looking out the window, presumably at passers-by. ‘People don’t think nothing – don’t even notice them [prison vans]’, she says. And she is right: unlike ice cream vans, British prison transport vans are frequently unmarked and easily mistaken for security vans by anyone unfamiliar with the tell of their window layout.

Latitude Festival revelers are largely of a demographic with statistically low rates of lived experience of the criminal justice system. Considered ‘the UK’s most unashamedly middle-class festival’ (Snapes 2016), Latitude Festival is hugely popular with families and majority white: “‘I’ve never seen so many square white people,” said a festival-goer’ (Lester 2013). Multi-arts programmer Tania Harrison, committed to promoting ‘boundary-breaking’ work at the festival (Hudson 2016), brought Clean Break to five seasons of Latitude from 2011-2015. For its part, Clean Break relished the opportunity to perform to festival-goers outside of its usual audience demographic: ‘Often in theatre, especially with new writing, you can feel you are performing to an already committed audience,’ commented Lucy Morrison, who commissioned *Sweatbox* for Clean Break. ‘With a festival audience, who may be there for the music or comedy, there’s the chance to grab them and give them something new’ (in Pearce 2011). What is new to audiences lurks perhaps not in narratives of women engaged in normatively causal pathways through crime, catharsis and redemption; but rather in dramaturgies of criminality that openly scrutinise the social imaginary of women and crime.

The sweatbox, in its just-close-enough, abject object nature – which allowed the quotidian of selfies and ice creams – made this cultural scripting visible to Latitude audiences: the scripting in other words, of hegemonic social identity, with the ‘wild object’ of the criminal identity transported ‘into our [sic] field of vision, into

our economic and legal system of operations’– what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor conceptualises as an ‘act of transfer’ (2003, 54). An act of transfer ‘grabs the body and inserts it into a frame ... allow[ing] us to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously and thus recognize the uneasy fits and areas of tension’ (Taylor 2003, 55).

Within the prison van parked at Latitude, audiences and performers enter a framework that traces a fine line between the citational and the subversive. Latitude audiences stare through narrow Perspex windows at women they know have experienced similar conditions at other times. The women are actually locked in to their cells – there was literally no other way without ripping the doors off for performances. An ice cream van and prison van side-by-side, one literally and affectively sticky with creamy sugar, summertime freedoms, the other literally and affectively sticky with pee, sweat, unknown futures – these ‘grabbings’ of the body between two systems of operation create tensions within the performance space of the sweatbox, as what are socially categorised as non-normative or deviant operations built around the ‘wild criminal object’ collide with the normative, middle-class family festival. For *Clean Break*, the act of transfer allows the performance of a scenario of criminality that holds both narratives of social prejudice, and the physical and narrative presencing of women impacted by criminalisation, in productive tension. Through the act of transfer and once-lived, now-dramatised scenario, the *Sweatbox* provides a ‘partial recognition’ (Taylor 2009, 71) of the dehumanising mechanisms of the criminal justice system, by bringing the power structures germane to it, into close proximity.

In the *Sweatbox* acts of transfer occur, however, not as a result of declarative, rationalist appeal, but rather through miasmatic drenchings of sweat, in which an

affectively shared knowledge condenses and transfers within the sweatbox. Patricia MacCormack writes of spaces of performance that create something beyond the relationship of ‘act to meaning’, and her description affiliates well to what occurs via the sweats of Clean Break’s *Sweatbox*: ‘flesh, meaning, and the pleasures of performance vibrate each element, performer, and spectator, as and with each other. The focus of performance shifts from converting act to meaning to affective potentialisation as an ethics of asemiotic alterity’ (2013, 51). For miasmatic performance, an affective experience of alterity is critical, and it is critical precisely in service of a broader ecology of knowledge in which the carceral function of affective knowledge also becomes evident. The sweat drenching of the *Sweatbox* carries a kind of dreamy realness, which can gestate this ‘affective potentialisation’: ‘the molecules of sweat, flesh, and movement, which the body leaves behind while it simultaneously inhabits the next’, writes MacCormack, signify (or a-signify) ‘the event of performance being a dream, neither and both real and not real, absent and present’ (2013: 54). Sweating in this play may be part of a process of what applied and prison theatre scholar James Thompson calls *bewilderment* in applied theatre: a bridging of affect and effect in audiences as ‘a perplexed state created by transition [connected to] the dislocation of communities caused by exclusion, violence, poverty or imprisonment’ (2003, 1-2). Linking bewilderment to MacCormack, carceral logics become evident in the *Sweatbox* but they are perplexed and dislocated, violently articulating what is already present in the socio-legal environment but without reason, or purpose, to adjudicate – ‘real and not real, absent and present’, as she says.

Where the *Sweatbox* permits ‘affective potentialisation’ in part through movement away from boundaried meaning, it also unmoors assigned subjectivity – or identity category – from empirical presence in the van. Evaporating along with the

sweat of the *Sweatbox*, in the place of the ‘criminal’ a sudden excess of assigned subjectivities hazes around the space of performance: mother, singer, person who needs to pee, woman who has learned all the dinosaurs. Audiences, similarly, though silent are sweating and staring – are they guards in this moment? Other prisoners? Someone who would like another ice cream or knows all the dinosaurs? Within the common territory, there is an unbreachable divide: life ‘chances’ remain different, generally, between performers with criminal backgrounds and audience members without. These hazings of assigned subjectivity function are a key part of miasmatic performance, as I discuss in the previous chapter.

Not being, in some ways, *allowed* to allocate a stable subjectivity as an audience member generates another ‘wild object’ of knowledge and functions as an important stop in the liberal desire to retain the power of empathy. In this way, the affective and embodied knowledges shared between performers and audience in *Sweatbox* correlate to Josephine Machon’s (syn)aesthetic performance:

This somatic approach to performance, foregrounded in the corporeal, emphasizes the sensuous in terms of performer and audience contact and highlights the ‘sharability of sentience’ between performer, performance and audience. Furthermore, when the performer’s life and bodily experience is used as creative source material, as well as the key performance signifier ... this activates an experiential immediacy in the performance moment where sentient and sensuous sharability enables an embodied knowledge of other(ed) identities and experiences. As a result, embodied knowledge can engage in a unique and actively political way with the marginal and transgressive. (2009, 23-4)

Embodied knowledge, (syn)aesthetically transmitted in the *Sweatbox*, exposes the carceral imaginary as motivated not by a need to remove dangerous criminals from society, but rather is a space of performance which allows three women – dealing with motherhood, mental health, addiction – to be physically and emotionally present to the audience and themselves. Sharing the ‘experiential immediacy’ of the prison van with three women performing different stages of motherhood (among many other

states), makes the sweatbox not a site of unusual punishment, but a condensed articulation of the regular, quotidian violence of the prison system.

### *Sweatbox* as space of reenactment

Like many performances of criminal justice narratives, the carceral realities of the *Sweatbox* / sweatbox are both real and not real; yet where they are not materially real (ie audiences are emphatically *not* en route to or from a prison), they still create realness through their perpetuation of the carceral imaginary. Audiences in the *Sweatbox*, though themselves mostly without personal experience in prison vans, commented on the ‘realness’ of the prison van play: ‘That is quite a real experience’, said one; ‘it is so humorous and interesting and real’, said another (Clean Break 2015b). Even *The Stage* used ‘real’ in its short review (to underscore that it is real theatre, thereby illuminating some of the stigma around applied/social justice theatre): ‘Like so much of this phenomenal company’s activity, *Sweatbox* is vital, humane work with real theatrical heft’ (Pringle 2015). Audiences knew from the catalogue listing that the performers were women with experience of the criminal justice system themselves: Was this the source of ‘realness’? Was it the setting of the van itself? Or was it the sweat of the *Sweatbox* – sweat, which of all the fluids, can’t really be faked: ‘I value sweat as a simple signifier of “realness [in theatre]”’ (Todd 2010). So ‘realness’ was a big factor for Latitude audiences, and in some ways this corresponds to the perception of ‘authenticity’ in the rat-women of Vivienne Franzmann’s *Pests*: an authentic display of criminalisation as a result of structural inequality. *Sweatbox*’s realness also corresponds to a confirmation bias, the matching of a criminal justice scenario to the environment of a prison transport van’s interior – *yes, I have a pretty good idea of what a prison van looks like, and it does look like this.*

Proximity to an idea of the ‘real’, that yet shifts perception: here, the *Sweatbox* enters a terrain of re-enactment. Clean Break’s *Sweatbox* was not a prison van, but also not not a prison van: all but three of the holding cells were ripped out to make space for audiences of twelve to thirteen people. Miasmatically, the repurposed sweatbox perforates an indeterminate zone of performance between reenactment and social misuse, in aid of a reclaiming of the carceral space of the van. Beyond its altered site-specificity, the sticky surfacing of the *Sweatbox* becomes miasmatic in its misuse of the van as a site of theatre. As I discussed in the previous chapter on *Pests*, miasmas emanate from a perception that something is not being used appropriately: for Pink and Rolly, that’s a pizza-tea-smoothie; a flat filled with rotten mattresses, and no other furniture. This particular *Sweatbox* is standing next to the Mister Whippy like a van should, but it’s not for ice cream, it’s for transporting prisoners. And it’s not even doing that. It’s doing theatre. The space and time of the prison van alongside its evident theatricality become simultaneously ‘real’ and ‘faux’; ‘[a]nd, perhaps’, writes Rebecca Schneider, ‘through the cracks in the “not not,” something cross-temporal, something affective, and something affirmative circulates. Something is touched’ (2011, 43). Both cross-temporality and cross-locality become possible within the palimpsest of the van, as audiences encounter a physical space etched with names and stains from other times, and the performers who were once behind glass (now, and other times too) yet pile out with the audience in a communal sweat-drench to take a bow. The play creates what Rebecca Schneider calls an ‘actuality of touch’ through reenactment that disrupts linear time, makes it permeable and challenged, and therefore, perhaps reversible. Schneider suggests that in ‘[l]aboring at the pass between pasts and presents we might recognize our labor as collective’ (2011, 137).



What could it mean to experience, or create, cross-temporality in the *Sweatbox*: to ‘labour at the pass between pasts and presents’? Within the carceral time of both the play and the object, the van is sticky with past travels and present repurposing to theatre. Multiple temporalities within the sweatbox/ *Sweatbox* pull on the past through lived experiences in other prison vans, transmitted through script and performance. These lived experiences inhabit the *Sweatbox* as what Caoimhe McAvinchey terms ‘possible fictions’, in which the double negativity of the ‘not me ... not not me’ inherent to performance (Schechner 2006), becomes critical to women in prison and their audiences: ‘The clear line that marks “the real” and “the imaginary” is blurred through the creation of these fictions with a root, a truth based in a person’s biography that flies beyond our assumptions of who they were or could be’ (2006, 180–1). The ‘not not’ of the prison van and the ‘not not’ of personal experience create a compound reenactment that puts the audience in porous proximity to criminal justice narratives.

This creates an act of witnessing both polyvocal and polylocal. It holds with D. Soyini Madison’s ‘co-performative witnessing’ after Dwight Conquergood, in which ‘polyvocal/polylocal stories ... traverse and “cut across” fixed locations to resist, survive, and to (re)make culture and belonging’ (2007, 827). For Madison, an awareness of co-temporality and dialogic exchange must accompany the polylocality of the event of co-performative witnessing; within this it is critical, as Conquergood also suggests, to recalibrate – at least temporarily – a balance of power via destabilizing ‘distanced judgment’ (2002, 351). The co-performative witnessing engendered by *Sweatbox* meets the demand of recognition of power imbalance, questioning both the distances and pre-judgments that audience members may carry when encountering performers with criminal backgrounds. One key way that this

occurs is via the prison van as a site of polylocality; the sticky surfacing, to use Ahmed's term again, of different places within the very site of the transport van.

## Transportation and transformation in *Sweatbox*

To experience a shared, embodied knowledge did not mean in the *Sweatbox* that audiences 'felt like' prisoners, or guards, etc. The embodied knowledge relates to a wider, miasmatic seepage around the carceral imaginary. The van, as a defunct yet alive socio-legal object, was and is a chiasmic object, moving from court to prison to prison to court; when the van then becomes a socio-legal-theatrical object as *Sweatbox*, it involves audiences in this chiasmus: *if prisoners transport audiences, then audiences transport prisoners*. In some ways divested of its disciplinary identity as a prison van, for the sweatbox to now perform criminal transfer to audiences at Latitude Festival gave a dislocated continuity to prison transport narrative: from court to prison, (theatre), prison to prison, (theatre), prison to court – sentence to sentencing to (theatre) sentence. Performance studies scholar Richard Schechner's influential writings on performance as vacillating between transportation and transformation are part of this cultural legibility of the transport at stake in the *Sweatbox*. Schechner's theory constructs 'transportation' as a liminoid, temporary event – an example would be the assumption of a role in a theatre performance – in contrast to liminal 'transformations', which permanently change the individual. In the *Sweatbox*, acts of transportation and transformation manifest along a complex spectrum: audience and performers engage with the site of 'actual', carceral transportation (the sweatbox), and they engage with theatrical transportation (the *Sweatbox*); these transportations are facilitated as a result of processes of 'actual' carceral transformation (for the performers, and maybe some audience members,

having been inside other sweatboxes in the past), and ‘actual’ transformation through theatre practice (making theatre in response to lived experience in this sweatbox). Participating in the ritual of carceral transportation, *Sweatbox* audiences become aware of how prison vans transform people – men, women and children prisoners, as well as guards – for life. Witnessing the impact of this transformation, audiences become both transporters, whose presence and action in the sweatbox makes the event occur, and temporary transportees of the sweatbox.

On another level the *Sweatbox* is about transformation of theatre in the wake of the sweatbox: the transformative power of the arts for women with experience of the criminal justice system. In a 2018 article on Clean Break’s *Sweatbox*, Aylwyn Walsh gestures to these productive polarities between transportation and transformation at work in the play, noting Clean Break’s embrace of the idea/l of ‘theatre for transformation’, despite the fact that this ideal has received important critical scrutiny in the field of applied theatre. Ultimately Walsh aligns her discussion of the transport/transform dialectic of the *Sweatbox* toward what it proposes around perceptions of mobility. She discusses the mobility of carceral narratives, suggesting that *Sweatbox* performed within a sweatbox widens the carceral imaginary to include moving sites like prison transport vans ‘as culturally produced in similar ways to the fixed locations of incarceration’ (Walsh 2018, 23). She proposes that working with and agitating at the moving boundaries of the carceral imaginary also generates new social mobilities for women with experience of the criminal justice system.

Whether or not it could be called transformative, the *Sweatbox* performers carry a temporality of future-facing hope and resilience, in part through their theatre training and support at Clean Break. Already at Clean Break’s studios, before the van left for Latitude Festival, a kind of affirming cross-temporality had occurred. Parked

in the courtyard for several weeks, many women with experience of the criminal justice system, attending theatre education classes at Clean Break's studios, explored the interior. The director of *Sweatbox*, Imogen Ashby, observed:

The women although nervous I felt were really liberated by being able to possess the van within 'their' space, so I encouraged selfies and social media and lots of women I think took it as an opportunity to reclaim the trauma if that doesn't sound too grand! I remember having a real laugh with women inside although very few would be in there with the cell door closed [...] most women came in with others. [They] showed themselves to be fighters and survivors rather than being victimised and silenced. I am sure the fact it was literally stuck in the [Clean Break] courtyard really helped the reclaiming as there was no-one else to possess it. (2017)

In his work on queer futurity, *Cruising Utopia*, José Muñoz writes: 'The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*' (2009, 1, original emphasis). The sweatbox / *Sweatbox* allows performers and audience to explore both what are, in the 'here and now', the material and emotional conditions of women at risk of offending, and what the theatre can imagine as a 'there and then' for women in society and women in prison.

Yet I want to propose a perfumative tinkering with Muñoz's phrase, as follows. In the *Sweatbox*, discordances of causality in narrative and performance space – and powerful reclaimings of trauma – not only investigate what is 'here/now' and what could be 'there/then', but importantly also scramble Muñoz's formulation to stage a 'here and then' and 'there and now' even more relevant to doing the time of prison or carceral theatre. In the criminal justice system, these cross-temporal localities come closer to articulating how the expansionist matrix of disciplinary time metes out normative fictions of discrete past-present-future to penalise and criminalise. If we think of it not as a here and now in the *Sweatbox*, but rather a *here and then*, this evokes the overwhelming power of affective events of past and future

upon the present physical moment; correspondingly if we think of it not as a there and then, but a *there and now* in the *Sweatbox*, this allows another physical space to invade the consciousness of the present – these con/ and disjunctures are fundamental to helping audiences to conceive of trauma, incarceration, and risk, and for performers to reclaim the space.

The women may never be in a prison van again: past then. They are: now. The audience may never be in a prison van again: future then. They are: now. The here of prison transport is temporarily disempowered: then they were here. It is a collective entering into, and looking back at the scene of despair, chrononormativity; it is also a communal awareness of the much higher chances the performers standing in front of the audience have of being sentenced again. The future that carceral society conjures for these performers is a recidivist time. But that's not the here and now. Now they are there, able to take a bow, leave the van – outside, in the clearing, standing and being celebrated. Such is the hard and sweaty labour of a repurposed *Sweatbox*. Being inside the sweatbox, participating in its sweats, makes the labour of the women in the cells a communal event; a mighty collective labour to repurpose this space. The ongoing legitimacy of the sweatbox and the authority of its temporalities can be challenged, if not reversed. The doing of the time in service of a sentence – a theatrical sentence and a prison sentence – becomes in the *Sweatbox* miasmatic because it secretes and smears the carceral logics that allow this and thousands of prison vans like it to be roadworthy.

In this first section on miasmatic aesthetics in Clean Break's theatre, I have investigated how the company brings the carceral function of audiences into close scrutiny through miasmatic performance. *Pests* achieves this through decompositions both sensorial and discursive in nature between animal and human, audience and

stage, poverty and criminality, civic space and waste population. The *Sweatbox* brings audiences into close proximity to carceral space and time, drawing the violence of chrononormative temporality into clear focus. Here, secretions of sweat labour against the van's status as disciplinary performance.

In the next section, 'Miasmatic Contagions', I investigate the cultural underpinnings of audience reaction further, focusing on how ideas around contagion, criminality, and race inform audiences' physiological and emotional responses to narratives of imprisonment. I move from sweat glands, to tear ducts; from decompositions, to disaggregated guts. Miasmatic Contagions focuses on two plays, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, which repeatedly confront impulses to weep in the audience. In Chapter Three I investigate a practice of miasmatic crying – or tearjerking – in *Dream Pill*, as audiences are confronted with the story of Bola and Tunde, two Nigerian girls sex-trafficked to the United Kingdom. Chapter Four considers the instance of a double bill of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* at the Almeida Festival in 2013. Audiences first crowded into one of the dressing rooms at the Almeida Theatre, for *Dream Pill*, and then moved to the Almeida foyer for performances by the same actors, now portraying two adult women in prison, in *Little on the inside*. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* insist that audiences develop an awareness not only around the ways that trafficking and enslavement are central to understanding conditions of imprisonment in the British criminal justice system: they ask audiences to question how both they *know and unknow* conditions of racism.

To begin this analysis, in Chapter Three I first expand the frame of miasmatic performance through a consideration of positions of knowing/unknowing in the audience, articulated through the audiences' tears. This is a miasmatic crying, I suggest, which in its mourning reasserts conditions of carcerality. Yet, as with the

investigations in this section, I seek to establish the hopeful dimensions of miasmatic performance. How might miasmatic tearfulness articulate a sense of permeability, and vulnerable collective, in the audience?



## Miasmatic Contagions





### **‘I don’t know why she’s crying’** *Dream Pill* at Soho Theatre, 2010

The chapters in this section need each other. They transmit to each other, play off each other, exchange language and organs with each other. Across this chapter and the next, I argue that *Dream Pill* (Rebecca Prichard, touring 2010-15) and *Little on the inside* (Alice Birch, touring 2013-14), activate and interrogate pre/conceptions of social contagion via sites of textual infection and emotional contagion. In particular the line ‘I don’t know why she’s crying’ (which opens both plays) proliferates, hosting transmissions of character and complicating criminal affects between the plays. In these chapters I position the epidemiological modelling of policing and sentencing as a necropolitical tool; mirroring these social practices, a contagious dramaturgy at work between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* creates carceral objects out of dissident bodies. How does the audience work within and between these two plays, and how does it become implicated in contagious exchange? Together, and apart, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* articulate the fundamental connection between slavery and imprisonment in carceral societies. How does the miasmatic of miasmatic performance both reveal this to the audience, and advance audiences’ emotional, affective and intellectual experience of racism as one of the deepest scripts of carceral society?

## Social contagion: a brief introduction to the concept and how it will inform miasmatic performance

A frenzied *sprees*; a crushing *wave*; radiation from a *hotspot*: collective nouns for criminal activity often affiliate crime with the uncontainable. As the infection and body count of a crime *epidemic* denotes, what is uncontainable about criminal threat can also be contagious. These idioms portend an erosion of boundaries – civic, physical, environmental and moral. Within this, they implicitly appeal to applications of force, even and perhaps especially extralegal ones, to incapacitate an impending ravage of criminal acts.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I explored some of the ways that contagion, impurity, and crime have been intertwined for millennia through the term miasma. In classical Greece, the religious semiotics of miasma placed an infinite, and intimate, burden on contagion. In its religious and social sense, miasma, writes classicist Robert Parker, ‘makes the person affected ritually impure, and thus unfit to enter a temple: it is contagious: it is dangerous, and this danger is not of familiar secular origin ... shor[ing] up those areas of the social structure and value system that lack any other sanction’ (1983, 4, 2).

In carceral societies of the modern era, ideas around ‘contagious crime’ continue to transcend the figural. The social sciences position contagious criminal behaviour as an articulation of ‘social contagion’, a concept first made prominent by sociologist Robert Park (1915). Building on the nineteenth century’s innovations in epidemiological modelling, investments in social reform and the formalisation of public health frameworks, social contagion adapted bacteriological theories of disease transmission to explain cultural contact and transmission of behaviour (Wald 2008). When ‘criminality’ becomes dissociated from individual identity and circumstances,

it rapidly crosses over into the realms of public health working to protect against an uncontrollable atmospheric, and viral, threat.<sup>19</sup>

Today, epidemiological modelling generates all-too-real predictive policing algorithms engendered by extreme social bias, peddled to the public via racist and classist politics of fear and danger. The Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI) relates British predictive policing software to ‘evidence that crime is “contagious”, frequently being carried out in the same area, by the same offenders, targeting the same people’ (Dearden 2017). Rather than indicating crime of the future, the ‘predictions’ afforded by these algorithms expand on an indefinite sentencing protocol of the present, stemming from conviction histories; postcode; ethnicity, age, gender, religion and sexuality, among other ‘data.’ The NYPD’s ‘Domain Awareness System’ has established a precedence for pulling on additional feeds, including radiation detectors that indicate a presence of chemotherapy in passing bodies (Scannell 2016) – thereby involving physical health and ability in the mix of variables used to identify people as likely criminals. As of April 2019, at least fourteen police forces in the United Kingdom either actively use algorithms for policing, have used them in the past, or are planning to in the future (Marsh 2019). Biometrics play a major role in policing practices today; criminalisation via face recognition technology results in what has been termed a ‘perpetual line up’ for men and women of colour, who are subjected to surveillance tools that are ‘less accurate

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<sup>19</sup> In one example of a public health initiative in response to crime ‘epidemic’, American anti-gang initiative CeaseFire works with epidemiology to identify preventative ‘treatments’ for street violence: epidemiologist Gary Slutkin, who founded CeaseFire, ‘says that violence directly mimics infections like tuberculosis and AIDS, and so, he suggests, the treatment ought to mimic the regimen applied to these diseases: go after the most infected, and stop the infection at its source’ (Kotlowitz 2008). Slutkin’s initiatives are predicated on personal interventions. However, the treatment of criminal behaviour as a public health issue is often concerned with the exact opposite – depersonalisation in favour of predictive algorithms – which engender aggressive policing protocols to protect public safety against a set of criminal threats figured as a kind of uncontrollable scourge.

on black people,’ according to the FBI (Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology 2016).

This chapter approaches ‘social contagion’ as a metaphor weaponised to discipline, imprison and kill – through police brutality, acts of deportation and the ‘letting die’ of negligent prison management. Social contagion, legitimated through policing and policy, leads to conditions of death and social death-in-life for disproportionate numbers of people of colour; people with refugee or immigrant status; people living with complex mental health conditions; addiction; and personal histories of abuse, among many factors (see Prison Reform Trust 2017). In this, as I suggest in this chapter, social contagion acquires the syntax of Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics (2003). Necropolitics describes technologies of governance that implement ‘death worlds’ for those who threaten the security of white hegemony and heteropatriarchy inherited from colonialism.

In this chapter I ask: When contagion, as a necropolitical metaphor, creates conditions of social and physical death for the others of white heteropatriarchy, what capacity does theatre have to intervene? How might performance practice create the conditions for audiences to become aware of both their discursive and their affective investments in the necropolitics of contagion?

Let us cycle back to the two plays under consideration in this section, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*. A contagious assemblage at work between these two plays aligns to Antonin Artaud’s concept of theatre-as-plague, in which theatre’s contagious properties become empowered to ‘drain a colossal abscess, ethical as much as social’ (2010, 12). For Artaud, this can only happen when it surpasses the descriptive metaphor of contagion, and ‘succumbs’ to it aesthetically (MacKay 2011, 86-87). Within Artaud’s theatre-as-plague, ‘outward events, political conflicts, natural

disaster, revolutionary order and wartime chaos, when they occur on a theatre level, are released into the audience's sensitivity with the strength of an epidemic' (Artaud 2010, 17). Sensitivity is at the crux of the analysis in this section on miasmatic performance. How do audiences at *Dream Pill* in this chapter, and *Little on the inside* in Chapter Four, 'succumb' to the metaphor of social contagion? More specifically, how do majority white theatre audiences react when they first encounter a narrative of trafficked Black children, followed by a narrative of adult women in prison – when the same performers deliver some of the same lines, and use many of the same gestures and movements between the two plays?

In order to understand how Clean Break's double bill becomes endowed with the 'strength of an epidemic', it is important first to attend to how *Dream Pill* itself already establishes a thematic and emotional context that reflects deeply on social realities of racism and social contagion. Miasmatic performance in the contagious exchange between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* begins in the scenario of *Dream Pill*; in this chapter, therefore, I investigate *Dream Pill* in its original setting at Soho Theatre in 2010. I explore the play via two entry points particular to the line 'I don't know why she's crying': *acts of knowing*, and *acts of crying* in response to the play. Between tears and acts of knowing, as well as tears *as* acts of knowing, this line precipitates a flash flood of miasmatic performance.

*Dream Pill* presents a challenge to audiences from the subjugated position of Black children in sexual slavery. Miasmatic crying in response to this challenge occurs via a series of emotional ruptures through contagions of threat and compassion, which in turn implicate audience participation in the social structures that create the conditions for trafficking. In thinking about emotional rupture, I position crying at Clean Break's *Dream Pill* as a contagious affect peculiar to a

practice of *tearjerking* at work in the play; by this I mean: eliciting, conjuring, and measuring tears in the encounter with narratives of imprisonment. In a close reading of audience reactions on the evening of 17 November 2010, I relate tearjerking at this particular piece of theatre to Sara Ahmed's notion of contingent pain (2014), and Leticia Sabsay's 'permeable alliances' within performances of vulnerability (2016). I conclude with a discussion of how crying, in its more sinister vocation, verges into necropolitical affect when audiences are confronted with performances of Black pain and resilience.

### The setting of *Dream Pill* at Soho Theatre

Now one of Clean Break's most widely toured plays, *Dream Pill* began as one of six short plays in Clean Break's 2010 production *Charged*.<sup>20</sup> *Charged* was performed across three performance spaces in Soho Theatre: in addition to the first floor mainstage theatre and the second floor studio space, Clean Break 'took over' the downstairs restaurant space (Soho Theatre, at that time, had a restaurant in its basement called Café Lazeez).<sup>21</sup> *Dream Pill*, performed in the basement, represented an experiment for Soho Theatre, in which the theatre first tried out using the

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<sup>20</sup> The political effects and affects of *Dream Pill* enter into meaning via miasmatic bleed across several years of multiple performances in a wide array of performance spaces. First performed as a part of the *Charged* season at Soho Theatre (November 2010, dir. Tessa Walker – see Chapter Five), *Dream Pill* toured on the UK festival circuit, including to Underbelly at Edinburgh Festival Fringe (2011); Latitude and Greenbelt Festivals (2012, dir. Jane Fallowfield); and Almeida Festival (2013, dir. Lucy Morrison). In keeping with Clean Break's producing model, designed to emphasise touring to professional and voluntary sector audiences in addition to 'conventional' theatre audiences, *Dream Pill* was performed for professionals at the Metropolitan Police's Human Trafficking Conference (Autumn 2010); the annual London Safeguarding Children Board conference (February 2011); and toured to Dundee, Paisley and Falkirk in 2012 as a part of the White Ribbon Campaign Scotland's initiative to combat violence against women and to foster public awareness around trafficking issues. In 2015, *Dream Pill* was performed at the National Underground Freedom Center (Cincinnati, US, dir. Eric Vosmeier [not a Clean Break production]).

<sup>21</sup> The entirety of *Charged* as a miasmatic production comes under scrutiny in Chapter Five of this thesis.

restaurant as a space for performance; the following year, Soho re-designed and launched the basement as a permanent space for cabaret and comedy.

In 2010 the basement was accessed by stairs, which were situated in the middle of the open-plan theatre bar (this layout was subsequently changed, during renovations). To attend *Dream Pill*, audiences walked from the theatre foyer, into the theatre bar, and down a set of stairs in the middle of the open-plan bar, into the performance space. As audiences took their seats in the half-light of the basement, they walked past two figures lying on thin mats on the floor, right in front of the stairwell. The performance took place in a small cleared space between the stairwell and the audience, approximating an end-on staging – although throughout the play the performers will move both amongst the audience, and up and down the stairs.



Figure 8. Danielle Vitalis as Bola and Samantha Pearl as Tunde in *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard at Soho Theatre (2010). Photograph Sheila Burnett.

There are barely any items in this small cleared area at the foot of the stairs: a beat-up transistor radio, some shoes, a necklace. Several dozen stacked cases of beer

under the stairs charge the space with a functional semiotic of goods storage, a reminder of the reality of the Soho Theatre bar above; yet the juxtaposition of such a plentitude of alcohol with two figures lying on threadbare mats heightens a sense of multiple commodities in the performance space.

The audience are immediately implicated as a property, if not a commodity, within this nexus. As people settle in their chairs, one of the figures begins to get curious about who we are. Dressed in a dirty undershirt and leggings, she looks young, perhaps of pre-teen age. Though she will soon ask the audience ‘Why are you here?’, among many other questions – *Are we allowed to sit here?*, *Can I touch your hair?*, and *Are you going to work here too?* (Prichard 2010, 3, 4, 6) – the very first thing that Bola directly addresses to audiences is ‘I don’t know why she’s crying’ (3). As she says this, she gestures to the weeping figure next to her, who has not yet looked up from her mat. ‘She just has days like this / she’s just having a bad day’ (3). So *Dream Pill* begins: with Bola and Tunde, two nine-year-old Nigerian girls, in tentative exploration of the audience and their surroundings.

Why is Tunde crying? Within seconds an answer forms, as Bola consoles Tunde, ‘Sometimes the men that come are angry but you didn’t do nothing to them’ (4). It becomes evident that that the girls can’t leave their room; the only exit is up through the stairs, and when they near this stairwell Tunde and Bola quiet the tone of their voices and look up anxiously. Yet when they advance toward the audience, their volume, and curiosity, grow. If they can’t leave their room, who are these people in the audience and how did they get here? The people in the audience have saved a spot for Bola and Tunde to come and join them: ‘*BOLA sees an empty chair in the audience. Are we allowed to sit here?/ Tunde./ Tunde./ We can sit with them.*’ (3).



Yet Tunde does not dare, and neither does Bola. Inviting though the chair may be, they do not know who we are.

Bola's first stab at identifying the role of audience comes as she suggests that audience members probably need to change clothes if we're going to work here (6). They offer to help the audience know what to do when 'the men' visit:

|       |                                                                                                                                           |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BOLA  | Their blood is white and sticky<br>I can tell you how to make them go quick. Just go 'yeah-yeah-yeah' like that<br>Or you can make a pose |
| TUNDE | <i>(Something that indicates anal.)</i> Boom boom                                                                                         |
| BOLA  | <i>(Something that indicates frontal.)</i> Bang bang                                                                                      |
| TUNDE | <i>(Something that indicates oral.)</i> Yum yum                                                                                           |
|       | <i>They make various poses during the above and laugh at one another.</i>                                                                 |
| BOLA  | You don't have to touch them you can jus' dance for them                                                                                  |
| TUNDE | Yeah you can dance like this (8-9)                                                                                                        |

The girls are laughing now, and as they dance around stage they forget where they are for a moment, and so does the audience. Then there's the sound of a thump upstairs. Just as quickly, reality sets in again: Bola and Tunde turn down the radio and turn their faces up toward the stairs leading to the Soho Theatre bar. Swept away by an intrusion of muffled voices and sounds from above, their laughter suddenly decays. 'BOLA: You'll bring him down / TUNDE: No he's going back up / BOLA: He will come down again' (6-7). Their captor, Dedeh, could come downstairs to investigate at any moment. Yet as these sounds direct the audience's attention back up the stairs down which we came, only moments ago, could it also be a theatre patron, coming to the rescue? The sounds of the bar bleeding through into the space keep this possibility alive.

These first exchanges between *Dream Pill* performers and audience establish a condition for the audience in which we become, like Bola and Tunde, 'caught between a feeling of exposure and the possibility of help' (stage directions, 3). Leaving aside for the moment a consideration of experiences of 'exposure' and 'help'

within the audience (though these are critical to political project of *Dream Pill*, and will be explored at length here), I begin with the premise that *Dream Pill* proposes a space in which audiences are caught between *feeling* and *possibility*.

‘I don’t know why she’s crying’, Bola says. A play that begins with ‘I don’t know’ and even more importantly ‘I don’t know *why*’ draws rationality into immediate question as a leading method of sense-making within the world of this play. Bola challenges audiences to recognise right away the conditions of their sexual slavery: audiences ‘know’ with sickening clarity why Tunde is crying within seconds. How audiences manage this knowledge through the course of the play becomes the tension, the catching, between feeling and possibility.

What does this knowledge of Bola and Tunde’s condition come to mean, what sociocultural forces underpin this knowledge, and how do audiences express it? Where close proximity to knowledge of the conditions of trafficked children is acute, even harrowing, at times in this play, Tunde and Bola manifest – and instruct – the audience on a wide range of feelings and responses. Crying starts off the thirty minute journey of *Dream Pill*, but there are also laughs, antics, play and many, many questions as Bola and Tunde investigate the audience and each other. We see them pretend to ‘jailbreak’ their surroundings as if they are members of an American SWAT team, examine each other at the witch doctor, answer to the ‘auntie’ in Nigeria who took them, and we hear tell of dreams that come ‘out of the back of a person’s head’ (20) during the plane ride over to the UK. About two-thirds of the way through the play, Tunde is summoned and goes up the stairs; men are waiting to rape her. With Tunde gone, Bola, distressed and anxious, attempts to distract herself and us from what is going on upstairs by telling a creation story. Descriptions of what is happening with the men break through into her telling of how the earth was made.

Then Tunde limps back down the stairs, nearly collapsing. The two girls share a pill, what they call the ‘dream pill’, to take the pain away.

*Dream Pill* ends as it began, with the girls prone on thin mats. As audiences, many of us are left prone too, in agonizing proximity to Bola and Tunde. Reviews from audience and critics show feeling silenced as a common response: ‘The two girls address questions to us, the audience, to which, of course, we cannot answer. We are made dumb before them’ (Woddis 2010) and ‘a devastating directness that leave[s] you feeling lost for words’ (Taylor 2010). Even more frequently, people talked of mobility. Of physical mobility: ‘Sometimes people couldn’t move afterwards’ (Walker in Caird 2011); ‘At the end, they all got up and ran to the stairs to get out!’ (Clean Break show report 2010). And of emotional mobility: on twitter, 16 audience members called *Dream Pill* ‘moving’ or ‘captivating’.<sup>22</sup> – although calling a play ‘moving’ could be considered generic, in this case in response to a play about sexual slavery, in which girls are trapped in a tiny performance space with the audience, it takes on double weight; the same goes, I feel, for ‘captivating’.

Silent captivation – as Bola and Tunde play with the audience, and dance around – gives rise to many points for laughing, sighing, for shuddering and grimacing, as the hard reality of the situation cracks through the girls’ antics. Crying, too, occurred. Across many years of touring *Dream Pill* with Clean Break, I witnessed audience reactions to the play both in theatre venues, and in unconventional performance spaces such as town halls, empty courtrooms, and green rooms. One of the most frequent reactions I observed in audiences, across many sites of performance, was crying, and it is the reaction under critical scrutiny in this chapter.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Moving’ x 14: @iAmBayo 9/8/11; @JoBoaden 20/8/11; @walkingheads 26/8/11; @inthewrongcrowd 1/3/12; @MissRudiBlue 25/8/12; @knighthallagent 26/7/13; @soophiaf 25/7/13; @SKShlomo 28/8/11; @tamashatheatre 20/8/11; @NickHernBooks 18/8/11; @scotrefcouncil 18/8/11; @yosoyrobcazavos 10/8/11; @jencloukey 6/8/11; @EmilyJJenkins 6/8/11. ‘Captivating’ x 2: @OpenClasp 14/7/12; @jencloukey 6/8/11

Audiences did not cry alone. I also cried recurrently, prodigiously, even having seen the play dozens of times in at least eight different venues. Even when doing sound cues. I wonder if I cried every time I saw the show; I believe I did. My own tears, coming back over and over, led me to wonder what about my response verged into the pathological. I don't know why she's crying: I don't know why she is crying on stage; I don't know why she, sitting next to me, is crying; I don't know why I am crying. *I don't know.*

### The cultural politics of knowing and unknowing in *Dream Pill*

As the opening line of the play about slavery, rape and imprisonment of Black children, 'I don't know why she's crying' immediately situates rationalist awareness as not only fallible, but structurally affiliated with the unseen captor's universalist perspective – in other words, carceral society's punishment of bodies who know, or create knowledge, within cultural spaces and methodologies anathema to white, hegemonic subjectivity. In *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault discusses such knowledges as 'subjugated': 'a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, [...] hierarchically inferior knowledges' (7). Prichard's research for *Dream Pill* involved consultation with AFRUCA (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse) and the Poppy Project, who support victims of trafficking, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), and with the Metropolitan Police's Human Trafficking Team. This consultation process crystallises aspects of the macro, structural causes of trafficking into an intimate storyline, working to reveal a critical distinction in how the law adjudicates on qualified and disqualified knowledges: most

importantly, how the disjuncture between knowledges functions to maintain rape culture.

Eve Sedgwick discusses ignorance and knowledge as interlinear, magnetic fields of power, the combination of which creates a 'privilege of unknowing' (1993). For centuries in cultures around the world, as she establishes in *Tendencies*, courtroom adjudication on rape and sexual abuse gives preference to the ignorance of the man, who did 'not know' he was proceeding without consent; did 'not know' he was raping a child; or did 'not know' the person had been trafficked. From within a 'patiently instructive orchestration of ignorance':

the rape machinery that is organized by this epistemological privilege of unknowing in turn keeps disproportionately under discipline, of course, women's larger ambitions to take more control over the terms of our own circulation. (1993, 24)

Stark among the several positions of privileged unknowing that become revealed by *Dream Pill* is the knowing-unknowing that trafficking occurs endemically throughout the globe, throughout Europe, throughout London, and is happening streets away from the performance of *Dream Pill* itself. 'I don't know what they are doing in there', Bola says to the audience when Tunde is called away to be raped (Prichard 2010, 25). *But you do*. At this critical moment, audiences must reconcile to a socially legitimated aporia of knowledge construction between the evidentiary, staged knowledge of what is happening, Bola's own knowledge, and a privileged position of unknowing. *Dream Pill* asks audiences, if you don't know why she's crying, why don't you know? If you *do* know, what are you going to do about it?

This macro question of the play is generated within *Dream Pill* through a device of direct address to the audience. Volleys of questions from Bola to the audience facilitate an overt construction of the audience in a privileged position of un/knowledge-power:

Why are you here?  
Are we allowed to sit here?  
Do you know what her whole name is?  
Can I touch your hair?  
Why do you have long hair? Does it hurt?  
Has anyone ever pulled your hair?  
Are you spirits?  
Are you going to work here?  
Do you know what it means?  
Do you know that it is dangerous to talk in your sleep?  
Have you ever been to a witch?  
Will you go back?  
Sometimes she just falls into a trance, but she can't just choose, can you?  
(3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 17)

These questions, some amusing, some strange, some entrancing – and perhaps to some audience members, really annoying!, in the way of being relentlessly questioned by a child – pull the audience into a wavering awareness of the narrative scenario: the play ‘lets you forget they’re trafficked children. You just see them as children and then suddenly you remember why they’re there’ (Director Tessa Walker in Caird 2011). The questions also cause the audience to haze between different identities. Bola and Tunde address us sometimes as other girls in captivity with them; sometimes as punters; at times, more implicitly, as theatre-goers. However we are addressed, we are always an audience under suspicion of *knowing*.



Figure 9. Bola talks to the audience. Photograph Sheila Burnett

As Bola and Tunde turn to acting out an experience of visiting a witch doctor, Tunde feigns going into a trance. Here, the nature of the questions suddenly accelerates into a seriousness questioning about knowing and being. Shaking out of her ‘trance’, Tunde joins Bola in questions to the audience (until this point Bola had been the exclusive inquisitor). They explain how the ‘dream pill’ works to audiences. It is a ‘special pill for protection [from demons] – Dedeh give it’ and it ‘make[s] you faint’ (18). The girls say that when you take the pill, you wake up with marks on your body – they show us the marks on their bodies; some are bruises, some are friction burns, others bites.

|       |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TUNDE | Dis were not here before                                                                                                                          |
| BOLA  | Dey are real, because if you go to their place [where demons live],<br>when you sleeping, they can mark you                                       |
| TUNDE | [to audience] Is it? <i>They wait for a response.</i>                                                                                             |
| BOLA  | They nor know.<br>Dedeh says you wake up in a place, diff’rent place, wid<br>diff’rent room and it is still real. Is dat true? Are we still real? |
| TUNDE | Are you? (19)                                                                                                                                     |

When Tunde and Bola ask the audience if they are real, and if we are real, the audience has now been very clearly interpellated into the structure of the scenario as its co-creators. Though Bola says we don’t know about the exact situation of how the pill and the marks work, she goes on to put us in a position of knowing *whether she and Tunde still exist*. This makes for an emotionally challenging and politicised audience-performer relationship. Sitting in a basement within London’s most infamous red light district, encircled by Soho walk-ups, the only way to continue to occupy a privilege of unknowing would be for the audience to deny its own existence. Confronted with this dilemma, we are challenged to deny this existence to children – their own existence, as well as ours – if we are to retain the privilege of unknowing.

From the core of *Are we real?* grows a challenge to recognise that within the rape culture of a racist carceral state, the subjectivity and agency of trafficked children, especially children of colour, becomes framed as unknowable, and to return to Foucault's term, 'subjugated' within this unknowability. The gauntlet of the question exacerbates an instinct within audience members to protest that no, actually they are *not* real, they are only fictions of a play! Yet written following conversations with women in recovery from sexual slavery, subjugated knowledges from trafficked women and children drive *Dream Pill* (even as Prichard herself does not share this background – I explore the identity politics of this position further below).

The subjugated knowledge of the girls, as Black children, manifests a position of unknowing altogether different from the privileged unknowing that Sedgwick charts. And this too creates another magnetic field of positionality and knowledge construction, into which the audience is drawn. Bola's own repeated not-knowing does not come from the privileged position of unknowing within rape culture. Tunde and Bola's circumstances, as well as their identities, both inhabit and overturn a position of being 'unthinkable' to the audience, what critical race scholar Saidiya Hartman refers to as a 'position of unthought': Blackness and Black sentience as the unthinkable other to white rationalist discourse. The position of unthought creates and sustains 'the foundation of the national order' of white hegemony (2003, 184-185). Through the fictional Bola and Tunde, *Dream Pill* confronts audiences with an awareness of enslaved and trafficked children, as articulating the national order by being 'unthinkable', and as occupying conditions too overwhelming to approach through reason.

I don't *know* / *can't think* why she's crying. But she *is* crying and this is not brought into question. 'Ultimately it's about the paradox of agency for those who are



in these extreme circumstances. And basically, there are very few political narratives that can account for that' (Hartman 2003, 187). In this sense, the politics of *Dream Pill* are in its attempt to dramatise a paradox of agency for Bola and Tunde, without giving the audience (or characters) a restitution of a carceral freedom narrative of heroism, survival, and triumph. This forces an antagonistic recognition of the racialised and material circumstances of children under violent domination. Yet it does not victimise either the children of the narrative, or its audiences, by allowing this domination to *remove* agency from the characters or *relieve* agency from the audience. Crying plays an important role in this.

### Miasmatic crying

*Dream Pill* is a play where audiences are 'caught' between feeling and possibility; one in which assigned identity positions miasmatically haze around the theatre.<sup>23</sup> The audience assembled in the theatre has been challenged as rational, and therefore hegemonic; and has been denied a privilege of unknowing, against which to define itself; and furthermore, has had its own reality brought into a differential distribution of vulnerability (*Are we real? Are you?*). Insofar as *Dream Pill* is about conditions of child trafficking, in which positions of knowing become interrogated, it is also a play about crying, in which tears from the hearts and ducts of carceral citizens become interrogated.

We are given two pieces of information by Bola in the first line: 1) knowing/not knowing/unknowing is happening; 2) crying is happening. The play proceeds to put audiences on an agility course of lachrymal exertion. It is thus not via rationalist appeal (rationality itself has been drawn into suspicion), but via exposure to

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<sup>23</sup> an effect key to miasmatic performance, as discussed in the previous chapters on *Sweatbox* and *Pests*

overwhelming feeling that *Dream Pill*'s challenge to the audience becomes conveyed. The play questions what audiences' feelings are, what they are for, and why they are here. It is through crying that the political agenda, and political *possibility*, of *Dream Pill* becomes manifest. From within these conditions, crying enters the analytic frame as a miasmatic response.

What is miasmatic about a tear? Tears, like the sweats of the *Sweatbox*, occupy a secretive purpose. They are bodily secretions, and they also secrete a cultural response. As Thomas Dixon notes in his history of crying in British culture, *Weeping Britannia* (2015), from the classical to early modern period the tear was considered 'on a par with vomiting, sweating, sneezing, or farting—a bodily reflex, an excretion—even a sort of waste disposal' (2015, 8). The excretal function of tears can indicate any number of encounters: with material pollutions, as in dust in the eye, but also with what is considered divine, or grotesque, or humourous, or pitiful, or enraging. For Bola, tears are vapours, of the air – they carry the properties of rain, circulating in and out of the body: 'Sometimes you can know there is rain when people have it on their faces [...] Sometimes I think could there ever be a kind of rain to blind people. Blind de eyes' (25). What is a rain that blinds, if not a tear? There is a call to a divine rain here, that could remove sight, and in so doing also restore the eye to empathy.

Tears are a 'universal sign', writes Dixon, 'not in the sense that it has the same meaning in all times and all places [but] because, depending on the mental, social, and narrative context, it can mean almost anything' (2015, 7). A very clear point to make about crying in *Dream Pill* is that it is not necessarily because people are sad.

The miasmatic of tears arrives via the interspersed delineations between culturally construed emotion and physiological affect. As an embodied response, sometimes we literally ‘don’t know why we’re crying’ – tears come before we know why, as a precursor to ‘knowledge’, if ever knowledge is to arrive. I can attest that there were no billows of dust blowing through the basement at Soho Theatre, or hidden stashes of cut onions (although it *was* at the time a restaurant), and we can safely rule out people’s tears at *Dream Pill* as the result of environmental pollutions. This does not occlude the underlying condition of the tear as a reaction to an assailing of emotions known or unknown. Or knowledges known or unknown, for that matter, for as William Blake wrote in 1803, ‘A tear is an intellectual thing’ (in Dixon 2015, 8).

The terrain of miasmatic performance in *Dream Pill* charts those emotions that in fact evidence themselves somewhere in a haze between known and unknown, and which in part create that haze. These emotions are functionaries of the carceral condition; their haze is the miasma of carcerality. The crying of *Dream Pill* is carceral-located in its function as a collective activity, a crying in public, which expresses audiences’ attachments to innocence and guilt within rape culture and racism. In *Dream Pill* the ‘liquid social bond’ of tears, as Dixon puts it, reveals what are ‘the intellectual and social dimensions of a complex, shared, unconscious, intellectual narrative ... running its course down your cheeks’ (2015, 8-9). To return to an earlier turn of phrase, what is secretive about tears then also relates to the hidden discursive properties of carceral society that articulate themselves through emotional response, though they may be resisted intellectually. Tears may be themselves intellectual but they also carry an ability to drown out rational thought.

The second miasmatic aspect of tears relates to contagion. Contagious properties relate to the project of *Dream Pill* on affective, discursive and aesthetic levels; tears here condense much of the intimate and confused relationship between miasma and contagion. *Have a good cry, get it out of your system*: as excreta, tears have long been connected to healthy functioning of the body in Western medicine, especially as modes of warding off disease. Equally, in situations of excessive crying, they may signify a diseased mind or soul – someone too impassioned, and thus fragile and susceptible to external stimulants (or degradations).

For miasmatic performance, from within these salutary and atmospheric functions of tears, it is the *act of crying* itself that is potentially contagious. Squeezing out of our bodies, tears squeeze an audience into social collectivity. To cry is to perform a social narrative, and tears – particularly those suspected as *moral* tears – issue a kind of instruction to anybody in the vicinity. As such they form part of a contagious social practice, a responsiveness that becomes in the context of criminal justice narratives, not only instructive, but also to some degree corrective. Especially at the theatre.

What do tears at a Clean Break play mean? In a sense, they sit uneasily between crying, knowing you're crying, and knowing *why* you're crying. In her essay 'On Affect and Protest', Deborah Gould articulates the connection between emotion and political mobilisation as overshadowed by western scholarship with 'a tendency to render emotion in cognitive and rationalist terms, thereby taming it' (2010, 23). Others are crying, why am I not?: a thought that surely many have had as audience members at one point or another. I certainly have; I have had this thought during several Clean Break plays, even. In the course of *Dream Pill* Bola asks Tunde several times 'Why are you crying?', cramping the reflexivity of the experience even further.

In the absence of spontaneous tear, do we attempt to ‘tame’ the roving, voracious, tear-bestowing affective response with thought? What does it mean if I don’t cry? But let me draw deeper again: there’s a tear in there somewhere... Tears are more than a little theatrical, after all. Maybe I can fake it, like actors and crocodiles.

Yet considered from another perspective, not producing tears equally reflects an engaged-disengagement – one that implicitly incorporates the individual into a nascent atmosphere of politicised community. ‘I don’t know why I’m not crying’ in fact may indicate a particularly ethical response, a ‘scene of recognition,’ as Judith Butler writes, ‘in which precisely my own opacity to myself occasions my capacity to confer a certain kind of recognition on others’ (2005, 41). To give an ethical account of one’s self depends, in Judith Butler’s formulation, in part on a disorientated temporality outside of the first-person temporality in which the self fails to achieve a coherent identity – if only for a moment. When in proximity to carceral narratives, to become opaque to one’s self – to know yet not-know – to cry yet not-cry, to be enmeshed or enfogged between affective response and a nascent political awareness: this is miasmatic performance at work to expose the porous boundaries of the self.

This is miasmatic performance also because it draws on a heritage of *tearjerking* as an artistic form and social activity. Weeping in public became overtly affiliated with the expression of moral social conscience with the rise of the sentimental novel in the eighteenth century. However it was first during that the Victorian period that a kind of extreme moral weeping developed as a public practice, and, as with many innovations of the Victorians, I view this as an explicitly miasmatic form. Dixon connects Victorian weeping to displays of punishment as well as criminal justice reform:

Tears produced by philanthropists, politicians, condemned criminals, lawyers, judges, clergymen, audiences at executions, and on at least one occasion the

executioner too, were the currency in a new economy of feeling. Tears flowed in the same old channels as money and power. (2015, 100)

Moral weeping became a way of asserting supremacy and disciplining one's self and others. These are not necessarily callous tears, but they are extractive; tears which in performing conformity to an agenda become shibboleths of identity. *I don't know why she's crying... is it for the intended reasons?* These shifts in weeping relate directly to the development of tearjerking as a social justice maneuver.

Crying as social discipline is reflected, too, in the way disciplinary terms to discuss crying are common. As Tim Etchells writes in 'The crying game of theatre': 'I'm not immune to a crying jag myself but I think weeping is of most interest in an audience when it's held in check or tension with other things ... The best tears come unbidden' (2009). *Bidding, holding in check, crying jag* – all point to the punitive side of tearjerking. In the 1910s the effervescent gestures of soda-jerks and beer-jerks were appropriated by journalists to describe a new kind of writing: *tearjerkers* were 'newspaper stories about tragic situations' (Online Etymology Dictionary). *Green's Dictionary of Slang* attributes the tearjerker to artistic forms 'which should guarantee a weeping audience [and] promote an emotional charge' designed to mobilise action in audience or readership. Throughout the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, journalists and cultural commentators jerked and raked the American and European public into new social consciousness. The muckrakers, a progressive vanguard of journalists dedicated to social reform, worked and wrote feverishly to expose corporate misdeeds and the plight of the poor, hungry and exploited in industrialising cities. Tearjerking modes of artistic production became closely connected to traditions of penal reform and consciousness-raising in social and criminal justice domains. Within British criminal justice policy and legislation, a key illustration of tearjerking impact from the period can be found in John Galsworthy's 1910 play *Justice*, whose audiences' 'many

“tear-stained” letters to the then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, begging him to reconsider the use of solitary confinement’, immediately resulted in changes to British legislation (McAvinchey 2011, 43). Clean Break, motivated by social justice initiatives, draws on this rich heritage of agitation and frequently employs an open appeal to audiences. ‘Have you been affected by any of the issues in *Dream Pill*? DON’T JUST GO HOME’ read the programme for *Dream Pill* in 2010. Bola and Tunde’s direct address and interaction with audience members created a complex interpellation intended to articulate social realities of trafficking and its root causes, ‘affecting’ audiences through emotional response.

The UK government estimates that there are tens of thousands of people in slavery living in the United Kingdom; in London alone the number has increased tenfold in five years to 2,346 known victims, with an 807% rise in child victims of slavery (Gentleman 2020). In the years since *Dream Pill* was first performed at Soho Theatre in 2010, Nigeria continues to be regularly identified as ‘one of the top countries of origin among victims identified [in the UK] ... 80% of women and girls [trafficked from Nigeria] are trafficking victims who criminals plan to exploit in brothels across Europe’ (Hyland 2016). The sheer scale of trafficking, and the invisibility or ‘hiddenness’ of both its victims as well as its root causes, worked as a muckraking imperative on Prichard: ‘To live with that, to live in a world where [trafficking] is happening now and to be a part of a system that benefits economically from the sexual exploitation of women and children – what else can I write about?’ (Prichard in Clean Break 2011, 3).

Yet how does a company measure the effects of its muckraking efforts? The articulation of tangible outcome within social justice reform is entangled with the Clean Break’s sense of purpose and mission, its appeal and justification for funding,

and even its daily administration. As is the trend with many companies working in theatre and social justice, Clean Break consolidates its core values and successes in many different areas through various articulations of the nebulous but critical term *impact*. For Clean Break, demonstrating ‘impact’ requires a balancing act with its own values as a feminist organisation; listening to and working off of definitions of ‘impact’ for the women who engage with the company; and reconciling with the requirements for funding – private trusts and foundations, or from Arts Council England, for whom Clean Break is a National Portfolio Organisation – and the pressures of relevant ministries and other government bodies.

At every level of impact measurement, but given a very material embodiment at the theatre, impact is *contingency*, or, in Sara Ahmed’s terms, ‘how we are touched by what comes near’ (2010, 22). The touch of contingency takes on a dynamism in the term impact: a sense of an encounter at speed, even a smack, a collision that reorients where we are – possibly even who we are. Very importantly it is an encounter with repercussions, which is why for a company working in the criminal justice system, it becomes such a loaded and troubled term – and also an expeditious one.

The question persists: how does a company *know* what its impact is on social justice matters? We can’t *know why* people cry at the theatre. Is it enough to know *of* people crying at the theatre? Research into audience impact, for a subsidised company with limited resources, can be daunting, especially under pressures to ‘capture’ as much data as possible to continue to secure funding. In my own years of trying to talk to people coming out of Clean Break performances, only a small portion of the audience really wanted to try to synthesise their experience into language – let alone to a stranger with a recording device, or on a clinical-looking survey page. Outside of



personal accounts by an audience member, when I worked at Clean Break, impressions of affective impact on an audience were not recorded. How could we know why people were responding the way they were? Yet, I recall many occasions when, following a performance (especially in previews), the Clean Break team would note events of emotional or affective response. Through laughs and tears observed, we would gather a sense of how the play had worked on the audience. ‘I saw a few people break down,’ a volunteer once said to me after a show at Latitude Festival, solemn with excitement. The tears were shorthand we took to mean that we touched somebody. We broke through; we *impacted* them. The audience had become contingent to the criminal narrative, and vice versa, as it came near.

One of my instincts in developing miasmatic performance is to chart a way to begin to think through audience impact differently: more atmospherically. The very notion of miasma runs contradictory to impact, in its sense of smack or collision, or pull and gravity. Indeed the gravity of miasmatic performance is about multiple diffuse bodies, ideas, laws, and restrictions in riotous co-contamination. How would a model of atmospheric efficacy behave? The question is one that trails alongside all the many angles of inquiry in this thesis, as I seek to ‘pin down’ miasmatic performance. One way of thinking through this question of efficacy in *Dream Pill* is how multiple levels of vulnerability might be experienced as contagions in the audience through miasmatic performance – what of these emotions ‘belongs’ to my body, my social conditions?, what is not of me, but could be?, what are narratives estranged from me, but mine as a carceral citizen – how are they brought near, and where do these tears go from here? In the next section, I investigate how emotions can blow miasmatically around an audience collective, and whether they have the potential to form what Leticia Sabsay calls ‘permeable alliances’ in the process.

## Emotional contagion and ‘permeable alliances’ within the audience

Crying in an audience demonstrates the generation of a social mechanism that is possibly more politically effective in a social field which has become wary of rationalist or moralist appeals for change. A tearjerk play, evoking again the effervescence of the soda-jerk, blubs and bubbles over in a flow between audience and performers, moving through a reef of emotion, affect and political mobilisation. In this, the tearjerking affect reaches a symbiosis with concepts of emotional contagion. To return again to Etchells’ vocabulary, ‘I’m not immune’: crying can infect as a transmissible event. The arrival of tears – bidden or unbidden – flowing around the audience space allows for a shift in the audience’s sensorium. This shift is an affective articulation within a socio-political space, relating to an epidemiology of affect: mimetic communication that spreads in the wider community, with a role in ‘making – and breaking – of social bonds. These [affective modalities] form the basis for a sense of belonging, and, ultimately, of the polis, as what forms the affective bases of political orders’ (Gibbs 2010, 191). If any one emotion hovers between the affective and the rational – some emotions pull more on cognitive processing than others (Gould 2010) – then a contagion of emotions as cultural-biological feedback loop brings multiple channels into play, from imitative behaviour (crying because others are, or Bola and Tunde are), to culturally constructed emotions (crying because of the situation of the narrative), to performances of judgement (crying because of a social requirement to respond to unacceptable brutality).

Judgment and contagion form a key nexus of the tearjerking apparatus of *Dream Pill*. ‘By an affect,’ writes Teresa Brennan, ‘I mean the physiological shift

accompanying a judgment' (2004, 5). A majority white audience watches two Black actors perform as sex-trafficked children:

just as the master depends on the slave[, f]or the one who is projected upon, the drive becomes an affect, a passionate judgment directed inward, a judgment that constitutes a kind of hook on which the other's negative affect can fix. (111-112)

Prichard tearjerks the audience with *Dream Pill*; in staging an encounter with sex-trafficked children she demands that the audience acknowledge their social duty to judge the situation and at the same time, she provides no easy object on which to hook that judgement. Her writing refuses to allow Bola and Tunde to stand as victims in front of the audience; it also refuses the audience their own injurability by splicing the grief and dread that the audience wants to feel with quirky, funny lines and hopeful shouts from the actors. Emotions circulate throughout the piece – laughter, to crying, to nothingness - 'emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects' (Ahmed 2014, 10). The projection of judgment travels around the space like a bottle rocket – the situation of Bola and Tunde is so unacceptable that there is no adequate landing zone for this impassioned, negative affect. *Dream Pill*'s original staging on Dean Street, with Soho walk-ups all around, brings the audience to the very precipice of recognition. 'Are we real? Are you?'

These factors create what queer and cultural theorist Leticia Sabsay identifies as 'permeable alliances' within the assembled body politic of the audience. Permeable alliances articulate the ways in which 'embodied vulnerability and the affective dimension of politics bolster a radical democratic perspective that at the same time accounts for hegemony' (2016, 279). Responsiveness to affect, as Judith Butler has noted, is vital to agency and to our ability to act within a political capacity (Butler et al 2016). Sabsay builds on this concept through a construct of *permeability*, in which

affect circulates and is transmitted freely from body to body; permeable alliances suggest how vulnerability becomes relational, and also how ‘the impossibility of establishing a clear origin and destiny for the circulation of affect (both in spatial and temporal terms)’ (2016, 286) reveals the social antagonism that allows vulnerability to be defined as injurability for some people, and not others.

The permeability of bodies, in this sense, works as a metaphor for the permeability of the body politic, and the constant negotiation of its boundaries. According to Butler, this “we” performs a popular will that might be plural and heterogeneous. But if this is so, it is not because of the immediate performativity of the acting in concert. Rather, the “we” that these bodies perform articulates an antagonistic relationship with what they are resisting, and particularly with what they are also excluding. The question, then, is how affective investments and shared vulnerability produce articulations that agonistically reconfigure social antagonisms, calling into question the hegemonic borders of the body politic. (Sabsay 2016, 297)

Acknowledging a relational identity condition of permeability, as Sabsay theorises it, formulates vulnerability as both an objective and a subjective state. Such a relational permeability is foundational, for any notion of miasmatic performance as a politically mobilised and affectively contagious aesthetic at the theatre. It is crucial to *Dream Pill*, as to the whole of Clean Break’s work, that audiences recognise that some people are objectively more vulnerable than others.<sup>24</sup> The permeability inherent to vulnerable alliances manifested through *Dream Pill* connects audience members’ own subjective vulnerability to pathogenic, or objective, vulnerability. When Bola and Tunde’s vulnerability reaches beyond its affiliation with pure injurability it becomes what Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay have termed ‘vulnerability in resistance’ (2016). In keeping with the interrogative mode of *Dream Pill*, the meaning of vulnerability in resistance is perhaps best expressed as a question: ‘what in our

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<sup>24</sup> What Sabsay calls an ‘objective’ vulnerability state, is elsewhere named ‘pathogenic vulnerability’ by Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds in their ‘taxonomy of vulnerability’; they connect the term to ontological precariousness resulting from ‘morally dysfunctional or abusive interpersonal and social relationships and sociopolitical oppression or injustice’ (2013, 9).

analytic and political frameworks would change if vulnerability were imagined as one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance?’ (Butler et al, 1).

Bola’s resistance to domination occurs as she expresses what she knows and what she does not know, and this gives her immense power and control within her own vulnerability. In perhaps the most trenchant illustration of this dynamic, she recounts to the audience a creation story while she is left alone on stage. Tunde has been sent upstairs to be raped. Bola, anxious and disassociating from the thought of what is happening to Tunde, begins to tell a story. But it is not any story – it is a creation of the earth. In this her vulnerability reaches beyond injurability alone: instead it becomes agential and she pulls the audience into co-creative relation to this vulnerable agency. She was born, and made the river, and then you came in:

People shouted all the time. There were so many noises with all the plants singing they had to shout. That there was singing. And they all got coughs and were sick and vomited up a whole load more people / And then I was born I peed and I made a river and flowed all over the earth / And then they bathed. And that was the only thing they had to bathe in / And the people got angry with the earth and cut off all her skin, so now she’s bare and naked / And then – and then you come in, and you say to Dedeh, ‘I didn’t do anything bad’ / ‘No I didn’t do anything bad’ / And then you say / ‘Would it make you sad?’ / Ask me ask me if it would make me sad to stay here ... (Prichard 2010, 26-27)

Here tears emerge again in a macro-cosmos, flowing as excreta through the body of Bola, and as rivers in lachrymal excess, overflows of woe. The swallowed tears of Bola, who doesn’t know why Tunde is crying, come as urine. These are tears both cleansing and of necessity: ‘And that was the only thing they had to bathe in’. Through coughing and sickness – contagion and vomiting – the earth is made and her skins are cut. She is left with marks, friction burns and bites. This also gives way to the time, she tells us, that you speak to her.

*Ask me ask me if it would make me sad to stay here.* These are the words of vulnerability in resistance: the command of a question. She has asked the audience

many things, and now, we must ask her a question. It will be the one she tells us to ask. The stage directions here indicate an internal monologue for Bola, in which she holds up several sides of the conversation. Prichard did not expect audience members to reply to Bola during her creation story: ‘The audience do not respond so she begins a dialogue with herself’ (26) and ‘Bola imagines a conversation with an audience member, but remains in her own space and in her own world of play, without approaching anyone, the following dialogue is with herself’ (27). That is not what happened. In performance, audience members by this point – about 25 minutes into the play – conformed to Bola’s prompt. More often than not, an audience member would call out: ‘would it make you sad to stay here?’

‘Yes.’ (27)

It is a grim moment. After all that, and even (un)knowing the response, even as Tunde is raped off stage – *we still ask if it would make her sad*. The provocation is distressing not only because of the harrowing suspension of this unknowledge, but because it sets up a cruel scenario in which Bola’s feeling and consent to stay might have an impact on her future. ‘Consent is unseemly in a context in which the very notion of subjectivity is predicated upon the negation of will,’ Saidiya Hartman writes in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997, 111). The shock of the voice calling out from the audience – in my experience, these voices (though never my own) wove through the space as trembles, punctures and ash, rather than as strident responses to a call – the shock of this felt deeply troubled. With it came, finally, the uncontestable evidence that we are real.

## Evidence of realness?

*About 20 minutes in, a woman fainted. She had been standing against the wall of crates. Someone gave up their seat for her, she was given water and the performance continued uninterrupted. She appeared to be fine afterwards.*

*After the performance a young woman sitting on the floor was crying and would not get up for some minutes. Eventually her friend convinced her that it "wasn't real, it's only a play" and she felt able to leave.*

*Dream Pill Show Report 4, Wednesday 17 November 2010, Soho Theatre*

*Dream Pill* provides the premise for a not-knowing and a crying that calls for a radically altered narration of the self and self amongst others. The audience responses given in the show report here – fainting and crying with abandon – illustrate a passage through various shibboleths of ‘on the spot’ identity dissolution, reification and re-formulation that amount to giving an account of the self within the permeable alliances fostered by the play. Witnessing Bola and Tunde – as trafficked characters, as Black people, as actors, as confident and funny characters, as raped characters, as people coming off the stage to touch the audience – manifested an extreme discomfort at this event of permeable co-constitution. A woman fainted and a woman was on the ground weeping. Here the tearjerk resurfaces, as a yank, a pull downwards, and also as a sinking. In some ways, the fainting woman’s sink can be read as occurring as a result of ‘too-much-ness’, following Butler: ‘I am animated by this call or demand, and I am at first overwhelmed by it. The other is, from the start, too much for me, enigmatic, inscrutable. This “too-much-ness” must be handled and contained for something called an “I” to emerge in its separateness’ (2005, 54). The fainting account becomes ethical in that it is an acknowledgment of the failure to manage excess of being, and differentiation in the encounter.

Yet the sinking motion of the faint also reverberates with a willful absenting from the scene of violence – and signifies a momentary return to comfort through a dissociative manoeuvre. The permeable membranes between Bola and Tunde, with all their identity categories, between the body of the audience, your body, my body – sends the spectator into a sink away from recognition of extreme reality of trafficking, and back into absence. The faint overrides the self's violent discomfort at this event of permeable co-constitution.

Sinking, within Heidegger's phenomenology of moods, is intimately connected to the anxiety of being. The encounter with the other, and failure to manage the excess of that encounter, surfaces as what Sianne Ngai theorises as a 'thrown projection' (2005). The audience member's body is thrown to dead faint. It projects a spatial displacement whose 'topologies of dispositioning... marked by physiological motifs of dizziness or vertigo, suggest that the logic of "anxiety" and that of "projection" ... converge in the production of a distinct kind of *knowledge-seeking subject*' (Ngai 2005: 215, my emphasis). As Bola announces her not-knowing, as the permeability between bodies becomes evident, and the girls question not only their reality, but that of the audience – it becomes clear that not only the girls are thrown projections, but that the audience itself is a thrown projection.

The faint from a fixed identity position as 'audience member' – even one desiring and failing to co-constitute itself – articulates this throw down. In *Ugly Feelings* Ngai formulates projection not as 'a subjective operation whereby preexisting feelings of the subject are displaced onto others, but rather designates the objective mechanism by which the feeling [anxiety] emerges' (2005, 221). For Heidegger this anxiety allows the 'environmentally ready-at-hand [to] sink away' (2005, 234) and restitutes distance for Dasein. However, Ngai asks, 'Is Dasein's



falling or fleeing toward entities-in-the-world *really* a “downward plunge,” or is this plunge an illusion fostered by the downward dropping of the world itself?’ (2005, 235, original emphasis). It is possible on many levels that the downward drop in *Dream Pill* is the world as previously ‘known’ – in other words, that to accept *Dream Pill*’s states of violence as creative of the world itself inculcates a mass vertigo at the sheer recognition of personal positionality. A ‘world itself’ formed of exploitation at very close quarters.

One of the reasons for this vertiginous discomfort is, finally, recognition that *Dream Pill* is not ‘only a play’ as the friend of the crying woman says.<sup>25</sup> To be on the floor weeping with abandon following a performance of *Dream Pill* presents a complex set of impulses and affects, arising from witnessing Black pain, in combination with a denial of easy empathy. Crying here also encompasses a necropolitical gesture.

Bola and Tunde begin, and end, *Dream Pill* laying on the floor. The audience member’s mimetic body on the ground - *a young woman sitting on the floor was crying and would not get up for some minutes* - recalls Sara Ahmed’s notion of ‘stickiness’ (2014). As discussed in the previous chapter on *Sweatbox*, for Ahmed, stickiness is ‘*an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs*’ surfacing together (90). Here, a stickiness – formed of trauma, racialised violence, extreme vulnerability, and performance (even a theatricality of these signs) – enveloped and overwhelmed the audience member. She became sticky with what

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<sup>25</sup> Written as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council Grant, Prichard built the characters and stage world of Bola and Tunde following extensive consultation with Detective Inspector Steve Wilkinson and Detective Andy Desmond of Scotland Yard, who are recognised leaders in police investigations of sex trafficking from Nigeria into the United Kingdom; Desmond is now an Anti-trafficking Consultant, having been responsible for the first successful prosecution in Europe of sex-trafficking children out of the UK. Sally Montier, of sex-trafficked women’s charity Poppy Project provided insight from 14 years of crisis support and housing for women impacted by physical, sexual and psychological violence as a result of trafficking.

Ahmed terms *contingent pain*, stuck to the floor in an ‘over-representation of the pain of others[,] significant in that it fixes the other as the one who ‘has’ pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give’ (Ahmed 2014, 22). This context leads me to suggest that appropriative crying at Black pain within *Dream Pill* becomes miasmatic in that it moves towards supporting the necropolitics of the carceral state in which the theatre is made. Why? In many crucial ways, the friend consoles truthfully: this *is* only a play. The girls, not girls, are not being held at the theatre; they have risen from the floor to take a bow and leave the stage. The lights are up and people are filtering back upstairs. Yet the crying woman refuses to rise. Her mirroring, sticky articulation of pain, refuses to let the girls rise, in what becomes an appropriative entanglement.<sup>26</sup>

There is every possibility that the woman weeping may have personal experience of some of what Bola and Tunde embody and enact. It is crucial to keep this in the frame of reference as a possibility. Her friend’s attempt to console her with ‘it wasn’t real, it’s only a play’ however gives an impression that either the friend *doesn’t know why she’s crying* – or that this reaction is not one they have seen before. Further the Show Report’s note that she ‘would not get up’ is tinted with refusal – or obstinacy. The play has ended without resolution; there is no sweeping in to save the girls; and in fact they question the audience’s existence. The refusal and the crying together could be part of a ‘desire to be’ – to be restituted to being. Desire to be is predicated on the desire to be recognised, as Butler perceives it (2005). And this is perhaps what the crying woman is articulating – the desire to be recognised further and further without end.

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<sup>26</sup> Frank Wilderson gives a further commentary on the politics of white audiences not allowing Black actors to rise for applause: ‘not only is the slave’s performance (dance, music, etc.) the property of white enjoyment, but so is [...] the slave’s own enjoyment of his/her performance: that too belongs to white people’ (in Hartman 2003, 188).

For an audience member faced with the pain of two Black girls, performed by two Black women, to be recognised further and further without end forms part of an obstinate compassion. The world of *Dream Pill* yokes the subjectivity of its characters to the ‘triple loss’ of slavery, as Mbembe identifies it: ‘absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)’ (2003, 21); a form of ‘death-in-life.’ Yet in Prichard’s writing, the girls live, and live at times exuberantly; their vulnerability is agential and never in a state of equivalency with their injurability. Thus the tears that do not allow a rise from the floor, when emerging from the necropolitical instincts of a citizen of a carceral state, become an act of aggressive mourning. The lights are up and people are filtering back upstairs, perhaps negotiating various emotions on those same stairs that hosted Tunde’s stagger. When the crying woman refuses to rise, it becomes an example of possession, even a trafficking of emotion: ‘Can the white witness of the spectacle of suffering affirm the materiality of black sentience only by feeling for himself [sic]?’ asks Hartman (1997, 19). As Bola asks the audience in the very beginning of *Dream Pill*: ‘Why are you here?’

To be directly asked ‘Why we are you here?’ prevents a sense of stability as unquestioned ally to Bola and Tunde within the audience. The inquisitive antagonism of this line allows for a multiply-propelled introspection throughout the course of the performance; ultimately, allows for a condition of possibility. In this *Dream Pill* engages problems of audience empathy, parrying with the audience throughout – at times opening, at times closing the borders of contingency and empathic identification. Prichard directly addresses the compassionate liberalism all too common amongst the middle class, what Lauren Berlant terms ‘a kind of soft supremacy rooted in compassion and coercive identification [that] wants to dissolve

[racist] structure through the work of good intentionality, while busily exoticizing and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant' (2008, 6-7). Berlant points to 'bourgeois white women writers [who] mobiliz[e] fantasies of what black and working-class interiority must feel like' (6). Prichard is herself a white woman, from a middle class background, and she has not been trafficked or enslaved; yet *Dream Pill* is not a work of soft supremacy. It critiques that supremacy; it creates an antagonistic space in the audiences that overtly threatens that supremacy. In so doing, the play creates possibility for permeable alliances that provoke an awareness of pain that exists for others, but which cannot be shared.<sup>27</sup>

Though I have not addressed it in the context of the whole production here, it bears briefly returning to the original commission of *Dream Pill* as one of the six plays of Clean Break's *Charged* season at Soho Theatre. As I discuss in Chapter Five, *Charged* deliberately stages at-risk states and subjectivities, asking audiences to inhabit narrative environments peripheral to the criminal justice system. Bola and Tunde, innocent of any crime, form part of this 'thrown projection' of criminality. In concert with the other five plays, *Dream Pill* inherently posits a world with a future for Bola and Tunde – and because of the nature of the company's work, that future carries a strong possibility of prison. The ingenuity of *Charged* is its ability to implicate the audience in the decision-making about that future world. It does not have to end with prison for Bola and Tunde, nor must it end with death. But as the audience reactions (including, perhaps, my own) delineated here suggest, facilitating

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<sup>27</sup> Sara Ahmed puts this very beautifully in *Cultural Politics of Emotion*: 'The connection is not made as a form of fellow-feeling, and it is not about feeling the other's pain. Pain is evoked as that which even our most intimate others cannot feel. The impossibility of 'fellow feeling' is itself the confirmation of injury. The call of such pain, as a pain that cannot be shared through empathy, is a call not just for an attentive hearing, but for a different kind of inhabitance. It is a call for action, and a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one.' (2014, 39).

even the imaginary of a different outcome poses a prodigiously difficult task for the audience, who have many prejudices to overcome. In carceral societies, where ‘whiteness must be constantly yoked to the future and victimhood while blackness must be yoked to death and pathology’ (Bassichis and Spade 2014, 195), the foreclosure on Black bodies as guilty, whose futurity is in some way inevitably bound to incarceration, is a demonstration of the necropolitical ideology that ventriloquises the police, courts of law and prison system every day – reaching all the way to something so seemingly harmless as crying at theatre.

In this chapter, I have explored some of the ways that *Dream Pill* expresses emotions through miasmatic crying, and the way that expression of emotion in the intimacy of the basement at Soho Theatre allowed for audiences to recognise aspects of carceral conditioning as permeating the collective of the audience. The audience becomes by this token drawn into ‘permeable alliance’ and antagonistic to such conditioning. Yet where a future of incarceration for Bola and Tunde is left shadowy and haze-like in *Dream Pill*’s staging in Soho Theatre, it is drawn very close to the guts and bone when staged in a double bill with *Little on the inside*. In the next chapter on *Little on the inside* I examine the ways in which the ‘omnipotency’ (Mbembe 2003) of this inevitability of prison becomes staged, drawing on aesthetics of contagion to create a future for Bola and Tunde in which they are no longer themselves, but their words are staged in a prison cell.

# 4

## **‘I don’t Know why she is crying’** *Little on the inside*, Almeida Theatre 2013

This chapter slides forward on *Dream Pill*’s slick of tears, to discuss the contagious relationship between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* by Alice Birch during double bill performances at the Almeida Theatre in 2013. Contagions here build on figurations established in the previous chapter around the cultural politics of crying and unknowing through crying; and they are treated materially as formal contagions that move across from one play to the next.

*Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* bring audience and performers into scenarios of criminalisation that rely on the cultural power of what René Girard terms a ‘reciprocal affinity’ between disease and social disorder (1974: 834). Underlying this reciprocity, for Girard, is a mimetic violence that animates both concepts. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* germinate a similar reciprocal affinity of mimetic violence: here, between compassion and threat. A painful twist of the affective and social dimensions of the two emotions capitalises on majority white audiences’ ‘compassionate’ response to Black pain, alongside ‘threatened’ response to Black resilience. As I investigate through this section on ‘Miasmatic Contagions’, fluctuations of compassion and threat in *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* place lines of dramaturgy on a cultural-biological feedback loop; they activate and investigate emotional and behavioural contagion constructs in continuity with one another. Within this construct audiences become carriers and arbiters of social

contagion, themselves the predictive policing algorithm, and a matter of contagious exchange.

To demonstrate this as a miasmatic principle, in this chapter I explore *Little on the inside* through critical race scholar Alexander Weheliye's concept of *habeas viscus* as a 'fleshy surplus' of Black bodies within performance (2011). Habeas viscus articulates and challenges the power of law to allocate personhood to some people and not others through habeas corpus; in making the legal body fleshly and alive, habeas viscus as a performance register speaks to 'the breaks, crevices, movements, languages, and such found in the zones between the flesh and the law' (2014, 11). In so doing, it activates lines of flight while explicitly articulating oppressive, and policed, conditions.

Miasmatic performance within *Little on the inside*, and between *Little on the inside* and *Dream Pill*, draws these concepts of flesh beyond and within law into the space of audiences who move between scenarios of both racialisation and criminalisation within the Almeida Theatre. Critical to miasmatic performance here is the fact that these spaces of the Almeida are expressly not spaces 'dedicated' to theatre (i.e. as with the Almeida main stage), but are the quotidian, transactional and private spaces of the theatre's foyer and dressing room, what I term 'carceral heterotopias' in this chapter. Flowing around the space of the theatre, seeping between walls that aim to sequester and separate spaces into zones for theatre and other transactions, miasmatic performance here activates carceral narratives across purpose-built boundaries. The fleshy surplus of bodies and law in *Little on the inside* floats in on an atmospheric surplus of disciplinary spaces.

## Carceral heterotopias: *Little on the inside* in the Almeida foyer and *Dream Pill* in the dressing room

*Little on the inside* was commissioned by Clean Break to be performed in a double bill with *Dream Pill* during the 2013 Almeida Festival. During the performance event, audiences first crowded into one of the dressing rooms at the Almeida Theatre for performances of *Dream Pill*. Forty-five minutes after *Dream Pill*, audiences moved to the Almeida foyer for performances by the same actors – Susan Wokoma and Simone James – now portraying two adult women in prison, in *Little on the inside* by Alice Birch. Despite a lack of narrative continuity between the two plays, echoes of Bola and Tunde’s lines in *Dream Pill* provide the formal structure for *Little on the inside*. Two innocent girls have suddenly become criminalised – but implicitly so; in *Little on the inside* the two characters perform a rumour of *Dream Pill*’s Bola and Tunde – or an assumption, even a prejudice. Predicated on physical and cultural contact, this is social contagion at work as a performance aesthetic, working to reveal how the social imaginary of women and crime creates the material conditions for women to enter the criminal justice system. In this capacity, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* provide a key example of miasmatic performance.



Figure 10. Simone James as Tunde and Susan Wokoma as Bola in *Dream Pill* at Almeida Festival (2013). Photograph Katherine Leedale.





Figure 11. The actors as in Figure 10, now performing as A and B in *Little on the inside* by Alice Birch. Photograph Katherine Leedale.

In the Almeida foyer, where the discretely drawn characters of Bola and Tunde once were, now stand Wokoma and James as A and B – granular, hyper-lyrical data points striding around the stage and bouncing off the walls of what, it becomes clear through dialogue, is a prison cell. Performing on a raised stage at the far end of the foyer, there are no set pieces beyond a huge backdrop of a rising (or setting) sun. As with *Dream Pill*, there is minimal lighting and sound. *Dream Pill*'s opener 'I don't know why she's crying / She just has days like this. She's just having a bad day / Why are you here?' becomes *Little on the inside*'s opener: 'I don't know why she's crying / . / I don't Know why she is crying / . / She steps out of the sea with a crown of dolphins I've got eleven brothers and six sisters I love you so much I could die and die and die' (2013). The diffuse, wild A and B crackle like the exposed innards of Bola and Tunde: guts, ectopic rhythms, and gleefully mutating stories break down and reform in the viral ravage of Birch's structure.

Where Prichard's *Dream Pill* works as a limit case to interrogate the audience's social and affective participation in the trafficking of young, innocent Black bodies, Birch's *Little on the inside* throws audiences into a scenario of implicit criminalisation of adult Black bodies, this time in state-sanctioned captivity. Both plays provoke and problematise audiences' desire to empathise with performances of Black pain and resilience. The variable positioning of innocence and guilt in the two plays reveals what Saidiya Hartman identifies as 'the need for the *innocent* black subject to be victimized by a racist state in order to *see* the racism of the racist state' (2003: 189, original emphasis), and fiercely challenges audiences to recognise this paradigm. If *Bola*, *Tunde*, *A* and *B* are performed on a continuity – as they are in the double bill – the audience's own trajectory from witnesses of innocence to quasi-complicit traffickers and jailers becomes an unavoidable performance within the matrix of social contagion.

Contagious narratives and their interactions with spatial properties at the Almeida Theatre play an important role in defining this matrix. As part of the 2013 Almeida Festival, the plays each occupied quotidian spaces within the theatre: a dressing room for *Dream Pill* and the main foyer of the venue for *Little on the inside*. These spaces both displace and dilate the plays' evident theatricality; they agitate at the boundaries of the space of the theatre venue and the space of the fictional play to generate what is known in cultural theory as a heterotopia. Heterotopias, building on Michel Foucault's 1967 introduction of the concept in 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), have been theorised by Kevin Hetherington (1997), Edward Soja (1996) and of particular relevance to this chapter, Joanne Tompkins (2014), as sites that simultaneously evoke discrete sets of social, spatial, and temporal rules and meanings, bringing them into productive discordance with one another. The foyer at the Almeida Theatre, for

example, is not normally used as a production space: it is a transactional space, in which people purchase tickets and encounter publicity about plays, and it is a convivial space with a bar; it is also a space of preparation to enter the space of the play and it is a space of assessment, in which people meet in intermission and, perhaps, give first thoughts on how the play is going – or, afterwards, level a ‘verdict’ on the piece.



Figure 12. *Little on the inside*'s setting in the Almeida Theatre foyer. Photograph by author.

The dressing room at the Almeida Theatre, on the other hand, is a private space of preparation for actors: accreting the layers of character through costume, makeup, exercises before performance, and, following performance, preparation to re-enter the everyday life of the actor's own 'real-world' identity. To perform a play in each of these sites – especially two plays in two neighbouring sites in the same venue, performed by the same cast – brings the carceral content and aesthetics of each play

into miasmatic discord with the social space of the theatre, creating a heterotopia. A play depicting two girls trafficked for sexual exploitation occurs in a space of actors' preparation, masking, becoming possessed by 'other' lives of characters; this articulates a deeply unsettling rhizome of various actions of possession and possessive acts, in which the audience is trapped in extremely close quarters. The foyer, by contrast, at the Almeida is big, airy, and transactional: when the audience moves into this space for *Little on the inside*'s transposition of Bola and Tunde into A and B as prisoners, the economics of theatre and the economics of the prison system, as well as the assessment of performance and the delivery of the verdict become spliced together: the production of prison, as much as – and through – a production of theatre.

In this way, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* at the Almeida constitute a heterotopia precisely because they intersect and draw into question the 'rules' or dicta of what become (at least) six spaces: the Almeida foyer; the Almeida dressing room; the theatrical space of *Dream Pill*; the theatrical space of *Little on the inside*; the space of the audience; and the discursive space of carcerality in society. The event of this particular heterotopia ignites a challenge to social performance, drawing the in-betweens of rules-embedded space to expose some of the elements of *space-making* that maintain and support the criminal justice system. Here I refer to the fact that the state relies upon the concept of firm, uncontested borders in order to legitimate its sovereign control – yet, as border studies scholar Jenny Turner puts it, rather than presenting or maintaining a physical border, 'prison is a technique of bordering' (2016, 32). I follow Turner as well as other criminologists, sociologists and carceral geographers (Wacquant, Bauman, Moran and Schliche, among others, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis), who promote an understanding of carceral society as enacting precisely the contrary to firm borders: it is through *porous*, perforated

borders between prison and society, that that carceral control becomes deployed. As miasmatic performance seeks to attest, theatre plays an important role in demonstrating how diffuse, subtended and twisted carceral borderlands actually are. And it is in part through the miasmatic repurposing of the foyer at the Almeida Theatre, that *Little on the inside* allows for settings traditionally demarcated as ‘outside’ of the inside of prison to be reconsidered as carceral settings themselves. How does this occur?

In her work on the implications of heterotopias for theatre, Joanne Tompkins writes:

Heterotopic theatre may not in itself directly create political change (theatre almost never has that capacity), but it is possible that a performance might affect audiences significantly by demonstrating how change for the social good (however incremental) might take place off the stage. The value in heterotopia is actually witnessing in performance how else space and place might be constituted: it is the point of comparison of what *does occur* against what else *might transpire* such that the ‘unreal’ spaces that comprise a theatrical experience have the capacity to elicit concrete effects beyond its walls. (2014, 29)

The utopic potential of what ‘*does occur*’ / ‘*might transpire* ... to elicit concrete effects’ becomes amplified by uncertain temporalities between the two plays – *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* echo each other in words and gesture, but not narrative. Though both narrative environments are carceral, their extreme disparity derives in part from an ambient attribution of guilt that passes miasmatically between zones of performance. It is in this sense that I suggest that heterotopias, as inter-porous sites of venue, narrative and performance, become miasmatically imbued when activated within super-dialectics of social features of guilt, imprisonment, seepage and contagion.

The carceral environment of the trafficked girls of *Dream Pill*, held against their will, functions as an *innocent-carceral* environment (guilt belongs with the

captor Dedeh and the punters, in degrees of complicity with the audience). The environment of *Little on the inside* signifies, by contrast, a state-sanctioned *guilty-carceral* of adult women in prison. To have the *same performers* perform each carceral scenario using much of the *same language* across two plays (within quotidian spaces of the theatre), enacts an aporia fundamental to carceral society: the treatment of prisoners simultaneously as slaves and as citizens.

This vacillating perception of guilt and innocence within captivity stems from Enlightenment discourse around applications of the ‘social contract’ in penal reform. Rousseau’s social contract, as adapted by 18<sup>th</sup> century legal scholars, positioned the modern citizen as infinitely capable of self-reform through the corrective assistance of the state. Yet public imagination of the prisoner/captive was then, as it is indeed now, equally enflamed by the figure of the slave (Smith 2009); this dual consciousness – the abjection of the slave, dehumanised and without rights, alongside the rehabilitating rationality of the citizen – continues to regulate and inform contemporary perceptions of carcerality. That the same actors perform first as slaves, then as prisoners, crystallises this central discord within the carceral state, where prisoners become dehumanised within the prison system, even as they are expected to engage in self-reform and rehabilitation as productive members of society.

In the performance event, *Dream Pill* is literally the immediate past of *Little on the inside*. Yet audiences’ sense of spatiotemporal progression is complicated by narrative dislocation: while the women in prison are not narratively connected to Bola and Tunde, they *are* textually connected. This helps to displace what the audience may hold in terms of hegemonic constructs of procession of time, agency and life chances for those who are criminalised. Chapter Two discussed carceral chrononormativity through the context of the *Sweatbox*, where miasmatic

performance rendered time as a carceral secretion within the defunct socio-legal object of the prison van. Here, the plays also enact a ruptured carceral temporality, demonstrating a sentencing protocol of the present that captures rather than adjudicates – yet this is accomplished in *Little on the inside* completely outside of the semiotics of the prison van, or of the prison cell. The play relies on the audience's own imaginary to co-create the prison space here. Just as the temporality between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* is distended and obscured yet made live through contagions of language, so is the spatiality of prison made live through a stage set with nothing but a backdrop image of an open field. To exist as carceral site it requires the contagion of the prison imaginary.

### Habeas viscus: performance between flesh and law

The net effect of these continuities and ruptures – physical, temporal and narrative – is a performance of the remainders of flesh and law. There is never a clear sense of why Birch's characters in *Little on the inside* are in prison; instead they exist in a brutalised present that draws into question the teleology of the justice system. Vibrant storylines become unhinged in the space of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, and in the space of the performance the Black characters become what critical race scholar Alexander Weheylie describes as a 'fleshly surplus' (2014, 2), which both articulates and transcends oppression.

Crucial to this interpretation of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, Weheylie's concept of 'racializing assemblages of subjection' (2) radically re-invests the perception of Black subjectivity on a dynamic spectrum through and beyond pain. The 'freedom dream' of the carceral state is alive in this theatre, and is what brings the audience into complicity with the social discourse surrounding the narrative:

‘[R]ather than displacing bare life or civil death, [these assemblages] excavat[e] the social (after)life of these categories ... [and] can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds’ (2). Where Bola and Tunde have many imaginative flights in their back-and-forth together, creating alternatives to the terrifying world in which they find themselves, Birch’s A and B in *Little on the inside* inhabit these ‘freedom dreams’ almost exclusively. In the beginning of *Little on the inside* A asks B to describe her lips, and what she would do to ‘get to’ her lip. In the first moments of the play, the distance between A and B is established as both prohibitively vast and an opportunity for wild adventure:

B I'd cross seas on a raft made of fish guts and the bones from little faces  
and I'd fight Every Single Thing that I found, just to get to that lip and  
when it sank, when the raft sank All the way down to the bottom of  
that big black sea full of snakes and eels and and a Big Big arm  
reaching up from the very bottom of the sea bed that's not really a sea  
bed but mountains and mountains of Thick Black Tar pulling me down  
like a whirlpool pulling me down to suck me in where there's only  
darkness and only Quiet but that Boooooooming quiet that Fills Up  
Your Ears dub dub dub dub dub dub

A dub dub

B Like a heart beat.

A      dub dub

B I Kick On

A      dub dub

B And think of your Lip.

A I don't know why she's crying. She goes. I ain't Fucking touched her.

(Birch 2013)

B's outward adventure, perilous, organic and fantastical, is brought into the immediate ectopic rhythm of the heart, suggesting these lines of flight as internally borne and manifested in the effort to move the few inches between herself and A's lip. Physically B and A travel in tight movements around a bare stage, signifying the stripped conditions of a jail cell. Though A synchronises with B's 'dub dub, dub dub' after a few lines she suddenly breaks the connection with her (and Bola's) declaration 'I don't know why she's crying'. In this she brings the audience back to the



surveillance of the audience, referring to the ‘she’ of B in direct address to a third party – the audience – just as Bola did to the ‘she’ of Tunde in direct address to the same audience about an hour earlier in *Dream Pill*. This, in combination with ‘She goes. I ain’t Fucking touched her’ places the line in context of speech to an intervening guard – a guard who has perhaps abrogated B’s full arrival at A’s lip. This moment, which foregrounds the tone of many more moments of adventurous approach – both lyrical and physical – encapsulate Weheliye’s idea of the fleshy surplus and its ability to activate lines of flight while explicitly articulating oppressive, and policed, conditions.

In *Little on the inside* A and B leave *Dream Pill*’s expression through direct address to embrace a physically active back-and-forth filled with shouts and jumps and narrative loops that seem to refer to a private world only they can know. As fragments of Prichard’s text ricochet through Birch’s, A and B regenerate as remainders – both as data points of Bola and Tunde, and social pathogens entirely unmoored from any one subjectivity. A text filled with organic imagery, riddled with guts and the riddles of guts, yet combines and recombines with algorithmic precision.

On the next page, contagions at work between the the opening lines of Prichard’s *Dream Pill* (left column) and the opening lines of Birch’s *Little on the inside* (right column):

**BOLA** I don't know why she's crying  
 She just has days like this (*Shrugs.*)  
 she's just having a bad day  
 (*To the audience.*) Why are you here?  
*BOLA moves her mat a little farther from TUNDE.*

Tunde, I'm putting my mat over here  
 Tunde, I'm going to put my mat here but you can still  
 touch it  
 You want me to comb your hair?  
 Why are you crying?  
 There's a room she doesn't like. Someone called her a  
 bad name de.  
*BOLA sees an empty chair in the audience.*  
 Are we allowed to sit here?  
 Tunde.  
 Tunde.  
 We can sit with them.  
*TUNDE doesn't move, and BOLA is unsure.*  
*BOLA comes forward but then retreats a little to wait*  
*for TUNDE.*  
 Yeah. Those mats are hard  
 (*To TUNDE.*) Do you want to come and sit?  
*TUNDE is curious but does not move, she remains*  
*watching BOLA however.*  
 [...]  
 She's quiet. I'm loud  
**TUNDE** (*Quietly.*) I'm loud too

**B** I don't know why she's crying.  
 .  
 I don't Know why she is crying.  
 .  
 She steps out of the sea with a crown of dolphins I've got  
 eleven brothers and six sisters I love you so much I could die  
 and die and die Have you seen that mangrove tree?  
 Come on.  
 Again.  
 Again again again  
 Pick one.  
 I don't. I don't know why she's crying  
**A** She goes  
**B** Yes - yes, I go - I go - I haven't got a fucking Clue why  
 she is crying  
**A** I haven't got a fucking Clue why she is crying she goes -  
 and she crosses her arms and she goes - and she pushes her  
 chin out - she she  
 she  
**B** .  
**A** she  
**B** Keep going  
**A** she  
 She pushes her chin out and goes - Have Not Got a Clue.  
 Mate.  
**B** I do  
**A** She does

Textual contagions between the two plays become reinforced by gestural contagions:



Figure 13. Gestural contagions between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*.  
 Photographs Katherine Leedale; composite by author.

What is the effect of these gestural and textual contagions across sites of trafficked children (in the enclosed dressing room) and imprisoned women in the foyer? From a perspective of miasmatic performance, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* expose the relationship between slavery, prison and – crucially – theatre, in carceral societies today: the shift of register exposes the judging, and policing, algorithms alive in the audience. In the end audiences can't unknow what has happened – why people are crying – and what continues to happen around world societies and economies enmeshed in trafficking. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* together demand a racialisation of positionality in the encounter of trafficking, captivity and prison narratives.

Audience and critical response to *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* took on markedly different tones when performed together, as at the Almeida Festival, and apart, as each play has its own production history separate from the other.<sup>28</sup> Putting aesthetic differences between the plays aside for the moment, I contend that the audience commentary reveals a strong shift between response to portrayals of innocent children in contrast to criminal adults – and that these responses vacillate along a scale of threat. For *Dream Pill*, as discussed in Chapter Three, feeling silenced, 'moved' or 'captivated' were common responses. In stark contrast, the responses to Birch's *Little on the inside* take on the tenor of an assault. Guts and body parts feature prominently: 'bruising – a bloom wrapped in barbed wire' (Love 2013); 'hard work to stomach' (Bowie-Sell 2014); 'an impactful punch' (Pritchard 2013); 'wallop' (Cox 2014); 'hiss[ing]' or 'sear[ing]' acid (Pringle 2013, Love 2013); 'a

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<sup>28</sup> *Dream Pill* production history, dir. Tessa Walker: Soho Theatre (2010); Metropolitan Police's Human Trafficking Conference (2010); annual London Safeguarding Children Board conference (2011); Edinburgh Festival Fringe (2011); White Ribbon Campaign Scotland tour (2012); Latitude and Greenbelt Festivals (2012); Almeida Festival (2013); National Underground Freedom Center (US, 2015, dir. Eric Vosmeier). *Little on the inside* production history, all dir. Lucy Morrison: Almeida and Latitude Festivals (2013); Edinburgh Festival Fringe (2014).

blow-torch blasted directly into your face’ (Gillinson 2013); ‘illusions shatter and blood is spilt as actor and audience are left in tears’ (Slater 2014).

So why did audience reaction to Birch’s *Little on the inside* take on the tenor of an assault? The strangely coherent tone of these responses seems to demonstrate that, as Brian Massumi suggests, ‘the affective reality of threat is contagious’ (2015: 195). In the preceding chapter, I relate this reciprocal affinity between compassion and threat to a process of *tearjerking*. Here the contagion of threat becomes articulated between the productions *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* as performers and audiences move from one imagined carceral zone to another. The ‘contagious’ aspect of the audience is made explicit: the audience moves, and carries the first carceral zone into the second, activated by pathogens of the first play infecting the second through the language and performers who travel with the audience. The carceral zones are not so much manifested by staged space, as they are manifested in the bodies of the actors and audience, who perform and recognise the same textual material between two separate zones. Movement between these zones emphasises both the extreme situatedness of imprisoned experience, in which two very different staged localities of imprisonment are the domain of the same actors, and audience movement also emphasises the profound disconnect between character story and prison environments.

Accordingly the works together ask, who, or what, is enabled by movement between staged carceral narratives – what happens in the remainder, the surplus of these narratives? In *Little on the inside* the surveillance of this social contagion between the plays crystallises in splits, break-downs, and reconstitutions of language and knowing. After all, in *Little on the inside* now ‘I don’t Know why she is crying’: it is an evocation of a host narrative from *Dream Pill* which audiences will encounter

in multiple iterations again. The contagion mutates and synthesises: ‘This not-knowing draws upon a prior not-knowing, the one by which the subject is inaugurated, although that “not-knowing” is repeated and elaborated in the transference without ever becoming a literal site to which I might return’ (Butler 2005, 55). When, in the opening exchange of *Little on the inside*, B demands ‘Again. / Again again again / Pick one’ she situates the ‘not knowing’ as a one of many openers of stories they can act out – pick up a narrative strand, a story we can act out, she exhorts of her partner. By these stories, each of which begin with a previously ‘inaugurated’ subject of Bola and Tunde, they pick up some of the data of *Dream Pill*.

In the first few minutes of the play, *Dream Pill*’s mat becomes a raft. Lying on the mat becomes a challenge on whether B can lie. Where in *Dream Pill*, Tunde announces she wants ‘sparkly clothes’ for her tenth birthday, B talks of putting her ‘sequined dress’ on to ‘cross seas on a raft made of fish guts’. Through these and many other correspondences between the worlds of *Little on the inside* and *Dream Pill* the recurrent symbolism of the mangrove extends the exposed roots of stories within fragile ecosystems of prison and captivity. It also more brutally evokes the plight of Bola and Tunde trapped in a grove of predatory men.

Where women in prison are frequently publicly, if not privately, defined by one story – the story of their crime – Birch writes a play in which a multitude of stories deliberately ensure no overarching narrative – there is no exact ‘story’ of A and B’s presence in prison. It is a play that provides every miniscule detail of A and B’s dreams, of their stories to each other, but gives nearly zero exposition of their situation of imprisonment: these are sentences outside of the sentence. These are sentences inherited, passed on, they are for passing on as well as passing time. Stories, and writing (about criminals, about women), can take on contagious

properties with ramifications for generations, as Emily Dickinson identifies in her poem beginning ‘A Word dropped careless on a Page’: ‘Infection in the sentence breeds / We may inhale Despair / At distances of Centuries / From the Malaria – ’ (Poem 154). Dickinson’s construction articulates the contagion of language, writing and social identity as a vapour that rises from the sentence. It is already an evocation of what I would designate as a miasmatic network of air, contagion, language (and perhaps despair); *Little on the inside* builds on the heritage of this atmosphere to communicate not only an infection in the sentence, but an infection in the *legal* sentence.

Within this compound infection, *Little on the inside* writhes and contorts, bringing the legal infection to violent articulation via viral, deliberately enfleshed language of guts and heartbeats. Birch’s voices give an embedded framework from within which ethics of precipitating the several stories of another’s tongue can be deeply examined, as well as the ethics required when hearing the voice of a group of people who are, as A petitions, ‘Consistently threatened with the removal of her tongue in a very real manner, members of the jury, and so on and so forth’ (Birch 2013). The viral gift of the tongue’s story, within the constant threat of its excision, occurs within the context of the air (mal aria) of freedom and despair: in front of a backdrop image of a patch of green grass with a setting or rising sun the two women circle each other, taunt each other, chant with each other. This achieves an overall aesthetic context for B and A’s stories as *specifically* creation stories. Here, too, there is a strong connection to *Dream Pill*: where Bola’s creation story positioned her body among the hurt earth whose ‘skin’ has been ‘cut off’, in *Little on the inside* A and B’s dialogue saturates the space of performance with not just creation stories but stories as creation – mangrove trees, dolphins, rafts made of fish guts facilitate flights into

environmental spheres, which virally replicate Bola's moment as a powerful strain of agency.

### Policing algorithms in *Little on the inside*

Within a framework of trafficking, captivity and imprisonment, contagious residues of language coalesce with a practice of data mining, without which *Little on the inside* would not exist. Birch deliberately mines *Dream Pill* to create her text. Between the two plays, therefore, a vector of language contagion and data management illustrates an aspect of social contagion perpetuated by algorithmic, data-driven crime mapping and sentencing practices in contemporary carceral society. Birch isolates elements of Prichard's text into granular units, which she then grows into new identity in a prison context. This textual practice operates within a semantic of 'predictive' governance that invests significant public and private capital in converting the metaphor of organic contagion into social necropower, via a development of crime mapping software based on epidemiological modelling tools. Crime mapping in the UK draws on a mixture of risk assessment algorithms, some of which are commercially marketed on a global scale, and some of which are developed in consultation with local police forces. Facilitating what R. Joshua Scannell calls 'deep managerial time' these 'data-driven police practices ... conjure new social objects. Not exactly human, but extracted and recombined from the human, these carceral quasi-objects thrive on dilating human life chances and debilitating human bodies' (2016, 248). A and B express this not-exactly-humanness and they also embody a communal resistance through riots of movement and touch, building on and solidifying each other.

The extremity of A and B's movement – as per Birch's instruction: 'It is fast and physical. It is probably faster than you think you can get away with' (3) – builds

into multiple frenzies through the staged action of the play. These have a revolutionary quality, precipitate seepages of character that both cannot be contained, and upon whom multiple interventions are made. Together speech and movement manifest in counter-tempo to each other; A and B become extractions of each other's language and movements, in a multiply recombining set of subjectivities. In the section that follows, A and B's repeated punctuation of the flow of language with 'I'm' and 'she's' delineates the creation of A and B in real time as new social objects – and, to return to Scannell's language, these new social objects straddle a subjectivity between the 'quasi-carceral' and the human:

A        She's kicking, she's literally Running up walls  
 B        I'm  
 A        She's  
*A does a run on the spot, flaying arms and legs and shouts.*  
 B        Not really  
*A repeats - louder. . Again. I don't Look like that. . Don't stop. . Don't stop*  
           don't  
           stop don't stop - There's  
 A        There's blood on the walls - there's Her blood  
 B        My blood  
 A        All over the walls  
 B        My blood  
 A        All over Our walls and she's  
*B is big. Scary.*  
 B        DON'T DO THAT, DON'T JUST FUCKING STOP, STOP STOP  
           YOU STOP AND  
           YOU  
 A        Looooouder  
 B (*a little louder*) DON'T LEAVE ME IN THIS THIS GREY THIS QUIET  
           IT'S TOO  
           QUIET IT'S  
 A        You were Much louder  
 B        TOO QUIET IT'S / I'LL FUCKING DIE I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK  
           I'LL BREAK  
 A        / I'LL FUCKING DIE I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK  
 B        I'LL BREAK  
 A        Dip of Screw's Head as the keys j j j j j jangle  
 B        I'LL FUCKING BREAK  
 A        And then up at the letterbox Screw  
 B        SCREEEW  
 A        Screw's pink mouth and she goes



B We're gonna need to come in, alright and I'm  
 A She's  
 B I'm  
 A Fuck. Off. She goes  
 B I go  
 A I don't know why she's crying  
 B I go  
 A I ain't fucking touched her  
 B And I  
 A And She  
 B And I  
 A And she kicks and she kicks and she kicks and she Throws her body up  
 against a wall and it Slams and  
 B And the eyes again, the Screw's eyes and then mouth eyes and then  
 mouth  
 and  
 A Her head  
 B My head  
 A Her head cracks clean on the wall and there's blood there's blood  
 there's  
 blood  
 B there's blood there's blood there's blood  
 A And the Screw goes  
 B I'm gonna ask you to Step to the back of the cell okay  
 (Birch 2013)

A and B build on each other in physical movement and language, infusing the space with a wild epidemic of revolution against containment.



Figure 14. Simone James in *Little on the inside*. Photograph Katherine Leedale.

In their performance of each other, and other others of the audience's imagination (the Screw) and memory (Bola and Tunde), B and A create a hosting of radical potential: a superspreading event. Here, the action is driven by A and B's game of recounting parts of stories or events that have occurred – maybe to them, maybe to others they know, maybe to Bola and Tunde – or are yet to occur but are based on fragments of what they don't/ (un)/ know. In this way, the recounting is the material of their bodies and their actions. The recount of their language provides physical data points, as much as personal history, and these coordinates become disambiguated from original context into the present: histories of *I'm* and *she's* both imagined and lived, in recombinations that roll out and infect each other: 'And I / And she / And I /... Her head / My head / Her head ... there's blood / there's blood' (etc). The quasi-carcerality of these subjectivities pertains to not only to the insertion of the voice of the guard – 'I'm going to ask you to Step to the back of the cell okay' – but the kicking creation of A and B's identities occurs against and up walls – their movements, like running on the spot, correspond to moments when they bear down and shout together 'I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK' in unison – *I'm* and *she's* are created within the announcement of firmly policed boundaries. Spillages of blood, breaking, cracking, throwing against, and slamming walls. A and B's riots of movement, and how they are policed, correspond to Rizvana Bradley's notion of 'kinaesthetic contagion': 'Black bodies cut movement's law ... Black movement, insofar as it is understood to be embedded in a mode of sociality concerned with the irreducible and eruptive potential of black life and labor, *is contagious*' (2018, 23, 24, original emphasis). As A and B become Bola and Tunde become multiple others in Alice Birch's *Little on the inside*, they resonate as enfleshed remainders of the law, cut free in contagious movement.

What is being staged here? What has become of Tunde and Bola and what is this becoming of A and B? In the progression between makeup room and theatre foyer, the audience reckons with a likely scenario. Despite the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act, which gives victims of trafficking a statutory defence when faced with legal prosecution, women who have been trafficked into the UK continue to be wrongly imprisoned: 'Foreign women are often jailed for crimes such as cannabis production, prostitution related offences, fraud and begging – which are commonly carried out under coercion – despite being recognized as trafficking victims' (Prison Reform Trust in Guilbert 2018). Kate Roberts of the UK's Human Trafficking Foundation reports that 'Female trafficking victims are being told to stay underground, to only trust their exploiters and that if they go to the authorities, they will be seen as criminals' (in Guilbert 2018). Although *Little on the inside* does not ever give a narrative line that explicitly connects the history of A and B to Bola and Tunde, it is impossible to ignore this connection, especially as their speech is so endemically reflective of *Dream Pill*. The prosecution and jailing of victims of sex trafficking – even in breach of anti-slavery law – show the extralegal effects of social contagion. In Birch's play the enactment of this contagion crystallises in splits, breakdowns, and reconstitutions of language and knowing.

A and B exist in this transmission in a relationship of what Christina Sharpe calls 'anagrammatical blackness' (2016). The audience both does and does not know who A and B are; Sharpe's anagrammatical Blackness speaks to this as an identity condition for Black people who are assigned various combinations of identity states based on racist and racialising stereotypes. These combinations fluctuate as conditional anagrams, interpellating one and the same person into a multitude of restrictive positions. A Black woman may have been identified as a victim of sex-

trafficking, but this does not prevent her being subsequently anagrammed into a criminal. I apply Sharpe's anagrammatical Blackness to *Little on the inside* because the deconstruction and recombination of identity through language is so core to Birch's play. A and B are never only who or what they appear to be on stage: prisoners, lovers, women, Black. They are also scrambled identities – anagrams of Bola, Tunde; guards and actors. As anagrammatical Blackness occupies 'an index of violability and also potentiality,' (Sharpe 2016, 75) they are informatic data points whose interpretation is contingent upon the context and contagion of social perception. Nameless and fluid, and if not interchangeable, verging constantly on rupture, 'they are good at pretending to be other people' writes Birch in her character notes (3). Birch's investment in this radical morphing manages to keep A and B within the 'index of potentiality', frequently preventing the audience from allocating a 'personhood' to either character.

By this point, the audience have been disallowed a number of conventions both dramaturgical and carceral in nature: 1) a clear narrative trajectory between *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, though they are performed by the same actors, using many of the same lines and gestures; 2) the prison cell of A and B is open, airy and staged in front of a giant backdrop of a field; 3) very few contexts of B and A's 'reasons' for imprisonment are given; 4) they scramble, share and host identities between each other, meaning that neither is a discretely drawn character. What is the import of all these prohibitions for miasmatic performance? They all point to a theatre that essentially denies the audience our writ of habeas corpus: the right to have the body of the prisoner produced before us.

*Habeas corpus* is held up as one of the most critical, and unshakeable premises of western law. It describes the right of a prisoner to be brought before a

court, so that their detention may be assessed as either lawful or unlawful; it is the right of due process that prevents people from being detained illegally. Yet the foundational notion of the writ of habeas corpus, ‘the judge may judge of all prisoners, held by anyone, anywhere’ (Halliday 2010, 316), has held considerably more impact in the social imaginary outside of the courtroom, than in has within it. Suspensions of habeas corpus occur regularly, and this has always been a feature of the writ in action: certain people are allocated the right to personhood, and therefore a right to the writ, and others are denied this right. As legal historian Paul Halliday notes of the British colonial period and beyond:

The exigencies of colonial rule, the technologies of detention, and the instabilities of postcolonial societies have long conspired together to generate the “necessities” by which even those who have trumpeted the writ’s virtues have comforted themselves as they bound the judge and muffled the prisoner’s sighs. (2010, 316)

These living legacies of colonial rule, as Alexander Weheliye notes, persist in the law’s role in insisting on personhood (and who deserves personhood), becoming one of the most acute acts of violence of contemporary society through the ‘having’ habeas of habeas corpus. This violence is one that Weheliye subtends and challenges through his formulation of *habeas viscus*. Through *habeas viscus*, Weheliye explores ‘the breaks, crevices, movements, languages, and such found in the zones between the flesh and the law’:

The conjoining of flesh and habeas corpus in the compound *habeas viscus* brings into view an articulated assemblage of the human (viscus/flesh) borne of political violence, while at the same time not losing sight of the different ways the law pugnaciously adjudicates who is deserving of personhood and who is not (habeas). (2014, 11)

Biased sentencing in courts of law – in their allocation of ‘personhood’ – make the political promise of *habeas viscus* a vital one; it is also a vital construct for the theatre under consideration here. Rational ‘knowing’ via the surveilling mechanisms of

audience is under siege, as is the traditional dramaturgical model of compassionate middle-class liberalism, i.e. sending playwrights to the margins to gather messages for the centralised, hegemonic audience, ‘allocating a personhood’ through what narratives may be brought before the audience/judge. Where in Prichard’s *Dream Pill* this model becomes disrupted through the permeable co-construction of audience, performer and social narrative, in Birch’s *Little on the inside* the play as a form of cultural hegemony is deconstructed through character and language – leaving a contagious residue from the crevice between flesh and law.

Weheliye confronts the ‘comfort’ of lawmakers, who bind judges and muffle prisoners, through the flesh and organs of the viscus. Instead of ‘having the body’, Weheliye designates habeas viscus – *you shall have the flesh* – ‘to signal how violent political domination activates a fleshly surplus that simultaneously sustains and disfigures [legalized] brutality, and [...] to reclaim the atrocity of flesh as a pivotal arena for the politics emanating from different traditions of the oppressed’ (2014: 2). Habeas viscus encourages a ‘layered and improvisatory’ understanding of oppression and violence which resists definitions of what extreme subjection looks like, how it is expressed, received and the impacts that it delivers, on personal as well as structural levels. A and B articulate precisely this layering, as they swap stories, organs, organs-as-stories, and stories-as-organs, from within a contagious skin of resistance, violence, pain and love. Their assemblage with other fleshs and organs, and also multiple identity constructs, resists legal possession. When in *Little on the inside* every word rolls with the miasmatic remainders of a stranger’s tongue in one’s own mouth, one or many new legal vocabularies of habeas viscus become enunciated.

## Organs and fleshly language in *Little on the inside*

If habeas viscus re-imagines what the definitions and limits of the body are, as well as personhood within that body, a viscous language similarly pushes at definitions and limits. Legal language that permits violence and oppression, even ‘A Word dropped careless on a Page’, means that language is of the body, and must never transcend the body. Signifiers and signifieds and their associated structures must melt away or be perceived as melting. They become a fleshly surplus. Through habeas viscus, ‘instead of emerging as an ontological condition, flesh comes into view as a series of desubjectivations, which are always already subjectivations, that hail the slave and the spectator in order to engrave upon him or her the hypervisible yet also illegible hieroglyphics of the flesh ... bearing witness to the processes of the black body becoming-flesh, stand[ing] as stark reminders of what covertly underpins modern political formations’ (Weheliye 2014: 110). Language, flesh, and fleshly language in *Little on the inside* operate within processes of desubjectivations / subjectivations that closely correspond to a Deleuzian schematic of deterritorialisation and territorialisation of language. Tides of language – ‘I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK’ lead to flows of recitations, about their cellmates, the birds they imagine in the mangrove trees, and to courtroom scenes. Sometimes one character has to coerce the other to participate in a storytelling, as in the following section when A forces B to witness her defence to an invisible jury:

A     Both.  
         Both  
B     Both  
A (*efficient*) Both nipples were removed  
B     .  
A (*efficient*) Both nipples have been cut off  
A *goes to lift her top*  
B     Don’t  
[...]

- A (*efficient*) The trauma of waiting, anticipating Mr Mossley removing her tongue was no doubt unbearable
- B I don't
- A (*efficient*) With the proper techniques and growing environments and Stem Cells it Is possible to regrow the nipples that he has cut off the defendant's body with a blade - but we're talking skin, glandular tissue, fatty tissue, muscle connections, nerves and hair follicles
- B Back to the green
- A (*efficient*) It is essentially easier to regrow a heart. Or an ear. Or a tongue. Or a tongue. Or a tongue. Or a heart. Something that is mostly one thing. We're talking ReBuilding the nipple that he sliced from my client's breast and and dub dub dub dub I heard her heart beat. Over all my silence.
- B I hate that bit.
- A It is an important bit. (Birch 2013)

The cutting out of tongues as a theme in *Little on the inside* has its deep origins in – or, to place it back in a contagious frame, is caught from – *Dream Pill*, in which Bola declares, 'I'm loud. She's quiet' and Tunde quietly replies 'I'm loud too' (Prichard 2010, 4). A and B build a similar profile of A as quiet and B as loud but, like Bola and Tunde, in performance their volume – and their audibility – is relational to the stories they tell to the audience and each other. Though they switch tongues frequently to enact each other's stories, in *Little on the inside* it becomes a narrative possibility that A has had her tongue cut out, and her nipples removed, by a man (the abovementioned Mr Mossley) who had tortured her over some years. B, who fears the quiet, is the only person who can hear A, in their cell together. Here the *reasons* for being quiet or loud become examined through the flesh; the torture of A's flesh, and B's torture in reliving that violence alongside her, become sites of the desubjectification / subjectification matrix of habeas viscus. A isn't just 'quiet', she is quiet because her tongue was removed, which she declares both efficiently and loudly at many points across the play. These 'important bit[s]' of language and flesh activate a 'ReBuilding' of something can never be 'mostly one thing': Black / women / imprisoned.



The removal of nipples – and B’s request that A not remove her shirt – forms part of a response to de/subjectification via what Hortense Spillers refers to as *pornotroping* (2003 [1987], 206): an evocation of the Black subject drawn into an assemblage of brutalisation and sexualisation which contaminates and complicates the political through a ‘libidinal economy’ (Weheliye 2014, 97). Pornotroping in *Little on the inside* occurs in part as a response to the sexual violence depicted in *Dream Pill*. ‘Staging simultaneous sexualization and brutalization,’ pornotroping figures the Black female slave as ‘the remainder of law and violence’ (Weheliye 2014, 90). In *Little on the inside* the afterlife of the captivity and sexual slavery of Bola and Tunde drives the pornotroping infinitely forward as A and B’s bodies are fragmented, ‘red and raw like a scream’ (Birch 2013), rendered somewhere between genderless and – ‘Both nipples were removed / Both nipples have been cut off’ – the mutilated gender of the enfleshed remainder. Excisions of tongue and nipples as erotic sites of pleasure, speech and succour announce pornotroping’s ability to agitate ‘the lexicons of slavery and colonialism, ... evidenced in, among many other things, the sheer amount of visual data devoted to exploring the nexus of political violence and sexuality’ (Weheliye 2014, 90). *Dream Pill*’s explicit concerns in exposing and critiquing this nexus are also, therefore, present in *Little on the inside*.

### The queer longing of B and A

Weheliye sees a queer potential in the pornotrope, in that it can reveal and interrupt a dual enforcement of blackness and gender normativity. *Little on the inside* takes up this queer potential through multiple interruptions of violence, imprisonment of all kinds (including restrictions created through gender and racial profiling) and it does this also through a lesbian love story, which motivates both characters as they search

to arrive at each other's lips. But the queerness I find at work in *Little on the inside*, while contingent to pornotroping, exceeds disciplinary frameworks of violence and normativity. This is not to ignore the importance of queer pain, through which, as Elizabeth Freeman explains,

queer becoming-collective-across-time and even the concept of futurity itself are predicated upon injury – separations, injuries, spatial displacements, preclusions, and other negative and negating forms of bodily experience – or traumas that precede and determine bodiliness itself, that make matter into bodies. (2010, 11)

The queer passion-pain between A and B is borne in part through reparations of spatial, cultural and temporal rifts that have created these injuries. Queer *longing* here is critical to A and B's relationship in prison; that A and B are constantly extending, and longing to arrive at the lip, catches at the throat of what Freeman describes as longing's historiographic elements: 'longing produces modes of both belonging and "being long," or persisting over time' (2010, 13). For women in prison, the referents of life before, and possibilities of life in the future exist through story – through recounting the past and dreaming the future. The present, its desire, love, its fears and futures, exist in a compromised relationship to time: how much time does each woman have? When A and B find each other,

we Get each other. And I get to come here. This patch of green. That is in her head. Where white-eyes sing up in the red mangrove trees. And the sea is in the distance. And sometimes there's an old couple sharing sandwiches in a rose garden. It's like she's kept it in her fists. All these rages and laughs and whispers for ears that haven't been enough. So when she puts these hot little clenches up by my ears and Opens I get them all. And we sit here. (Birch 2013)

When B tells A she is getting out, they are both devastated. It becomes another 'reason' for *I don't know why she's crying*: 'B: Got release / A: And my whole body goes into shock and I go That's Not Possible' (36). More illustrative of this rupture as actually a continuum of longing (rather than a plot point) is the language of the play

throughout; the whole play is peppered with going – A and B never rest physically, and so are constantly in a state of going movement, but also in the way Birch uses ‘going’ for ‘saying’ through the play.

This going, longing, temporality between A and B, as we have seen, flows on floods of organs. This too, shapes the queerness between them; as Freeman notes, queer temporalities invest in, even privilege, body parts over the fantasy of wholeness of the body (2010). The temporal body part of A and B’s joining-up in prison illustrates this, as do the guts and organs, lips and nipples that proliferate throughout Birch’s text. Miasmatically, there are the body parts of *Dream Pill* drifting through this text. A and B’s language, while openly connected to a linguistic and thematic genesis in *Dream Pill*, yet exhibits an ambivalence to making a referential object of *Dream Pill*; this produces language in *Little on the inside* redolent of Freeman’s erotic historiography through ‘a productive *disbelief* in the referential object, a disbelief strong enough to produce some kind of pseudo-encounter with it that isn’t worried about the pseudo’ (2010, 14, original emphasis). In A and B’s cell, ruptured and enraptured sentences articulate the ruptures that fulfilling the sentence portend, alongside the raptures that the sentence delivers right now. In this way, the exposed and contagious ligatures of Birch’s writing connect the fleshly surplus of habeas viscus to the erotics of a hybrid present filled with remade pasts, collective futures.

### Body without organs, or prolifically organed body?

In this hybrid present of *Little on the inside* you shall not have the body, you shall have the flesh. Body parts accrete, guts proliferate, stacking up as ramparts to the space of performance. Within this walled-off zone of hyper-crystalline language, it is not the body that is under attack, it is the organism of prison and social control. The

Artaudian-Deleuzian concept of the body without organs (BwO) articulates the relentless impulse to inscribe the body with, and as, social organisms. A body without organs, for Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, resists these inscriptions through a non-stratified form, a zone whose “smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface” does not react to an external socio-political universe’ (Castronovo 2001, 137). This body without organs enacts an organism impervious to individuation and social stratification. Instead of a desubjectified zone, it presents as pre-subjectified, and perhaps, subjectification-immune. The body without organs presents a repository of potential connections, affects, movements; it is the space of deterritorialisation that both fights against the stratifications of the outside and confirms the idea that there is not only an outside, but that it is endowed with extraordinary powers (Culp 2016, 58).

In these anticipatory potentials of the concept, the body without organs presents a uniquely powerful framework for a play like *Little on the inside*, in which concepts of inside and outside, arrived at via disciplinary measures of the state, are both reified and under attack through epidemics of language and movement. The very concept of the body without organs is also almost pathogenically suited to theatre and performance, as Ed Scheer traces in his work on the original inception of Artaud’s body without organs (later analysed and further articulated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*):

Organs render the body as slave [to biological function] rather than master. Artaud’s image of the body without organs therefore contests not only the ways that bodies are structured, but the ways in which they perform, biologically and socially. This is why the theatre was the key site for Artaud’s vision: it permits the imaginative reconfiguration of these bodily forms, compartments and behaviours and allows the body to act in ways that are profoundly anti-social. (Scheer 2009, 42).

*Little on the inside* manifests a relationship to organs in which A’s and B’s guts and gut-language announces a part-whole relationship of prisoners in prison; articulates

the antecedents of *Dream Pill* and the relationship of slavery to prison; and takes guts on a giant fluid journey that ‘masters’ the conditions of their imprisonment to create freedom dreams, sexual passions, audible identities. In these ways, A and B are ‘profoundly anti-social’ because they refuse to even acknowledge prison as a whole of prison. As the performers are ravaged by, and succumb to, plagues of language, a resistance and resilience continually deterritorialises the social concept of prison, propelled through pure movement of their bodies around the prison cell-stage.

Essentially, contagiously, every word is a performative in Birch’s play, amounting to what Laura Cull discusses in *Theatres of Immanence* as a performance of Deleuzian becomings, creating the presence of ‘difference to difference... without the need to pass through processes of imitation or representation’ (2013, 69). Deleuzian becomings are particularly relevant to *Little on the inside* as the text enacts A and B as minoritarian consciousnesses, per Deleuze’s definition of the minoritarian as ‘oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions’ (2007, 45). Becomings become possible on such fringes: on the prison wall, for example. One refrain in particular announces a becoming: ‘I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK’ mutates through becoming broken and effecting a breakage, a breaking-free, an outbreak and a heartbreak.<sup>29</sup> A and B labour under the physical effort of moving and breaking speech through Birch’s text, passing through materialities of stories past and present, returning again and again to chants and repetitions. These cut them loose from eddies of language when they become too threatening or traumatic.

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<sup>29</sup> Becoming the break is critically relevant to Fred Moten’s powerful work on the Black radical tradition, *In the Break* (2003), in which he investigates ‘the power to speak and to break speech’ (17) through men and women who survived slavery to become ‘commodities who spoke ... and who continue to pass on this material heritage [of labouring as commodity] across the divide that separates slavery and “freedom”’ (6).

I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK I'LL BREAK enacts a performance of becoming as the phrase is put through 'all the variables that could affect it in the shortest amount of time' (Cull 2013: 78) in a destratified, disordered voice traded between the two bodies. From organ to organ, the becomings of *Little on the inside* – becoming-break, becoming-mangrove, becoming-organ, becoming-Bola-and-Tunde, becoming-screw – are contagions themselves; never derived from what Deleuze terms 'filiations', becomings exist as contagious transmissions of multiple potentialities, rather than instances of hierarchical inheritance.

Perhaps paradoxically, then, Birch's play manifests both a body without organs and a prolifically organed body. Can both be radical? – which body model is more subversive, more anti-social? Which is more miasmatic? It is important to return to the observation the key issue at stake in miasmatic performance is how the body becomes interpreted as social organism designated for intervention by the prison system. As Andrew Culp argues in *Dark Deleuze* (2016), within the endeavour to socially interpret the body, the tendency in cultural theory is to identify the body through aberrations, problems, frustrations of society, rather than through the promise of the body without organs as inter-connected system. Given this predilection, he enjoins: 'the point is not to construct a body without organs (organization, organism, ... ) but organs without a body. We only get outside the productivist logic of accumulation when "at last the disappearance of the visible body is achieved" [Deleuze Cinema 2 190]' (Culp 2016, 61). Yet from within a miasmatic performance register of contagion and habeas viscus, 'the' discrete body does not exist in *Little on the inside* (visible though it may be). How do theatre audiences reconcile this problem of visible on stage, yet resistively invisible to the surveilling eye? Is it what leads, in the end, to audiences who react with responses to the play like 'a blow-torch blasted

directly in your face’? This subversion of the visible body circulates us back to the framework of predictive policing, a practice that interpellates Black bodies as hyper-visible social pathogens.

## Outbreak

The overarching question of this analysis of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* has been around how the two pieces, performed in tandem, precipitate an aesthetics of social contagion and, as a result, how they confront a potential policing algorithm carried by the audience. Emotional vacillations between threat and compassion, I have suggested, are closely related to how audiences articulate a policing atmosphere. Within the policing atmosphere of these plays is a consideration of both biometric and policing technologies, and a cultural logic of whiteness on which these technologies are predicated. Whiteness offers the measurement protocols for what is identifiable, and what or who is not identifiable – or who is allocated an identity as ‘dark matter’, as Simone Browne terms it (2015). In her work on the racializing surveillance of blackness, Browne develops a resistant framework that she terms ‘dark sousveillance’: ‘a form of critique that centres Black epistemologies of contending with surveillance’ (2015, 164). Engaging surveillance studies with the archives of transatlantic slavery and contemporary practices of imprisonment and policing, Browne situates the resistances of dark sousveillance through practices like talking back, eye rolling, and ‘disruptive’ staring. I want to suggest here that in *Little on the inside* fleshly speech can also form part of the practice of dark sousveillance, in that it signifies both ‘talking back’ and ‘breaking down’ the semantics of the sentence – jail sentence and grammatical sentence (I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK I’LL BREAK).

Dark sousveillance in *Little on the inside* occurs as a retaliation to surveillance in the audience, to affiliations imagined between the innocent-carceral of *Dream Pill* and the guilty-carceral of *Little on the inside*. The reiterative explosion of organs in the foyer of the Almeida Theatre breaks down the ability of the audience to codify contagious linguistic and narrative residues into criminalised personhood. Could a performance of flows of fleshly speech, queer resilience, and institutional critique become enveloped into a giant, socially contagious organ pulsing in the Almeida foyer? Is this a miasmatic outbreak?

In its response to social contagion, *Little on the inside* comes into proximity with both discursive and phenomenological spaces of outbreak. In her work on outbreak narrative, Priscilla Wald writes of the stratified social body: ‘Constituting a threat to [social] borders, the [contagion] carrier, one of “the individual parts,” comes dangerously close to being equated with the dissociable diseased organ’ (2008: 77). Following this same vein, Birch’s play manifests a body of prolifically dissociable organs. ‘Over the other side of that wall. Just behind that patch of grass by your foot, the bit that’s all burnt and covered in hair and thick dark moss and shoelaces’ (Birch 2013) – A and B place all their organs on this prison boundary-wall. In one potential reading, chins, lips, hearts, faces, guts are all proffered as tokens of conciliation, of rejoining the social body: ‘I’d cross seas on a raft made of fish guts and the bones from little faces and I’d fight Every Single Thing that I found, just to get to your lip’ (Birch 2013).

B and A host and emanate from each other like a couple of superspreaders. They repeat each other’s lines, creating a physical manifestation of the line that jumps from host to host, breaking its original grammatical structure, reconfiguring, mutating into a new organism. In contrast to the immigrant strangers Bola and Tunde, the



healthy carrier of the (potentially) criminal woman from within the native culture, engenders a particular fear. She embodies a behavioural contagion, perhaps even defiantly nurtures its spread through wilful negligence of her moral roles as a woman. This contagion is borne of endogenous effects, internally grown and metastasised propensities, and can effect a population, more importantly a nation – before it is recognised (Rimke and Hunt 2002). The vector of women, poverty and crime is not only frequently configured metaphorically as virus leading to social contagion; epidemics and pandemics themselves have given rise to legislation that targets and punishes women as carriers and progenitors of plague (Byrne 2012).

Organs play a critical role in perpetuating social contagion. Contagions of character, especially criminal aptitudes, are eminently transferrable via organ, as centuries of western popular lore has it; they are the fetishised grammar of the body. It may be the twenty-first century but even a surgeon admits, ‘I wouldn’t like to have a murderer’s heart put into my body [...] I might find myself starting to change’ (in Lock 2002, 320). In a 2007 article, Ian Hacking asks: ‘Does anyone ask criminals about to be executed in the United States whether they would care to have their organs recycled? ... [Bills proposing measures to allow for this consistently] fail to pass’ (84). Later, Hacking discusses the ‘strange family relations’ created by organ transplants: ‘[Recipient] Mr B also feels that he bears some of the soul of young C, not just his energy but also some of C’s quirks and fascinations’ (2007, 94). *Little on the inside* explores just this contagion of character, the parasite that haunts the host, or engenders the host to new/old consciousness. A dark sousveillance at work here might therefore be about packing the organs high like a fortress, to force a recognition of racialising atmospheres of social contagion. These notions are literal evocations of

miasmatic performance, in which atmosphere, contamination, contagion and bias intersect as carceral paradigms.

There is no resolution to A and B; they rise and die off in many ways, multiple times through the performance. If the body can be reduced to its constituent parts, the pathogen of the disease can be identified and eradicated. The parasite can be hunted, and the body cleansed. This is what the prison system proposes to effect, removing pathogen-selves out of circulation. Today, despite prodigious research – empirical, theoretical, and artistic as in Clean Break’s theatre – to debunk notions of women and crime as contagious identity states, the principles of social contagion still hold prodigious imaginative power. In the UK, twenty-two per cent of all women in prison had no previous convictions or cautions (Prison Reform Trust 2017, 36). Bola, Tunde, A and B are voices, bodies, histories, which in contagious dialogue give a storyline of many women trapped and criminalised as a result of social oppression. As these plays demonstrate, Clean Break’s prison theatre is about everything in the world, including prison. They manifest storylines that sustain, and grow, run rampant and lush in carceral environments.

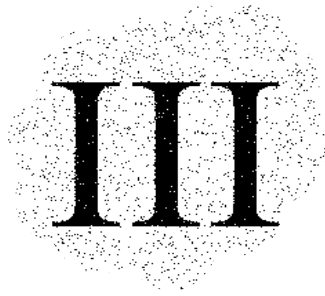
A continued legitimisation of state- and culturally-sanctioned police brutality, stigma within legal systems and predictive policing depends upon the contagion metaphor. The weaponisation of social contagion instructs the social field to aggressively contain, and ‘prevent’, epidemic overflows of criminality and violence. As I have investigated here, one way of becoming aware of personal investment in social contagion, and correspondingly its greater or lesser investment in us, is through the miasmatic permeability of the theatre. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, in their precipitation of affective response to carceral zones across multiple sites of performance, make the complicity with policing more powerful. They also engender

resistance. Within their contagious assemblage, these plays mobilise a poetics of resistance in response to criminalising bias as it threatens to saturate social life in carceral states.

In Section Three, 'Miasmatic Investigations', I turn to the implications of miasmatic performance for a type of criminal casework at the theatre. The productions *Charged* (2010) and *Joanne* (2015) draw the concepts of social contagion explored in this section into conversation with the aesthetics of miasmatic performance established in Section One, through investigatory formats at the theatre. *Charged* and *Joanne* each take on problems of causality in the criminal justice system both as social critique, and as dramaturgical problems. These productions articulate miasmatic performance in a condensed way; they are as fundamental to miasmatic performance as the four pieces I have discussed to this point, but they come in the final section of this thesis because they strike at the core of case logic, the catalytic heart of the carceral imaginary. To understand how these productions manipulate causality, and its implications for audience experience, miasmatic principles of carceral society as articulated through waste, secretion, policing, and contagion are necessary.

Here miasmatic performance once again puts audiences in conversation with their carceral subjectivity, as detectives in *Charged*, and as coroners in *Joanne*. *Charged* by EV Crowe, Sam Holcroft, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, Chloë Moss, Winsome Pinnock and Rebecca Prichard (Soho Theatre, 2010) is the focus of Chapter Five. I discuss the positioning of the audience as investigators participating in a collective casework: *Charged* presented six short plays, performed in three play cycles over two nights. Audiences were split up and saw the plays in different orders. As the audience moves through narratively unconnected spaces under the banner of a 'charged'

woman, the only dramaturgical connection becomes the audience's own regulatory body itself.



## Miasmatic Investigations

# 5

## Case *Charged* at Soho Theatre, 2010

In this chapter, I position *Charged* as undermining the carceral imaginary through a dramaturgical event space modeled on investigative case structure. In anticipation of the specific casework of *Charged*, and how it contributes to miasmatic performance, it is important to first establish how the chapter approaches what a ‘case’ or ‘casework’ is, given the wide parameters of the term.

Seventeenth century poet and fabulist La Fontaine begins his fable ‘The Wolf and the Lamb’ with a pithy construction of casework:

*The strong are always best at proving they’re right.  
Witness the case we’re now going to cite.*

In ‘The Wolf and the Lamb’, a hungry wolf accuses a young lamb of speaking badly of him in the previous year. When the lamb protests that it is not yet a year old and therefore can’t be the source of any bad talk, the wolf declares it must be one of the lamb’s associates, and eats the lamb anyway: ‘So trial and judgment stood.’ The ‘case’ of the wolf and the lamb, La Fontaine tells the reader, will illustrate the point he gives in his first line: that the strong are best at proving they’re right. Meanwhile, the reader is instructed to witness the infallible narration of the case, in lamb-like fashion, as each line flows from the first to produce the general through the example.

Cases are ubiquitous across modes of discourse: the cases of fabulists stand in direct relation to the medical case, the criminal case, the academic case, the social work case, the case-study as a methodology. Formally, cases work to both clarify and

diagnose an overarching problem or question at hand. They propose, as Lauren Berlant puts it, ‘a problem-event that has animated some kind of judgment. Any enigma could do – a symptom, a crime, a causal variable, a situation, a stranger, or any irritating obstacle to clarity. What matters is the idiom of the judgment’ (2007, 663). As such, cases are complex adjudicators: parts illustrating the whole, parts questioning the whole, parts disciplining the whole, parts becoming the whole. The practice of British case law, for example, expresses the role of the fractional legal case as an arbiter of common law: hundreds-of-years-old cases continue to set judicial precedence, define acts of parliament, and explain the common law. In this way, case law provides a clear illustration of not only how ‘law mirrors social and political attitudes’, but how the case itself, in form and content, shapes social and political attitudes (Clapham 2018). Cases are systems of meaning-making.

They are also popular systems of media-making, as demonstrated by a global entertainment industry awash in case-led investigative procedural formats. True crime podcasts and documentaries are currently bathed in a carceral limelight, in large part due to the fact that legal repercussions have followed a spate of recent television and podcast productions – *The Jinx*, *Making a Murderer* and *Serial* among them – allowing public investment in the ‘real-world’ stakes of the case to become entwined with narrative dramaturgies of the offender.<sup>30</sup> These formats now explicitly create a tension in the reporting around whether citizen journalism will expose new angles in the case, and cause legal or criminal justice authorities to revisit it. In form these productions bring the causal boundary between narrative production and legal prosecution into an increasingly visible fray. This demonstrates how both as a

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<sup>30</sup> *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* (2015 HBO) led to the arrest of Robert Durst on first degree murder charges the day before the finale aired. *Making a Murderer* (2015-16 Netflix) led to an overturned conviction of murder on grounds of police coercion. Season 1 of *Serial* (2014 This American Life) led a judge to grant a post-conviction relief motion calling for a new trial of Adnan Syed on grounds that his legal team failed to adequately question submitted evidence.

narrative format and as an idiom of judgment invested in shaping society, the case in criminal justice contexts plays a fundamental role in maintaining a collective ‘carceral imaginary’, in which cultural assumptions about criminality accrete and reify the institution of prison and practice of imprisonment.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I situated the ‘carceral imaginary’ as a centrally animating factor for miasmatic performance, outlining some of the ways in which the mass mediatisation of carceral narratives instructs a collective investment in carcerality as an organizing principle of society. Through media representations of imprisonment and police control, a shared carceral imaginary becomes anchored via three main elements: predictability of carceral narrative (Wacquant 2009), movement through carceral topoi as narrative sites (Griffiths 2016), and entry into a collective penal subjectivity (Brown 2009).

The majority of case-led narratives come at audiences through heavily mediated channels, offering minimal opportunity for live response. By contrast, theatre, as a cultural product predicated on physical proximity and collectivity, proposes a form with unique capacity to agitate audience awareness of how the constructs of casework motivate carceral society through a shared carceral imaginary. In this chapter, I investigate Clean Break’s *Charged* at Soho Theatre (2010) as operating within, and critiquing, the syntax of a criminal case by engaging audiences in collective casework at the theatre. As with *Little on the inside* in Chapter Four, the audience are denied the trappings of the criminal justice context: in the ‘case’ here, there is no crime, no suspect, no ‘body’, no witness, no evidence, and no trial being staged. What is under investigation? Further, when it suddenly becomes a live encounter, in what ways might collective casework at the theatre reveal carceral sites – and site-making processes – as immediate, material, and specific to the context of the audience?



Clean Break summons the audiences of *Charged* to collective casework through an image of a woman styled as a booking photo in the foyer at Soho Theatre. As the theatrical event proceeds, however, the nature of the criminal ‘charge’ is never specified in any detail. A charge in this theatre does not attempt to result in audience determination of conviction or release of any singular character. Instead, the charge of *Charged* works to generate a broader question of what an ambient ‘charge’ might mean within carceral society: can an ever-manifesting identity site of ‘becoming-criminal’ be completely disestablished, even if the charge never lands? Through a production comprised of multiple narratives, casts, performance spaces, and audience movement through Soho Theatre’s building, *Charged* provokes audiences to explore personal and collective responsibility in a society that routinely criminalises women through social bias.

If theatre can be understood as doing a medium-specific form of casework, how does it do it? In order to answer this question, I look to *Charged* to elaborate the specific ways in which miasmatic performance draws on the carceral imaginary to sustain a critique on how criminal identity becomes assigned in carceral society. Miasmatic performance relates to the predictable movement of a collective carceral imaginary through the ancient motivation of miasma as perception, and identification, of blood-guilt in the commons. Miasmas, catalyzed by social stigma, activate stigma’s predictable movement through a collective as a seeping, and policing, haze of carcerality. Yet miasmas also represent causal complexity: their origins are frequently unclear, and thus they generate confusion and difficulty around actually assigning a clear cause or solution for the social ‘problem’ at hand.

It is in part due to this intrinsic limit or failure of miasma, that miasmatic performance carries the potential to radically articulate, and question, the role that

social stigma plays in maintaining concepts of linear causality in the criminal justice system, as well as in the narratives of the carceral imaginary. The case of a charged woman, yet the charge is never given or resolved; a fictional case, yet made by a company who works with women offenders, real people with real stories: miasmatic obfuscations between theatre and prison, between dramaturgies of fiction and fact inform this production. I explore the potentialities of collective casework within *Charged* to facilitate what Elaine Aston calls ‘networks of resistance’, in which ‘political subjectivities [occur] across multiple sites of potential emancipatory possibility’ (2016, 8). Tracing the casework of *Charged* advances a broader development in this chapter around theatre’s capacity to destabilise linear causality in criminal justice narratives, and to critique the carceral function of audiences.

*Witness the case we’re now going to cite.*

### Setting the conditions for casework in the foyer at Soho Theatre: the *Charged* poster and structure of the production

Clean Break’s 2010 production *Charged* convened its audiences in the foyer of Soho Theatre, next to large posters of a woman apparently under investigation, the production title stamped under her chin. Framed up large at the theatre, her face seems plucked from a rogue’s gallery: a white face looks out, defiantly pursing her lips around a cigarette. The freckles on her face condense into a patina of green, loading her with the hue of oxidized copper. A bad penny. This mug shot declares: CHARGED. But with what? The nature of the charge is not given, yet audiences are nevertheless called to the theatre to adjudicate. ‘Punish me or pray for me,’ ran the marketing copy. ‘Lock me up or look away. I’m not going anywhere’ (Clean Break 2010). A poster styled up as a booking photo, accompanied by an invocation to

judgment ('Lock me up or look away'): proffering a *Charged* woman to the audience, the production formed from the outset a dynamic that challenged audiences to investigate a fictive charged identity – to punish, pray for, lock up, or look away.

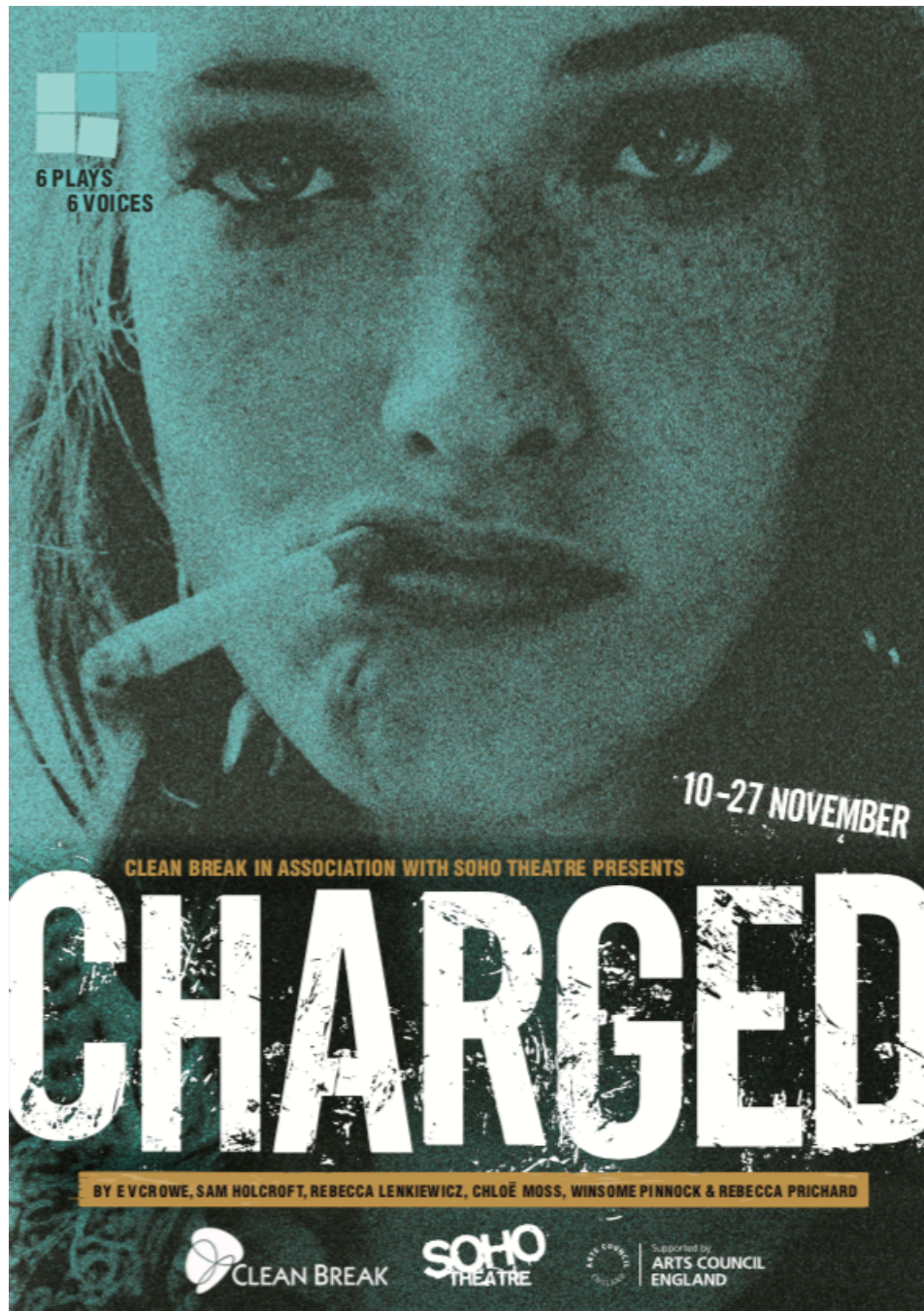


Figure 15. The *Charged* poster at Soho Theatre (2010).

In typical miasmatic fashion, however, there is something off about this stylization of the poster as booking photo. It doesn't *actually* conform to the standards

of the mugshot: where are the lines indicating height? Where is the placard indicating name, case number, and so forth? Are you allowed to smoke in a booking photo? And yet it does conform. She's charged, but she is also *not* in a police suite: she's out in the streets. Is this more of a Wanted poster: FBI Most Wanted, or Wild West outlaw? These stylistic confusions lead to temporal ones: where are we on the timeline of her charge? There is a decomposition at hand, a bleeding across the imaginaries and 'actualities' of the criminal justice system, already evident in this poster. Drawing on the semiotics of a long tradition of public appeals, what is animated here is the faculty of judgment. A booking photo that is not quite right – you don't know why but you are sure it has not been done 'right': this alone is an expression of carceral society, informed by the carceral imaginary. As such, the *Charged* poster is the first point of activation for a production concerned with provoking and challenging a collective carceral imaginary around women under criminal investigation. *Charged* set up audiences as apprehenders at the precipice of judgment.

'Charged', as a word, and as a word conferred upon an image of a woman, works as a punitive performative, in Judith Butler's sense (2011; also McKenzie 2001, 166-170). The word endows a loaded (literally charged) subjectivity, conferred with a 'binding power': 'Here it is not only a question of how discourse injures bodies, but how certain injuries establish certain bodies at the limits of available ontologies, available schemes of intelligibility' (Butler *ibid*, 170). The binding power of a criminal charge – 'I charge you' – may yet be one that can *potentially* be slipped out of: a transitional identity state, in other words, changing upon release or conviction. Superimposing a 'charge' on a poster styled as a booking photo, the *Charged* poster gathers carceral traditions around spectatorship and criminality as an explicit theatre of judgment.

Spectacles of the criminal body have a long-limbed history as forms of theatre. Indeed, Erika Fischer-Lichte begins her 2014 *Introduction to Performance and Theatre* textbook with a verbatim reprint of a 1723 invitation to the public to attend ‘the dissection of a female corpse of a child murderess’ (18). In *Charged* the crux of judgment at the theatre occurs not merely through an audience called to advance a disciplining of identity through a legal charge; this production digs deeper into the exertion of an unquestioned right to look upon the *Charged* woman, and to judge the vicissitudes and viscera she holds within her. These traditions coalesce around the face of the *Charged* woman in such a way that calls the case of Eurydice to mind: ‘The gaze by which she is apprehended,’ writes Butler of Eurydice, ‘is the gaze through which she is banished’ (2006, viii). The gaze here is a carceral gaze, banishing through perception; perception as apprehension. The *Charged* woman also gazes back at us, and the defiance in her eye again hints at something more, something to come: the charged will confront the chargers. Like Eurydice, the *Charged* woman is in a becoming state: she is not yet convicted, but becoming-criminal. Or she is, in the moment before the gaze banishes her, ‘at risk’, also a technology of becoming. Charged with preconceptions, stereotypes and social stigma she occupies this tenuous and risk-heavy identity site. The case of Eurydice articulates (perhaps even facilitates) the aptitude of the gaze to become an apparatus of carcerality as it delimits deviant or transgressive identity. It also situates ‘the’ gaze as the normative idiom of judgment – and it is precisely this carceral function of normative judgment that is under scrutiny in the production *Charged*.

The poster promises an investigation, and in this, a casework in which audiences will assess the charge. Yet a singular case, though promised, never seems to arrive. And so: What is being articulated when the Clean Break presents the case of

a charged woman, yet the charge is never given or resolved? The overall challenge of the production to witness and ultimately adjudicate on a charged identity quickly falls into disarray, as audiences encounter six short plays, narratively unconnected to each other: *Doris Day* by EV Crowe, *Dancing Bears* by Sam Holcroft, *That Almost Unnameable Lust* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz, *Fatal Light* by Chloë Moss, *Taken* by Winsome Pinnock and *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard. *Charged* was performed in two-night cycles, over three weeks – three plays on night one ('Charged 1'), and three plays on the following, night two ('Charged 2').<sup>31</sup> The plays were performed across three spaces, each on a different floor within Soho Theatre: the basement, the middle level mainstage theatre, and the studio at the top of the building. Once assembled under the poster in the foyer of Soho Theatre, audiences were randomly split, such that half would start with a play in the basement and half in the top floor studio; the two groups then travelled up- or downstairs to the middle level to watch the second play together as one audience; finally, for the third play, audiences split back into their groups again and continued either down to the basement, or up to the studio. On any given night, the studio and basement plays were performed twice, once for each half of the split audience; the middle level play was performed only once for the whole audience together.

Plays performed in the basement and studio spaces dramatised 'at risk' or criminal justice-adjacent thematics – addiction (*Taken*), sex trafficking (*Dream Pill*), girl gangs (*Dancing Bears*), and gender discrimination (*Doris Day*). Prison is not the setting of these plays, and in most of them, prison is not mentioned. Only on the middle level, proscenium mainstage did audiences encounter settings and narratives that worked explicitly with prison or police custody: deaths in custody (*Fatal Light*)

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<sup>31</sup> Some audience members bought tickets to see both nights; others attended only one night of performances.

and aging in prison (*That Almost Unnameable Lust*). Physically moving from risk narrative (studio or basement), to custody narrative (mainstage), and back into risk narrative (basement or studio), audiences investigate some of the categories of social risk routinely linked to the criminal justice system. The production chafes at the dramaturgical link between, for example, gangs and prison, addiction and prison, sex trafficking and prison, as sites where an inevitable criminal charge has yet to land. Prison both follows and predicts these risk spaces, figuring the criminal justice system as on an ouroborotic continuum of disciplines, aftermaths, reentries.

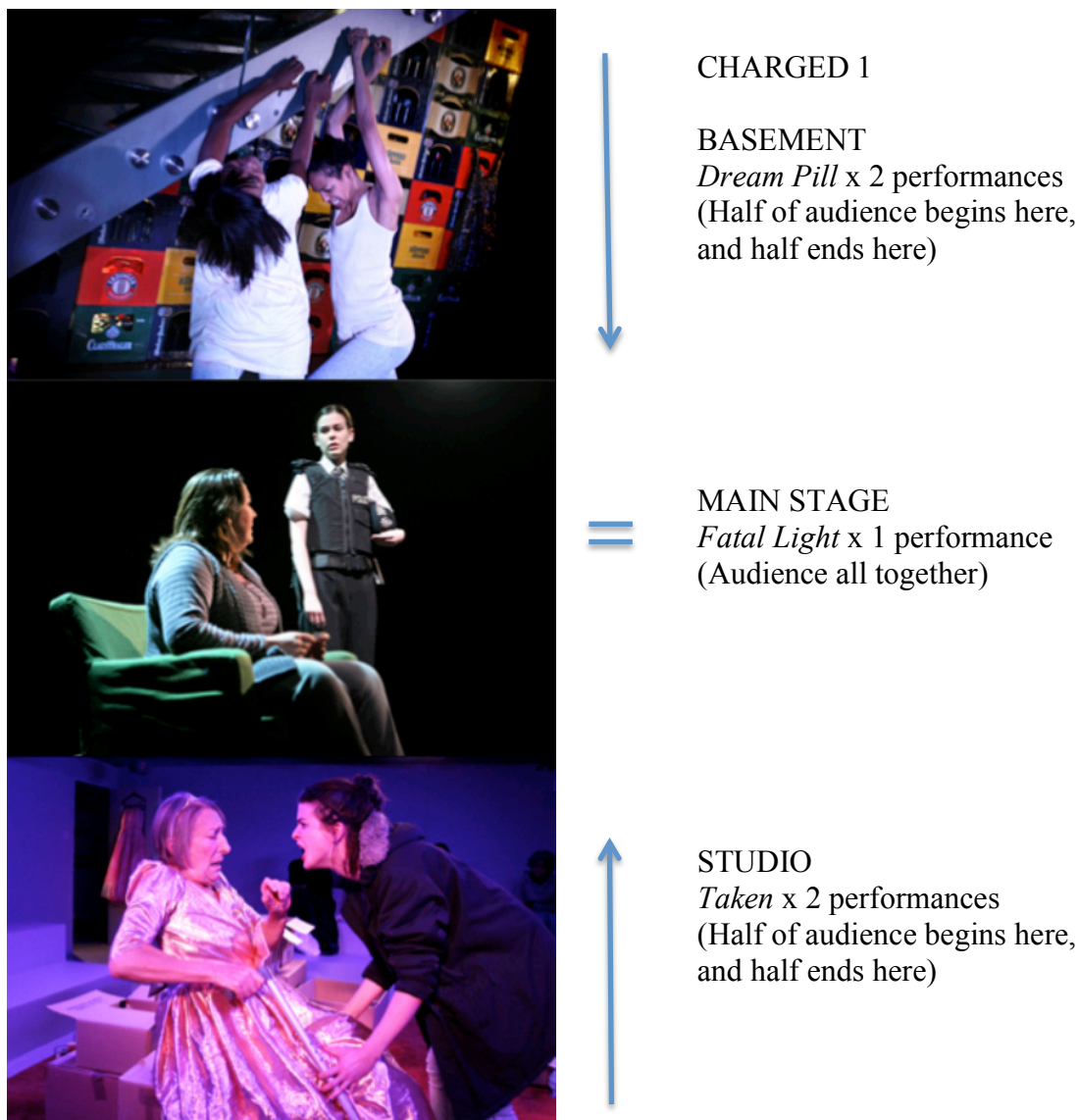


Figure 16. From top to bottom, *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard; *Fatal Light* by Chloë Moss; *Taken* by Winsome Pinnock. Photographs Sheila Burnett; composite by author



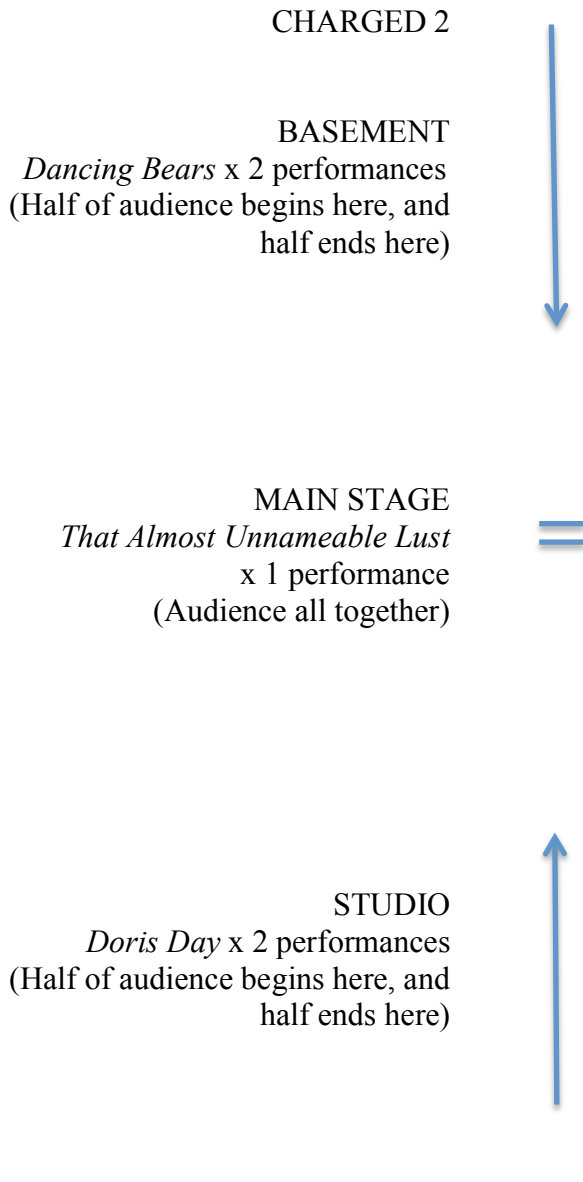


Figure 17. From bottom to top, *Doris Day* by EV Crowe; *That Almost Unnameable Lust* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz; *Dancing Bears* by Sam Holcroft. Photographs Sheila Burnett; composite by author

In creating a piece of theatre that revolves around an *ambient* criminal charge – a charge never clarified, but physically carried by each audience member from each performance space to the next – Clean Break generates a multi-causal dramaturgical model, in which criminalisation becomes motivated by stigmatic idioms of judgment. *Charged* configures and draws on multiple identity positions, descending and ascending through topoi of the carceral imaginary, emotional events, contexts of risk,



and, not least, the many ages and ethnicities of performers and audience members alike. The production is *charged*, as in loaded or supercharged, with bodies, stories, and knowledges. It is also charged with stigmas of various kinds, creating an excess of pre-, post- and para-criminal identities through dramaturgical surplus that engages the audience in miasmatic overflow.

In part this multiply-valenced load on the production occurs through sheer numbers of creative team, consultants and crew. Six playwrights engaged with the company via residencies onsite at Clean Break's studios and in prisons, and via consultations with staff at drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, probation and with police.<sup>32</sup> As a performance event, *Charged* extended into ambitious terrains, on a scale never before attempted by the company: in her foreword to the playtext, Executive Director Lucy Perman MBE writes of the production as 'an epic moment for Clean Break' (2010, iv). Three directors – Tessa Walker, Caroline Steinbeis, and Lucy Morrison – helmed a creative and production team of thirty women theatre practitioners, including three companies of actors, whose ages spanned eight decades on stage. They in turn were supported by producers, staff, consultants and board based year-round at the company's London studios. *Charged* was a multiply-stranded event on three levels, therefore: multiple physical passages through the plays; multiple dramaturgical passages through an overarching narrative of the *Charged* woman; and a heterogeneity in artistic vision and execution, with several companies of playwrights, directors, designers and performers working across six plays.

By offering such a large number of variables to the audience, the case of *Charged* isolates social preconceptions about women and criminality – the carceral imaginary – as one of the only constants of the production. Where in *Charged* each

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<sup>32</sup> Among these were staff at INQUEST, a charity monitoring deaths in UK custody; HMP Peterborough; Metropolitan Police; Hope House, a drugs and alcohol treatment centre; and social policy think-tank Race on the Agenda.

physical and narrative space operates along a referential axis to the word ‘charged’ (sex-trafficked girls - charged; families dealing with addiction - charged; girl gangs - charged), the plays also use their multi-causal charge (as excess) to activate each other along resistive networks *against* the charge (as legal event).

Fostering these dramaturgical connections is at the core of Clean Break’s artistic vision.<sup>33</sup> The casework of *Charged* relies on setting up the social norms that drive conditions of hyper-incarceration: it is not the deviation from the norm, but the norm itself that will become investigated. Correspondingly, *Charged* is structured to produce scenarios of criminalisation in direct relationship to categories of social normativity. The *Charged* poster works from the outset as a lure to establish the audience as arbiters of social norms, ‘infallible narrators’ of criminality; this is a technique with long traditions in Europe, as Todd Herzog writes, beginning with the eighteenth century practice of widely disseminating criminal dossiers:

the criminal is presented as a curiosity, an aberration from the norm that makes him [sic] an interesting case. The powers that judge the criminal are thrust into the background as the individual criminal takes center stage to be documented, classified, and distinguished – by an invisible, purportedly infallible, and generally anonymous narrator. (Herzog 2009, 37)

This staging of the criminal by an infallible narrator sets up a concept of the case as mode by which to document one (or many) deviance(s) from the norm, as Foucault theorises in *The Birth of the Prison* (1995, 184ff); for other theorists, however, the shifting nature of the case provides not only documentation and assessment of deviance, but consistently re-establishes and re-frames the conventions of the norm itself (Jolles in Chandler 1998, Herzog 2009, Berlant 2007). It is in this sense that Diana Taylor affiliates case study methodologies to the normalisation of torture:

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<sup>33</sup> See Introduction. Clean Break’s mission statement: ‘The treatment of women by the criminal justice system is one of the clearest demonstrations that our society is still unequal and that women are judged by different standards to men. ... we believe that theatre enables women to challenge their oppression by society in general and by the criminal justice system in particular.’ (Clean Break 2019)

‘Particular case studies seem to transparently illustrate patterns and produce generalizable theories. They generate evidence that is objective and replicable – any investigator should be able to reproduce the findings’ (2007, 715). In *Charged*, basement and studio dramatisations of risk become scenarios of criminalisation; with no connecting narrative ligature between the scenarios, a core underlying operation of the casework within *Charged* is to reactivate the ‘known’ through bias and prejudice. Any investigator should be able to reproduce the findings – under the sheen of new risk variables, the case of *Charged* always progresses through the middle level imprisonment narrative, reaffirming social attitudes and fears.

In most investigative crime dramas, the narrative arc concentrates on the detective’s efforts to identify the criminal by applying the techniques of the case, serially; the objective in such formats, writes literary scholar Franco Moretti, ‘is to *return to the beginning*. [...] For the stereotypes to live, the individual must die, and then die a second time in the guise of the criminal’ (1990, 241, original emphasis). Though the character of the detective may develop, the narrative rarely returns to the criminal (or victim); they are socially dead in prison, or they are physically dead; in the next case, the detective begins anew. Drawing on Moretti’s theories, literary scholar Colleen Boggs points to the fact that the

liberal subject is under several forms of erasure in detective fiction, which pits “the individual (in the guise of the criminal)” against “the social organism (in the guise of the detective)” and thereby creates a tension between a society “conceived of as a ‘contract’ between independent entities” and one imagined “as an organism or social body.” ... Detective fiction produces a set of social deaths; it does not merely stage the mechanisms of biopower but is deeply complicit with them. (2013, 111)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Here Boggs points to two mechanisms of biopower, as discussed by Foucault in *History of Sexuality I* (1976) and further elaborated in his lectures at the Collège de France (*Society Must be Defended; Security, Territory, Population; The Birth of Biopolitics*). Figurations of the state as a social body (‘organism’), and the concept of the ‘social contract’, are each central to mechanisms of governance via networks of regulation and reform, deployed throughout society as biopower. Biopower privileges the maintenance and advancement of certain lives over others, drawing primarily on one race to determine the norm, in order to ‘preserve’ a purified organism of society.

The ‘return to the beginning’ of detective fiction is evocative of the ouroboros of the criminal justice system itself, and the ways it too destroys the subject: the ‘cycle of reoffending’ is maintained as ex-offenders struggle post-release, having lost homes, custody of children, personal relationships, and employment. Erasures of the subject, as Boggs identifies them, occur by extension throughout the social field proposed by fictions of the carceral imaginary. Where, in detective fiction, the criminal suggests the individual failure to uphold a social contract, the detective performs as a regulatory state (and not an individual subject). In *Charged*, a similar tension exists: the criminal does not exist as one individual – audiences are convened under an image of a woman and the title ‘Charged’ but these identities are never clarified or resolved, undergoing instead a prolonged erasure throughout the production.

To embed this concept further within a legal / criminal justice frame, if the *Charged* woman makes the ‘criminal’ a disappearing object, the production enacts an intentionally failed writ of *habeas corpus*. Under the banner of the *Charged* woman, the production becomes a request for the physical presencing of a prisoner, who never arrives. In a contemporary global climate, in which suspensions of habeas corpus routinely occur, this carries a powerful symbolic message around the elusiveness of the jailer. The disappearing object of the criminal suddenly, urgently, becomes a disappeared subject whose rights have been abrogated. This aspect, which I discuss at length in Chapter Four through *Little on the inside*, occurs again through miasmatic performance in *Charged*: the *Charged* woman will never be presented, yet ‘she’ is constantly in transit to an evocation at the theatre. A remand never arriving. Within Phelan’s conceptual framework for performance as resisting reproduction through disappearance, ‘[t]he disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be

remembered' (Phelan 1993, 147). The disappearing object, in Phelan's context the performance itself, occupies the heart of *Charged*'s poetics, where the dissolution of the object-nature of the topical, and the object of the criminal body, is crucially at stake. This creates the conditions for the production to participate in a kind of memory-act of dissent: not only 'longing always to be remembered', as Phelan writes, but longing for the *Charged* subject to be differently remembered, and recovered from the oubliette of imprisonment.

Integral to the ways *Charged* arrived at creating these conditions, is the surprise of its form: *Charged*, as a piece of theatre, manipulated and overturned expectations of what theatre about women in the criminal justice system could do, and how it would do it. *Charged* occasioned surprise amongst critics who had clear expectations of what a play about women in the criminal justice system might be like. In a preview press interview, *Guardian* critic Lyn Gardner faithfully reports her own suggestion that the plays 'don't sound like the most cheerful of nights out,' to which *Charged* playwright Rebecca Prichard responds, 'I'm confident we will surprise you' (Gardner 2010). This 'surprise' was in fact experienced by several reviewers, who highlighted the disparity between anticipations of 'an orgy of narrowly issue-driven drama and tub-thumping political correctness' and the 'unexpected directions' that *Charged* took audiences (Taylor 2010). In their reviews of *Charged*, Hazel Tsoi and Carole Woddis both note a lack of resolution-oriented dramaturgy. For Woddis, 'Offering no solution [...] *Charged* confronts us with complex realities of crime, the criminal justice system and those who become entangled in its web either as victims, perpetrators or custodians' (2010). Tsoi echoes: 'the incredible power of *Charged* is the absence of solutions to the situations investigated [...] you are free to feel scared, angry, dismayed, uplifted, uncomfortable or happy as you wish' (2010). If this small

selection of notices is any indication, then it makes clear that an aspect of the carceral imaginary (at an intersection with theatre) is punitive to audiences: when provoked to imagine an exposure to carceral spaces at the theatre, audience members expect that they too, will be implicated in a disciplinary way.

These are normative case-led expectations, in the sense that these reviewers appear to bring their experience with, and imagination of, theatre for social justice ('tub thumping') to bear on their experience with mass mediated narratives of carcerality, a kind of doubly-punitive scenario. They were surprised because, to use Tsoi's terms, 'the situations investigated' did not force them to feel or think any particular way. For these reviewers, and for me, *Charged* proposed instead what Berlant calls 'an altered way of feeling things out' (2007, 666): a potential within casework to undo or mitigate the teleological bent to reaffirm the known, which normally accompanies the space of the case.

### Beginning and ending in risk environments: the basement and studio plays

In keeping with their fundamental role in assessing risk (to the social norm, as well as more broadly), cases can become risky events. 'Cases' in the criminal justice system – in an expanded sense of legal cases, police cases, and the casework of probation and social services – significantly magnify the actuarial aspect of the case, as risk-led idioms further assess people already defined as 'at risk' in society. In the theatre of *Charged*, these propensities of the case become heightened; they also become in some

ways overturned, offering ways to productively ‘fall out of line’<sup>35</sup> with the normativity of case-led narrative:

[The case] raises questions of precedent and futurity, of canons of contextualization, of narrative elucidation. This is what’s disciplinary about the normativity of caseness. ... Case almost closed: the marked subject is a walking exemplar, a person trailing an already-known story. Not always, though – [...] the case can incite an opening, an altered way of feeling things out, of falling out of line (Berlant 2007, 666).

*Charged* immediately set up the audience for casework predicated on an ‘altered way of feeling things out’ through the settings of the first short plays of the production. The basement and studio plays amplified at risk thematics, creating cramped and precarious environments in which distinctions between criminal and investigator, as much as performer and audience, begin to lose carceral power.

In the basement, *Dream Pill* (Prichard, ‘Charged 1’) audiences encounter Bola and Tunde, two young Nigerian girls sex-trafficked to the UK; in ‘Charged 2’, *Dancing Bears* (Holcroft), four teenagers navigate life on the streets as part of a gang. Both basement plays employed a semi-immersive performance space; while both settings were end-on, actors moved into and amongst audiences. The aesthetics of *Dancing Bears* and *Dream Pill* manifested both a vulnerability, and a volatility, resonant to chaotic environments in which children at risk live. Throughout *Dancing Bears*, four teenagers keep themselves moving, hopping from foot to foot across a stage envisaged by Holcroft as a bed of hot coals. This movement is met by constant character transfigurations between male and female, pregnant and not-pregnant, and human-animalness within the proxy family of the gang. Where in *Dancing Bears* characters explore continuums of love, fear, desire and violence through multiple subject positions, in *Dream Pill* it is the audience that becomes implicated in such

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<sup>35</sup> The English word ‘case’ derives from two Latin words, *casus* (‘fall, chance, occurrence’) and *cassus* (‘void, hollow’), ‘as though’, Berlant notes, ‘a falling out of the fabric of things produces an event that requires explanation’ (2007: 666 n11).

shifts. Bola and Tunde, as girls not yet ten years of age, speak to the audience, tell them stories, give them objects; the audience vacillate between figurations, addressed sometimes as punters, sometimes as other girls trafficked to the basement for sex work, at still other times, as rescuers. These characterisations propose a hybrid narrative of theatre and criminality via shifting, scrambling subject positions, in which kinetic engagements with young characters in risk environments underscore the nature of risk itself as a becoming, with uncertain temporalities (Van Loon 2000, 176). As such *Dream Pill* and *Dancing Bears* set a scenario in which the fallibility of criminal justice casework from a superposition of an investigative eye becomes evident.

The basement plays also manifested risk as material sites bounded by precarity. This latter aesthetic was made possible through a heterotopic dynamic in the basement, which functioned during the production as both performance space and as a working kitchen for the theatre's bar directly above.<sup>36</sup> The sounds of the theatre's bar, along with the chip fryer going off intermittently as the kitchen filled orders, suffused the plays with heterotopic tension. A partially converted space gave these plays a palpably differential, and vulnerable, status – they were not in a sense 'protected' by theatre any more; instead they circulated through an undetermined, semi-converted social space. As the audience experienced the audible encroachment of a public in the bar above and chefs in the kitchen at the back, the miasmatic porosity of the performance space echoed the social themes of the plays; it also evoked the porosity of carceral society itself, in which the narratives, techniques and technologies of the criminal justice system bleed throughout the socius, including from the basement up into the Soho Theatre bar.

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<sup>36</sup> Though the basement is now a permanent performance space for Soho Theatre, when *Charged* was produced in 2010, a restaurant occupied the theatre's lower level; Clean Break took over the dining area for the production, making it a performance space.



The small top floor studio space, by contrast, presented as exceptionally sealed. A cramped aesthetic here amplified the topics of the studio plays: addiction in the family, in *Taken* (Pinnock) for ‘Charged 1’; and gender discrimination in the police force in *Doris Day* (Crowe) for ‘Charged 2’. *Taken* pivoted off themes of generational trauma, and transmissions of post-traumatic stress between family members. The play’s recursive patterns of addiction drew the performers and audience into an ever-increasing claustrophobia of trauma, intensified by traverse staging, as each half of the audience stared down their own counterparts on the other side of the stage.

In an exploration of institutional violence and gender discrimination within the police force, *Doris Day* also benefited from the tight, sealed space. *Doris Day* expanded *Charged*’s overall investigation into ‘women in the criminal justice system’ beyond the traditional sense of women under criminal charge, to also include those women who police them. This inclusion compacted the relative airlessness of the studio, in its scrutiny of a discriminatory system that punishes the (supposed) punisher. In the studio, various stucknesses coalesced within *Charged*’s macro-trap of imprisonment themes: stuckness of addiction joined the stuckness of rank-and-file policing experienced by women officers continually passed over for promotion, joined the stuckness of family and friendship (in *Taken* and *Doris Day*, these stucknesses each have positive and negative cadences).

Cops, friends, kids, parents: both *Taken* and *Doris Day*, as well as *Dream Pill* and *Dancing Bears*, work hard to shift narrative onus off victims of the criminal justice system as ‘tragic protagonists’. In this the basement and studio plays heeds Rustom Bharucha’s warning that ‘[n]ot only can this singular focus on the tragic protagonist blind one to the suffering and social exclusion of others, it can also pre-

empt the actual possibilities of radical transformation in society at large' (2014, 46). To dismantle the casework of the carceral imaginary, it becomes critical to provoke instead a contingency of figurations, both within and beyond the 'already known' of criminal identities, which can sweep the audience into a relationality that prohibits exoticizing the criminal woman. Crucial to the transformative impact of *Charged* is this multiplicity, which, while shifting focus off any one protagonist –let alone any one tragedy – does not altogether eliminate protagonists and tragedies.

*Charged* offers a scenario in which powers to define and discipline are reversed: the 'marked subject' as the mark-bearer of social stigma suddenly marks / reveals what is normative about the space of the case, rather than being defined by it herself. To clarify how the marked subject of the *Charged* woman might operate in a carceral theatre environment, it becomes productive to engage Berlant's 'marked subject' – as quoted above, the mark-bearer of the already-known – with Peggy Phelan's *unmarked* 'configuration of subjectivity which exceeds', where within performance, '[w]ith every mark, the unmarked summons the other eye to see what the mark is blind to – what the given to be seen fails to show, what the other cannot offer ... We may begin to be able to inhabit the blank without forcing the other to fill it' (Phelan 1993, p, 27, 32, 33). In convening a collective movement through risk spaces, both marked and not yet marked, an audience marks its own movement through the carceral society, 'inhabiting' the blank of the *Charged* woman. Here there is a marking in excess of a singular subjectivity, a highly marked (as in stigmatic mark) subjectivity, in other words, that becomes excessive and loses its antecedent. In *Charge* it is the performative action of the un/marking that is relevant to, and generative of miasmatic performance. If miasma works to fill in crevices of the social space, making assumptions and diagnoses part of an ill-defined atmosphere, through

miasmatic performance the filling of the blank becomes an instructional event: it fails to show anything but its own pollution – an inhabitation of the blank ‘without forcing the other to fill it’.

Unlike the characters in the plays, who operate within conditions of social and environmental stuckness, and the performers, who do not move between performance spaces, the audience *can* move – and this very exercise of movement becomes part of the production’s meaning through exclusionary space and narrative. Yet at the same time, audiences did not choose an order of plays, or drift in and out of performance spaces at will. A curated movement through the space thus serves to intensify the effect of carceral stuckness: there is movement, but even this movement is processional, almost – to borrow a term from prison contexts – a *decanting* of audiences between performance spaces. Cases, like risk definition, are predicated on maintenance of a clear power differential (Beck 2006, 333); accordingly the audience is pressured, in some ways, to allocate certain risk states to criminal states (and vice versa). Stilted, curated movement for the audience implicates them in the overall carceral atmosphere at work in the production, as predictable risk spaces convene together through a collective passage. In these ways, audience movement within *Charged* illustrates the carceral function of audiences as they perform what Lefebvre terms social *dressage*: ‘To enter into a society, group or nationality is to accept values (that are taught), to learn a trade by following the right channels, but also to bend oneself (to be bent) to its ways’ (2004 [1992], 39). The means by which individuals and communities break themselves in, or come to be broken into representations of self, versus and among other selves and other objects, are often non-discursive performances, as *Charged* expresses through its phenomenological linkage of narrative domains. Processes of movement and affect trailing through the social

domain and in the social encounter, reflect the self's adaptation to a collective will, in which visibility and viability of persons is ordered in strata of standardisation. Dressage, up and down the levels of Soho Theatre, choreographs this movement into and around identities legible to the state, and correspondingly, to the carceral imaginary.

Yet *Charged* undercuts this power differential, both through a split audience and through studio and basement narratives that demonstrate the reflexivity of risk. Squeezing by each other along narrow passageways between performance spaces, audiences linked 'at risk' narratives phenomenologically through their own movement, creating a site-responsive dramaturgy of multiply-noded causalities and fractured subject positions. Through these interruptions of linear causality, the spaces of performance accreted dynamic connections and outcomes, related purely through audience movement within a dramaturgical space in which both simultaneous and sequential narratives were performed within the same building.

### **'Proscenium prisons': staging custodial settings on the proscenium of the middle level**

Berlant draws a distinction between casework that rehearses normativity, and casework that can resist or change it: 'When it doesn't work to change the conditions of exemplarity or explanation, something is deemed merely a case study, remanded to banal particularity,' she writes. 'When it does, a personal or collective sensorium shifts' (2007, 667). Brushing by each other, audiences became cross-contaminating hosts not only of the detecting position of social control, but of a carceral imaginary that could only come into being through the audience's own movement through 'at risk' narratives under the banner of a 'charged' woman. As the audiences continue

their trajectories, some ascending, others descending, they cross-pollinate subject formations. Fredric Jameson writes of stereotypes as the friction between the epidermis of groups, ‘precisely the outer edge of the group that – all the while remaining unrepresentable – brushes against that of the other’ (in Chow 2010, 49). Filing past each other in the ascent and descent, the audience chafes; sloughs off some of the skins of cultural prejudice; litters them in the midden of the theatre.

The settings of the studio and basement plays connected notions of social cohesion and exclusion with hierarchies of space, and embedded them in the performance dynamic and audience’s reception mode. These conditionings of the audience become most starkly evocative when considering the ‘at risk’ studio and basement plays in relation to the middle level performance space and its plays. The middle level plays, presented on Soho Theatre’s most conventional, proscenium stage with raked auditorium seating, offered the only perspectives on imprisonment in the production, overtly matching the institutional theme of the plays to the institutionalised setting of the proscenium. Subject formations of the risk space, pre-, post- or para-criminal – addicted but not criminal, sex trafficked but not criminal, not yet – meet in the middle as the audience becomes exposed to characters pulled in to custody. In *That Almost Unnameable Lust* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz, a writer delivers workshops with older women serving long sentences (‘Charged 2’). *Fatal Light* by Chloë Moss (‘Charged 1’), on mental health and deaths in custody, is told in reverse order, gradually unpeeling connections between social isolation and single motherhood. A kind of ‘proscenium imprisonment’ thus operates here as a fulcrum for space (the middle level of the theatre) and for audience (the one space in which the audience comes together to watch a play as one group); it also provides a thematic fulcrum, in that it manifests conditions of imprisonment as inherent to the semantics

of the criminal charge under investigation. However these ‘middle plays’ of imprisonment do not provide thematic resolution, or even a single point of connection, between the ‘at risk’ thematics of top and lower floor plays.

What narrative through-lines there may be, are created only via the connecting ligature of the audience’s movement from risk space, to imprisonment, to risk space. Without conscious intention, as cross-contaminating bodies themselves, audience members encounter characters in risk spaces, and then enter a totalizing mainstage framework of custody narrative. Coming back out of the custody space, the final risk narrative carries an immediate history of criminality that overshadows and pressures the dramaturgical arc.

Although collective casework in *Charged* pulls audience members into a kind of contaminating carceral dressage, this does not foreclose an ability to break gait from the narrative expectations fostered by the carceral imaginary. As Elaine Aston proposes, ‘networks of resistance’ in theatre and performance practice become formed via an ‘amalgam of dissensual and reparative practices [...] agitating for change’ (2016, 9):

Agitating for change requires not only oppositional strategies, but also reparative tactics to help envision the remaking of an alternative, socially progressive hegemony ... both imagining and working towards a systemic change that is not yet, while at the same time surviving the here-and-now conditions of a sociopolitical given. (ibid, 8-9)

Where some aspects of the production’s dramaturgy were overtly dissensual – idiosyncratic environments pulled together in deliberate disconnect – *Charged* employed ‘reparative tactics’ in its staging of the middle level imprisonment plays. As within Aston’s networks of resistance, this amalgam of dissent and reparation supports a shift in the audience sensorium. The proscenium-imprisonment of the middle level inaugurates anew the role of case-building investigator, looking to

normalise the custodial narrative. *Fatal Light* takes a clear investigatory line – working backwards in the narrative to reveal how a death in custody could have occurred / been allowed to occur; *That Almost Unnameable Lust* organises around the difficulties and misconceptions of a writer running workshops in prison: her experiences as an outsider trying to understand the world of the women inside define the course of a narrative fueled by the mystery of why the characters are serving long sentences. In the former, why did a woman die? In the latter, how did these older women in prison become lifers? Suddenly confronted with explicitly case-driven scenarios on the hegemonic mainstage, the atmosphere becomes explicitly redolent of the Wanted poster of the *Charged* woman.

The impulses to case normativity on the mainstage coalesce through characters and content endowed with investigator/ coroner consciousness. These pieces agitate a very ‘writerly’ zone – through Moss’s play, a formal conceit, walking back time; and in Lenkiewicz’s play, a framing narrative of an inexperienced writer accompanies stylised passages, which convey the inner thoughts of an imprisoned woman who no longer speaks. In these narratives, the writer becomes drawn into allegiance with the investigating aptitudes of the audience. On the mainstage in *Charged*, narrative through-lines move in from risk spaces of the anticipated-yet-not-arrived, into the proscenium prison. Both the mainstage theatre and its narrative, situated physically on the middle level of the theatre, exist in a suspension between studio and basement sites. The audience in its split has become both reparative and dissensual to itself; in this strange suspension the fragments of the narrative come into a restructuring of relationships, driven by a frustrated desire to close the case.

Because it is suspended between the performances of risk narrative in the basement and studio, the middle level palimpsest of deeply culturally inscribed sites –

prison and proscenium theatre, layered on one another – becomes in some ways the most transparently constructed site, allowing for transformative work. The reparative middleness of the mainstage – a return to seemingly normative scenarios of imprisonment – becomes scrambled or ‘broken’, an effect aligned to what literary scholar Isobel Armstrong has called the ‘broken middle’ aesthetic: ‘not a representation of the subject, but the subject of a representation, which is not a self, not an object, or a thematics, but the structuring movement of thought and feeling’ (in Shaughnessy 2015, 99). The deepest struggle of *Charged* to divest prison from its representation within the carceral imaginary becomes articulated here as imprisonment narratives on the mainstage are not the representations of prison, but show the concept of prison as a totalizing representation itself. By that very turning point, ‘prison’ becomes fallible: the subject of representation of something else – ‘a movement of thought and feeling’. Imprisonment happens in part as a result of thoughts and feelings that some people experience – about morality, pollution, danger and containment – which they then apply onto other people. The miasmatic performance of *Charged* makes these ambient origins and effects of stigmatisation evident as structural events in the creation of prison as a signifying construct.

The ‘broken middle’ enacts a breaking down in order to reveal what has long been broken about the criminal justice system. Performance theorist and practitioner Nicola Shaughnessy applies Armstrong’s ‘broken middle’ in performance aesthetics that moment when

the movement between opposites creates breakdown, contradiction and a restructuring of relationships [... This is the] notion of the in between space of the broken middle, and the bridging of affect and thought, emotion and cognition. (ibid, 99)

The broken middle of the mainstage forces the audience to rationalise the preceding and coming risk spaces into imprisonment narrative, and, I suggest, to reject such a



rationalisation. Personally I found the mainstage plays involved me in just such a restructuring of relationships, which I experienced as a disassociation from, or a frozenness between, ‘affect and thought’, as Shaughnessy puts it. I remember crying during *Fatal Light* and, at the same time, wondering why. It was not because the play and performances weren’t ‘affecting’, but because I had cathected the proscenium prison into the ultimate articulation of how common the connection between risk and imprisonment is within carceral society. It was as simply illustrated as walking up and down some stairs, or taking a lift, between performance spaces.

By offering no singular causality in the creation of the *Charged* woman beyond the movement of one’s own body through predictable topics of carceral topoi, collective encounters within criminal justice narrative spaces cause a surfeit of assigned subjectivities to haze in shifting relation both to each other, and to the macro-concept of the ‘criminal’. The travelling audience reveals the co-creation of criminal justice narratives in domains both in and out of the theatre, awakening the notion of positionality as through the carceral imaginary, it/ we/ they co-create criminal subjectivities. Moving through Soho Theatre’s building, a mapping occurs, in which ‘at risk’, criminalised or ‘criminal’ figurations appear; in such a mapping, there are networks of resistance. Carried by the audience, these figurations take on and bestow intersectional feminist subjectivity by being unanchored to linear causalities. They are dynamically related through what Rosi Braidotti terms ‘nomadic’ subjectivities. Encountering and carrying these figurations from space to space, the audience becomes self-reflexive. For Braidotti, achieving such a self-reflexivity, as I suggest occurred in the theatre of *Charged*, is a process of becoming:

materially embedded [in] cartographies of different nomadic subjects and as such ... self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of “others.” On the contrary, they target dominant subject formations from within. This kind of self-reflexivity is, moreover, not an individual activity,

but an interactive collective process that relies upon interrelations and social networks of exchanges. (2011: 16)

Figurations of the criminal woman, in Braidotti's sense, can only occur within a heterogenic siting of discourse, bringing questions of criminal subject formation into dialogue with counter-hegemonic articulations of causality and case. In that it conceptualises the material condition as well as the narrative of criminality as an open system comprised of multiple needs, and multiple structural factors contributing to the creation and dissipation of those needs, miasmatic performance in *Charged* demonstrates a dramaturgy of contingency and transmission between narrative temporalities and physical proximities otherwise difficult to reconcile.

In this sense the production complicates not only the audience's perception of personal agency in carceral society, but also dramaturgical agency: what narrative does do, and what it can do, to disturb normative idioms of the carceral imaginary. *Charged's* dramaturgy of criminality creates the conditions for audiences to reflect on how they are agents of stigmatisation through their expectations of narrative closure in the criminal charge. Because *Charged* refuses to provide any narrative connections between six plays, the audiences perform a dramaturgy of criminality as an interpretive act. This dynamic speaks to the carceral function of audience within carceral imaginary. What *Charged* offers by way of the breakdowns of linear causality in the formation of the criminal subject, as such also translates to an understanding of audience as sensorially, intellectually and socially present within carceral narrative production; audiences are not passive here as they are (intended to be) within carceral society. Passing through risk states connected together as carceral topoi, the audience are 'doing' carceral narrative: this is what makes *Charged* a miasma of seepage between subject positions of individuality and collectivity within a criminal justice framework. The criminal charge in the theatre as live encounter

intensifies the experience of the liveness of the criminal charge in social domains outside of the theatre.

For *Charged* to provoke such seepages within a multi-causal model defined by casework, then, proposes an understanding of how models of justice and support should be, or can become, themselves dynamic dramaturgical spaces, comprised discursively of multiple risks, multiple needs, multiple ideologies, and multiple movements of audience and performers. This heterogeneity foment resistance, care, and perhaps even emancipation, by disallowing a panoptic compulsion to render ‘criminal’ identity scrutable, and (in this scrutability) scriptable via anticipatory, simple models of risk identification and support. As such *Charged* becomes a powerful example of Clean Break’s ability to agitate deeply for social change.

What is *Charged*’s contribution to miasmatic performance? *Charged* brings a critical perspective on the supposed fleetingness, or ephemerality, of the charge: it challenges the audience to experience several sites of identity-injury through dramatised risk and imprisonment – to investigate how the charge never leaves, and can become in fact a foregone conclusion or a delimiting technology to ‘establish certain bodies at the limits of available ontologies’ (Butler 2011, 170) of identity within carceral society. The process by which an ambient charge may land on stigmatised social situations and identities becomes miasmatic through the site-responsive form of the production. As audience members travel up and down the theatre, they create a ligature of infinite variation between pathways to criminality. Brushing by each other, I contend here, audiences became cross-contaminating hosts not only of the detecting position of social control, but of a nascent criminal subjectivity that could only come into being through the audience’s own movement through ‘at risk’ narratives under the banner of a ‘charged’ woman.

The miasmatic fluidity of the state of becoming-criminal is the transmission generated by the casework of *Charged*: multiple perspectives, voices, and bodies in the dramaturgy of the event preclude events of anagnorisis for character or audience member – there is no reintegration into a fluid procession from risk to criminality, nor is there rescue, or resettlement, in the wake of these narratives. Instead, by eliminating any possibility of dramaturgical closure, ruling, diagnosis or findings, the risk-states manifested by *Charged* allow it to precipitate a shift in audience sensorium (or to make such a shift available). Predicated on a miasmatic *contingency* of identities, both within physical and narrative space, the production’s evocation of multiple identities on the precipice inculcates a sustained focus on what social stigma needlessly, and ruthlessly, forecloses about marginalised identity – and stigma’s participation in material conditions of oppression. *Charged* both engages and rejects expectations of narrative closure around a case-led dramaturgical structure, proposing instead a multi-causal model of entry into criminal justice narratives.

In the next chapter, the audience-detectives of *Charged* become the audience-coroners of *Joanne* (Soho Theatre 2015), investigating the death of a young woman through five monologues. In *Joanne*, the title character has come out of prison, vulnerable and alone, and has been left to die on the street. However, as with *Charged*, ‘Joanne’ never arrives. Instead she is summoned through monologues from the perspectives of five key workers who met Joanne in the hours before her death. A miasmatic seepage occurs here, as the monologues perform something between a tribunal and a séance. Vacillating between witness statements on the one hand, and as mediumistic spirit-rapping on the other, how do these monologues call forth and critique the carceral imaginary of the audience? Here, where there has been a death, what models of mourning does this production propose? How does the grief, and

anger, of *Joanne* dialogue with the necropolitics of miasmatic performance explored particularly in Section Two through *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*? In Chapter Six I explore these questions in relation to the ways in which the monologues of *Joanne* scrutinise the model of the social contract, revealing it as a fallacy of a state that never intended to hold up its end.

# 6

## **Haunt** *Joanne* at Soho Theatre, 2015

*We inherit not “what really happened” to the dead but what lives on from that happening, what is conjured from it, how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspire our imaginations and visions for the future.* – Wendy Brown (2001, 150)

In 2010, *Charged* unfurled across the whole of Soho Theatre, moving the case into an event-space in which social exclusion and inclusion became radically addressed. Five years later, Clean Break produced *Joanne* (2015 Latitude Festival, Soho Theatre; 2016 RSC): comprised of five monologues, *Joanne* was written by Deborah Bruce, Theresa Ikoko, Laura Lomas, Chino Odimba, and Ursula Rani Sarma. As with *Charged*, these plays were commissioned by Clean Break to be performed in tandem with one another; unlike *Charged*, they were compressed into one space, performed by one actor, with one director.



Figure 18. Tanya Moodie in *Joanne* at Soho Theatre (2015). Photograph Katherine Leedale.

The production is titled *Joanne*, ‘but,’ as the marketing teaser runs, ‘it’s not about her’ (Clean Break 2015). The eponymous character Joanne exists in the recesses of monologues from five characters working in public services, from probation to health to education, who meet Joanne in the hours immediately following her release from prison. As the audience learns through the course of the monologues, Joanne has been given an incorrect prescription of anti-psychotic medicine and takes her own life that night. The five characters who see her, some fleetingly, chart a peripatetic narrative of her death as they recount their own exasperations and personal worries about the care they are able to provide.

Few details about Joanne are given to the audience. She is young, tall – ‘like really tall, like she’s been stretched out’ (Bruce et al. 2015, 16) – and has a history of self-harming. She was in prison for a short sentence of ten months (the reason why is never revealed, nor is it relevant to this play; whatever caused Joanne to be imprisoned, this play examines the fractured care she receives on release). Joanne’s favourite, and perhaps only, possession is an old Mickey Mouse watch. More we are not told, because it’s not ‘about’ her. It is *around* her, and *through* her – this spectre of Joanne – that the audience is exposed instead to the five women who encounter her in her final hours of life. As each monologue reveals the pressure on a different part of the public sector as a result of government funding cuts, a shadowy Joanne comes into focus through the anxieties and reflections of overstretched frontline service providers.

*Joanne* was commissioned and directed by Róisín McBrinn, Joint Artistic Director for Clean Break. ‘At the time [of commission], the run-up to the [UK] General Election was underway and there was media saturation of rhetoric around cuts, cuts, cuts [to public services]’ writes McBrinn. ‘I began to see the women

employees who are the “faces” of our public services as the front line of a very brittle army, kept fighting through good will and human endurance’ (Bruce et al. 2015, front matter). This ‘brittle army’, embodied by one performer – in all productions to date, the British-Canadian actor Tanya Moodie – file out on stage in emotionally intensive concentration. Transitions between monologues are made on stage, as the performer moves between minimal set pieces, never leaving the view of the audience. Moodie, herself physically stretched by the demands of a text-heavy performance of five monologues (Jays 2016), brings to each character a sense of exhaustion, frustration and tenacity as knowledge of the ‘facts’ of Joanne’s death deepen in the audience. The spectre of Joanne calls up from within this incommensurable, unresolved matrix of empirical and emotional information, a type of justice that resists aligning itself purely to critique of austerity Britain, government support, law, social prejudice, or any other institutionalised coordinates of power.

In this chapter, I explore the physical, thematic and spectral elasticity of *Joanne* – the production’s overstretches and stretchings out – as a model of miasmatic causality. While the critique of causality in the criminal justice system central to *Charged* (Chapter Five) remains a key tactic for *Joanne*, here it is put under increasing formal pressure. Distinct narrative voices provide multiple entry points for the audience; performed by one woman, however, these playlets necessarily take on a monologic causality, proceeding from points A to B to C. This processual format, gradually uncovering the details of a death through multiple character perspectives, takes on formal resonances to witness testimony in tribunal theatre.<sup>37</sup> The plays

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<sup>37</sup> One illustration of a processual method in tribunal theatre-making comes from Nicholas Kent, former Artistic Director of the Tricycle Theatre, who collaborated on many pieces of tribunal theatre from 1994-2012: ‘[In deciding how to dramatise material from a trial] you’re slightly helped by the narrative [...] inquiries are always set out in a narrative, they don’t go haphazardly, they look at what happened and how it happened. We made a rule that we would never ever jump the chronology. We’d always take witnesses in the order in which they appeared in the Inquiry’ (Brittain et al. 2014, np)



become, I argue here, imbricated in a kind of inquest, positioning the audience as investigating coroners.

As a miasmatic play, *Joanne* stretches and bleeds across modes of performing justice. Embodying five characters in quick succession, Moodie's performance straddles realms of the medium, just as much as it does the witness on the stand. In this chapter I ask: in what ways, and to what ends, does a miasmatic mode within *Joanne* borrow from the methods of both the *séance*, and the inquest? What does this entanglement offer to a way of thinking through how modes of haunting manifest in this production, and how do these modes render *Joanne* more criminologically efficacious? In pursuit of answers to these questions, in this chapter I draw on readings from spectrality studies (Gordon 2008, Spivak 2013), bringing critical perspectives on haunting from theatre studies (Luckhurst and Morin 2014, Rayner 2006), into conversation with work within theatre studies on tribunal theatre (Monks 2013), and registers of the legal (Read 2016) and 'paralegal' (Rae 2009) within theatre. Where an otherworldly critique empowers *Joanne*'s overarching condemnation of the justice system and its support networks, the production achieves a spectral economy, in which the intimacy of shifting character perspectives pull in narrative details and gestures extraneous to the casework at hand. These details, unexpected and only relevant, perhaps, to other cases past or future, are delivered not with the rigidity of testimony, but as a confiding, urgent delivery of news from the other side, pitting the empirical details of a timeline around a woman's death against the apparent extraneity of each character's storyline. In these ways, and others as this chapter will investigate, miasmatic performance within *Joanne* activates a form of theatre that stretches across forms of inquest and *séance* to perform a haunted, cryptic space of law.

## Inquest

Functioning as a kind of testimony from those who encountered Joanne in the immediate vicinity of her death, the five monologues reveal information along a 24-hour timeline beginning with Joanne's prison release. In the first three monologues Joanne is alive: social worker *Stella* (written by Chino Odimba) describes Joanne as she comes through the gates on release from prison; that evening, police officer *Grace* (Ursula Rani Sarma) attends a fight between Joanne and another person at the halfway house, St Bartholomew's. The audience next encounters Joanne as exasperated NHS receptionist *Kathleen* (Deborah Bruce) struggles to give her proper attention in the middle of the night at Accident and Emergency. Through *Alice* (Theresa Ikoko), hostel manager of St Bart's, the audience comes to know that Joanne has died from an overdose of incorrectly prescribed medicine. The play concludes with *Becky* (Laura Lomas), Joanne's former teacher, who had discovered her self-harming as a teenager, but struggled with resources to help.

Though the monologues were researched in conversation with people working in the public sector, these texts are not drawn verbatim from interviews or court testimony. The play is not, therefore, a tribunal play; neither is it testimonial theatre, or documentary theatre. And yet, in its sequential narrative, gradually revealing the facts of a death from those who were present with Joanne in her final hours, it investigates a death. It holds, as such, a kind of inquest.

Where *Charged* positioned the audience as detectives on the trail of a criminal case, in *Joanne* the audiences have become coroners, undertaking an inquest into how Joanne's death could have occurred. In England and Wales, inquests are formal hearings in coronial court, in which a coroner determines the circumstances of a death. The purposes of the proceedings are purely fact-finding, in contrast to civil or

criminal court proceedings to decide on guilt, or apportion compensation. In other words, inquests are not territory for cross-examinations or the rhetoric of opening and closing statements. In their deliberation of a verdict, coroners call witnesses and in most cases the inquest is not held in front of a jury. Inquests are relatively rare and are held only when the coroner, upon initial investigation of the death, has found unusual or unknown causes.

Given their fact-finding function, inquests lack some of the rhetorical flair of criminal court proceedings. British coroners do not today have the power to send someone to trial; the inquest offers a legal preliminary to the trial. The majority of deaths in England and Wales (Scotland does not have a coronial system, and Northern Ireland has an independent coronial jurisdiction) do not occasion inquests. One major exception to this rule pertains to deaths occurring in prison or police custody: in these cases, inquests are not only unilaterally required, they are also juried, as checks on possible abuses of governmental power. Because Joanne's death occurs after her release from prison, it would not formally warrant an inquest; yet her death results from medication mis-prescribed by the prison doctor, putting the question of accountability at the heart of the play.

'The challenge of the production was to create something that purposefully excluded Joanne's voice whilst also ensuring that this was a virtue and not a loss [... leaving] Joanne's absence very present for you [the audience] at a time when she urgently needs to be visible' (McBrinn in Bruce et al. 2015, front matter): one 'virtue' of this play, perhaps, is in its quality as inquiry into how such a death could be *allowed* to occur in British society today. In this the play, though not a tribunal, holds a commonality with tribunal theatre as a type of performance that imagines or revisions justice, providing what Aoife Monks terms a 'supplementary role to the law'

(2013). In “‘This Painful Chapter’: Performing the Law in *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry*’ (2013), Monks addresses co-constructions of visibility and rhetoric in the theatre and courtroom, proposing tribunal theatre as both supplementary to, and surrogation of, law. This supplementary role, Monks argues, is indicative of desire to repress spectacle and spectacular rhetoric, both on stage and in the courtroom – theatre’s role in depicting the tribunal as un-artificially as possible supports the courtroom’s positivist requirement to be considered empirically grounded and evidentially backed: ‘by making the process of justice visible onstage, [theatre] underlin[es] the law’s need for spectacle – the need to be seen to be done’ (ibid, 348). The privileging of these axes of objective observation and judgment as forerunners of *truth* are as operational in realist theatre as they are in courts of law: realist theatre, in that it purports to represent society faithfully, facilitates and even develops a ‘juridical attitude in its audience’ (ibid, 349). As McBrinn says, Joanne ‘urgently needs to be visible’ in order to impact the audience; through the denial of this visibility, she suggests, the problems of the justice system become starkly evident.

The aspects of *Joanne* that draw on realist representation alongside the careful placement of clues and testimony-like statements deliberately create this juridical sensibility in the audience. In the first two monologues, support worker Stella and police officer Grace use language that comes across like a plea to a judge. In the first few minutes of her monologue, well before the facts of Joanne’s death are known, Stella is both rattled and defensive:

I would never abandon one of mine. Not mine. I mean who would? Who would do that? Leave her there alone. Never. Not me. I’ll be there I say. Didn’t I? How could I forget? My last one? No way. (Bruce et al. 2015, 4)

Police officer Grace relates her interaction with Joanne at the hostel:

I say, “I’m asking the questions here.” She nods [...] “Help me.” [...] “I have to report the incident,” I tell her, “I don’t have a choice.” “Everyone has a choice,” she says. [...] I can feel the weight of her whole life in my hands. (17)

Grace, repeating Joanne’s words, illustrates what is a core function of the tribunal, and the inquest: standing in for, or voicing, those who are not there. Monks (2013) constructs this aspect as a surrogation of law. She characterises the courtroom as a ‘proxy space, in which speech and action always take place on behalf of others’ (ibid, 355). For Monks, proxy in the courts meets proxy in tribunal theatre, ‘foregrounding the role of actors as stand-ins for those who were gone, by making them present’ (ibid, 356). The surrogative and the supplementary functions of theatre and law, then, form two kinds of proxy relevant to *Joanne* – what might otherwise be termed a ‘parallel’ proxy of surrogation (in court, as in theatre, proxies for persons disappeared), alongside a ‘derivative’ proxy of supplementation (theatre as proxy for court and vice-versa). Both are at work when McBrinn declares the aim of *Joanne* as a purposeful exclusion to aid visibility.

Of course, there is an important discrepancy to identify here: Monks’ constructions of supplementation and surrogation between law and theatre are predicated on court (and theatre) proceedings that did in fact occur, in relation to specific cases where justice was breached. *Joanne* is a fictional account. Though, as Alan Read points out, the line between reality and fiction in law, as in theatre, is very thin indeed – if it even exists as a line at all (I might suggest a miasma):

a judicial spectacle operates simultaneously as a “reality” and a “fiction” [...] We have the law “as it should function” in the interests of justice, and we have the “law as it does function”. And importantly we have a critical valence of the law.... that is we have the law as it is *perceived* to function. (2016, 12, 13, original emphasis)

In *Joanne*, as a fictional account, no crime has ‘actually’ occurred and therefore there is perhaps no need to deploy a tribunal-style theatre to scrutinise the miscarriages of

the legal system. The fact of its fiction allows, arguably, for an expanded field of inquiry that encompasses elements of all three of Read's valences of law. The play offers composite character development out of interviews but is not comprised of testimony or verbatim material ('does function'). Contextually, it employs some similar techniques to tribunal theatre ('perceived to function'). The important contribution of *Joanne*, and so many of Clean Break's productions, however, is the miasmatic scramble of the 'does function'/'perceived to function' *in aid of* the 'law as it should function'.

In this *Joanne* meets what Paul Rae terms 'paralegal performance': theatre that in 'supplementing the work of the law, and even acting as a temporary stand-in where legal provisions fall short [...] draw[s] audiences back to aspects of the relationship between rights and responsibilities that are less easily adjudicated' (2009, 51). Rae's 'paralegal performance' draws on an understanding of the supplementary which diverges from Monks' application to tribunal theatre, in that it is radically broadened out to incorporate many types of performances, including fictional ones: 'diverse events and practices' (ibid, 42), which are auxiliary to the law and human rights. Paralegal perspectives deliberately stand alongside, yet not quite within, traditional performance modes of the legal system in order to critique the power of law and support visions of how the law can better function.

*Joanne* is a play of consequences and accountability. Fictional account though it may be, *Joanne* operates as a paralegal composite, researched through dozens of interviews with women at risk and frontline workers who support them. A young woman with a diagnosed mental health condition is released, with threadbare support, after serving a short-term sentence of under a year: these baseline dramaturgical 'facts' are *lived* facts for most women coming out of prison in the UK (Women in

Prison 2019). Under paralegal auspices, *Joanne* operates from a critical and creative narrative space that performs as an auxiliary or extra-legal arbiter/orbiter of the law, questioning its long-term, even final, ramifications on post-prison lives. Dramaturgically, Joanne's death is revealed through a series of failed interventions, any one of which might have diverted her course and saved her life. Thus – to return to Rae's articulation – adjudicating the juncture, or 'relationship between *rights* and *responsibilities*' (my emphasis) is the primary function of *Joanne*. As paralegal theatre, outside of the realms of testimonial or tribunal theatre drawn from verbatim court documents, *Joanne* is an inquiry into how a young woman's right to be considered the responsibility of society came to be denied five times over.

The mock tribunal – in its crossing between reenactment, rehearsal and potentially fictive encounters of the court – can play an important role in redressing the legal system. Paul Rae positions the work of Mufuliat Fijabi for the National Tribunal on Violence Against Women in Nigeria (2001) as an instance of paralegal performance. In Fijabi's mock tribunal, survivors of domestic and sexual violence recounted their experiences as testimony before a panel of judges. The aim was to inspire amendments to existing judicial policy around violence against women and girls. Fijabi writes:

By recreating this model [of a tribunal] on an informal level, the tactic simultaneously publicizes the testimony and calls attention to existing gaps in government action. The need for a 'mock' tribunal automatically raises the question: 'Why isn't the state having its own tribunal?' (in Rae 2009, 48)

Although substantially different in form – what parallels there are to an inquest appear implicitly on a lit theatre stage, in a performance of fictionalised narrative – *Joanne* asks a similar question. Why does the state rarely investigate the deaths of people impacted by the criminal justice system, in situations such as Joanne's? 'This is state

abandonment,' say British charity INQUEST, who campaign for state accountability around deaths in custody

In 2018/19, ten people died each week following release from prison. Every two days, someone took their own life. In the same year, one woman died every week, and half of these deaths were self-inflicted. ... The figures are deeply disturbing and require urgent scrutiny, due to the current lack of independent investigation into these deaths. (INQUEST 2019)

*Joanne* provides precisely this urgent scrutiny: as paralegal theatre, *Joanne* largely seeks to establish not the facts of an individual death, but rather the facts of a death of *governmental accountability*, and the threats this poses to the public – most immediately represented by the five monologic women, who also suffer a kind of death-in-life as a result of this negligence.

In this urgent scrutiny, however, *Joanne* also finds it necessary to depart from the domain of inquests and tribunals, and this is where the production enters fully into a miasmatic mode. Where the paralegal offers one aspect of the political protest of *Joanne*, through the séance we find another: to conjure or resuscitate Joanne through the medium of actor on stage takes the paralegal into an ether of revolt across the great divide. In this miasmatic stretch, paralegal becomes paranormal. Why does the urgent scrutiny of *Joanne*'s investigation need to depart the paralegal? – what does the séance offer that the paralegal cannot?

In some ways Rae's paralegal performance already operates within a spectral mode, in that it both supports and critiques law, engaging those many moments where governmental and institutional legislation has failed to support human rights. Pointing out where this has led to crisis and loss, paralegal performance is haunted by failures of justice. In response, paralegal haunts the legal back. In this a paranormal-paralegal aligns to what Joseph Roach delineates in *Cities of the Dead* as a process of surrogation (in variation to Monks' surrogation above), in which collective social



memory and ritual performance respond to traumatic and violent shifts, or ‘cavities’, instigated by death, enslavement, and other departures (1996). One such surrogation in *Joanne*, I suggest, comes in the form of a ghostly séance as substitution for an inquest that will never occur, given the degraded social status of the departed.

As paralegal zones to the law, the public services are empowered to shape, define, educate, house, nourish, and advocate. As such they are also empowered to fail in these efforts: to let suffer, to let die. Miasmatic performance in *Joanne* draws up the paranormal of law by addressing how deaths as a result of state-sanctioned negligence haunt the spaces and technologies of governance. Miasmas are environments (carceral and otherwise) that haunt people – they hang about, trail after us and infiltrate everyday spaces – as much as people haunt those territories from which they have been dispossessed. In *Joanne*, miasmatic performance makes these hauntings visible as seepages into social and aesthetic articulation. The unique power of *Joanne* does not begin or end with its ability to stage an inquiry into a death; it is in the haunting of the system that allowed the death to occur.

## Séance

Since the Victorian period, séances have been a uniquely campaigning activity: ghosts campaigning to be seen, messages passed to the living, and the bodies of mediums themselves as campaigns for political and spiritualist agendas. Similarly, in the miasmatic stretch between paralegal and paranormal, *Joanne* becomes a campaigning haunt. The sociocultural force of the séance is an inheritance from the Victorian period, which also established many elements of the contemporary criminal justice system: new models for penitentiaries and prisons; the prisoner standing for both reformed self and degraded other in the public imaginary; ideas of crowd behaviour

and social contagion; a constantly reified imperial margin, to identify and discipline the others of Empire; models of ‘good citizenship’ for prisoners; madness as a character trait passed on through taints of blood from parent to child; concepts and enforcements of public health; traditions of women campaigning for social justice; the development of forensic policing tactics. Miasmas drifted freely. So did ghosts.

Miasmatic performance seeks to draw these elements, which are still agential within – moreover, are even in some ways still the definition of – contemporary paradigms of discipline, citizenship and incarceration, into focus. In *Joanne* the concerns of ghosts, and the hauntings of law, drive the miasmatic project of the play. The nineteenth century’s spiritualist fascination with the supernatural created what Russ Castronovo calls a ‘necro-citizenship’, then and now, made of haunted citizen-subjects ‘unable to resolve an ambivalence between abstraction and political engagement, generic being and specific embodiment, and tranquil consensus and spirited conflict’ (2001, 149). In a necro-citizenship, ‘social corpses’ (i.e., the citizenry) are highly aware of social inequalities; yet this awareness becomes fogged by transmissions of abstract occult messages. The result is a public culture that appears aware, yet is deadeningly inactive around social reform. Castronovo explains this fundamental incoherency by charting the development of a ‘sociocelestial discourse’ within politics in nineteenth-century United States:

While mesmerism and spiritualism often intersected with pressing issues of race, class, gender, and national destiny, their structure and style blocked democratic critique by displacing sociopolitical agitation to a psychospiritual realm of eternal consciousness. The occult public sphere works by contradiction, engaging politics and social conflicts only to disencumber citizens of sociopolitical consciousness. (2001, 111)

Confronting the apathy of a necro-citizenship is central to *Joanne*. In so doing, the question becomes: does it challenge the audience beyond a sense that having received the message from the beyond is *enough* political activity? What kind of political

engagement does *Joanne* call on the audience to develop? To return to McBrinn's statement, 'The challenge of the production was to create something that purposefully excluded Joanne's voice whilst also ensuring that this was a virtue and not a loss': Does attending, or performing, or writing, or directing *Joanne* hark to the 'virtues' of mediums and reformists of the nineteenth century on, whose messages can conceal racist, classist and otherwise prejudiced abstraction within a zeal for the Victorian-era 'good citizen' model?<sup>38</sup> The plays that form what I propose as Clean Break's miasmatic corpus tend to tackle precisely this tension between abstraction and political engagement.

If *Joanne* dramaturgically proposes at least one ghost, the play's imputations of a widescale failure of public services propose many more ghosts to come. *Joanne* re-animates the dynamic of necro-citizenship by oscillating between cadences of resignation and tenacity in each social worker's monologue, articulating some of the ambivalences between 'abstraction and political engagement'. NHS receptionist Kathleen describes a frantic witnessing of the walking wounded and not-yet-dead who clamour for her:

I imagine myself climbing up on the desk and screaming Help Me! I'm full to the brim of you all. I'm choking on you, I'm gasping for air here people ... What do you want me to do? Take them all home? I do! I do! I take them all home most mornings. Buckling under the weight. ... They're all there, curled up on the bed next to me, squeezed into the drawers of my bedside cabinet, in my glasses case, wrapped round the legs of the bed. ... All waiting to be seen. (Bruce et al. 2015, 24, 26, 27)

Here Kathleen's experience of the people in the A&E ward become phantasmagoric bodies laden on her shoulders. To express her engagement in their plight, she abstracts them into a seepage of beings, curling around her private home. As if in

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<sup>38</sup> For the Victorian model see Zedner (1991). The good citizen model persists today, and is evident even in Baroness Jean Corston's feminist assessment of the women's prison estate, in which she suggested a lack of so-called 'life skills' as one of the biggest problems for women leaving prison – 'how to live as a family or group, how to *contribute to the greater good*, how to cook a healthy meal' (in Davies 2018, 296, my emphasis).

response to a suggestion from the audience that she is not doing enough until she takes them all back with her – on her back, even, ‘buckling under the weight’ – she exclaims ‘I do! I do!’ Because Kathleen’s patients are not-yet-ghosts, who nevertheless squeeze, torque and curl, Kathleen’s exasperations illustrate an in-between where engagement can’t be resolved into an ‘eternal consciousness’ of the celestial realm. The ghost world already fully infiltrates the living. Rather than modeling a transcendent set of objectives for engaged citizenry – *how to contribute to the greater good* (see n.38) – *Joanne* in fact proposes a radical ground of contingency, exhuming messy, disturbed materiality over resolution and passivity.

Peter Hitchcock, writing on spectralities of class, provides an important formulation. Joanne being gone is neither a ‘virtue’, nor a ‘loss’: ‘The ambivalence of the specter is not its virtue, only its dependence on concrete determination. And that is why the experience of freedom before us is also the space of ghosts’ (2013, 192). In direct expression of ‘concrete determination’ at work in *Joanne*, the eponymous ghost, around whom the production revolves, cannot be summoned. Not just gone, she has been made gone-gone, in absolute reflection of her voiding through negligent and necrotic statecraft. In carceral society, a space of ‘living’/‘freedom’ for some is concretely determined through a clearance of others. Instead of to Joanne, then, the performer becomes medium to a range of characters who, as the custodians of Joanne’s support networks, articulate Hitchcock’s designation of the experience of freedom as the space of ghosts. They are interstitial characters who, rather than speaking for Joanne, interrupt an abstracted agenda. They do not overtly pretend to speak from jurisdictions beyond the veil or from behind a courtroom stand under oath – the monologues instead give snapshots from each woman’s life that night, as Joanne is about to, or has just, died. A leaving do (Alice), a reverie driving home (Grace), a

self-counselling session in the break room (Kathleen), a walk in the countryside (Becky): spaces of tangential ‘freedom’, crowded with ghosts.

These concrete determinants of *Joanne* point to life as an inherently conditioned condition, what Judith Butler calls ‘precarious life’, ‘that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death’ (2009, 25), rather than a feature of a monadic concept of ‘life itself’. The aesthetic and political obligation of *Joanne*, similarly, is to the conditions that make life livable; the character emphasis is on the spectres of social services rather than on Joanne herself. Troubled, stressed, anxious and invisible frontline workers campaign to be seen and heard; their speech is deeply conditioned to their own pressures in delivering (and failing to deliver) on their ‘obligations’ to making life livable. These characters are not ghosts, but rather people whose urgent, desperate pressure relates to a kind of death-in-life in which they too are impacted by the differential exposure to negligence, injury and violence. Contextualizing the narrative conditions of *Joanne* as failed efforts to make life livable, failures which in turn make life less livable for support workers themselves, makes it possible for Joanne to be apprehended by the audience as a ‘grievable life’ in Butler’s terms (ibid).

The space of ghosts as concretely determined is also a critical proposition for *Joanne* in that, as is evident through Kathleen’s monologue above, there are several types of ‘ghosts’ being channeled in *Joanne*: there are the soon-to-be-ghosts-if-nothing-is-done; there is Joanne, the ‘actual’ ghost; there are the five ‘choking, gasping’, dead-on-their-feet and socially invisible social workers of *Joanne*; and there are the audience members who, in a darkened auditorium, may perhaps be spirit-

rapped out of their own necro-citizenship. Such a wide palate of ghosts indicates not only a campaign to be seen, but to catalyze socio-political action.

This reading of ghosts as socio-politically catalytic is core to many dimensions of contemporary spectrality studies. In her introduction to *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (2006), theatre and performance studies scholar Alice Rayner writes that 'ghosts represent an epistemological or methodological corrective to forms of thought that reduce the world to a series of oppositions in order to clarify and control' (xxvi). Despite the fact that for prison – or carceral – theatre perhaps any notion of corrective modalities should be treated with circumspection, this notion of a *corrective* activity of ghosts also resonates to social theorist Avery Gordon's formulation of haunting as 'one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life' (2008, p, xvi). Haunting, Gordon writes, 'is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done' (ibid.). For Gordon, this 'something' takes on a utopian valence: what needs to be done is in relation to 'something we have lost, but never had' (ibid, 183). What is eventually, already un/attainable of this formulation is key to *Joanne's* critique of rule of law: law that spectrally draws on stigmatic precedence, and manifests it as miasmatically arrived contemporaneity to continue to criminalise and negate 'minority' counterpublics.

It is in the face of such legal, and illegal, discrimination that Gayatri Spivak calls for a spectral *future anterior* to replace conceptions of the future present in social justice narratives. The future anterior requests, even 'prays' for, a continued haunting in the future by other, different, subaltern pasts (2013, 323). To link Spivak and Gordon, haunting produces a something-to-have-been-done, rather than a blueprint for an unambiguous future present, 'as is' Spivak contends, 'the case with

the “end” of most narratives of social justice’ (ibid). This approach on the spectral as simultaneously instigator of resistance to social control in the present, and instigator of a future that will be differently haunted, comes across in *Joanne* powerfully through the monologue of police officer Grace.

Grace begins her monologue with a series of vignettes from her past, including one as a teenager when she humiliated one of her peers at a school dance. The humiliated girl tried to take her own life shortly afterwards, failed, but lost too much oxygen to the brain to regain function. ‘*The memory haunts her*’ reads the stage directions (Bruce et al. 2015, 14). She implores of the audience: ‘See me at one ... see me at ten ... see me at fifteen ... see me at twenty-four’, etc., until under the weight of these evocations, her own past selves asking her to change the course (or asking the audience to contextualise her actions), she decides not to take Joanne back into custody at the hostel following her fight. British policing protocol requires officers to report ex-offenders if they break the terms of their probation; in these circumstances Grace’s judgment call is borne not of autonomy, but of resistance. Grace’s plaintive requests to ‘see me’ take on the valence of the courtroom plea (rationalizing her choice – a choice that while not disciplining Joanne, also leaves her vulnerable on the street); simultaneously they also achieve the valence of an appeal to a ghostly domain of adjudication: ‘that thing that the universe saw me do, that it recognised, that it acknowledged’ in not arresting her (ibid, 16). When Grace encounters Joanne, memories of the girl Grace humiliated at the dance flood over her: it’s another, different ghost for Grace, but drawn into a spectral amalgam with Joanne. ““We have to report [Joanne’s fight],” he [Grace’s police partner] says. “No we don’t, we fucking don’t, all we have to do is what we think is right”” Grace insists (ibid, 17). Grace’s monologue offers a cluster of what Spivak, and Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (2006),

discuss as *revenant* and *arrivant* together – both the returned and the arriving of political promise. The moment incorporates the *revenant* of the past with the *arrivant* of new political awareness, facilitated by the ghost-memory of the humiliated girl: a different kind of haunting. It is, in this, a *something-to-have-been-done* that causes Grace to critically resist her own power as police.

Alice Rayner argues that ‘ghosts are soon domesticated by law and logic’ (2006, xxvii), empowered by fugitive incursions from the margin into the center of rational law. In *Joanne* the opposite is true: *law* is domesticated by *ghosts*. The production proffers a scenario in which spectral possessions draw the connection between paralegal and paranormal ever closer together. Law and its auxiliary support systems demonstrate not only the domestication of law by ghosts, but a ghostly law that actually requires ghosts, and ghost-making, if it will be maintained.

In the séance of *Joanne*, a young woman excluded by society, and demeaned by the justice system as a criminal, encounters a series of social prejudices – the audience hears from Joanne’s teacher Becky that this is part of a long stretch of such events in her life. Social stigma forms part of what Colin Dayan characterises as the spectral regions of jurisprudence, the ‘the sorcery of law’ (2011). Dayan’s theory of how the law ‘makes and unmakes’ persons takes on a miasmatic mode in its evocation how stigma ‘fleshes’ narratives through the extra- and interlegal porosities of law:

In its manipulation of categories such as the spirit and the flesh, the law perpetuates its claims to mastery and comprehension [...] in a world where the supernatural serves as the unacknowledged legislator of justice. In varying sites of struggle, sacrifice, and stigma, legal rituals give flesh to past narratives and new life to the residues of old codes and penal sanctions. (2011, 40)

Supernatural territories within law are powerful (and concrete) determinants of personhood in western legal traditions. To sentence Joanne, then to release her to the



streets in vulnerable circumstances, is a ‘legal ritual of old codes’ designed to decrease her life chances. The sites of ‘struggle, sacrifice, and stigma’ accrete; in the monologues they cause her death, over and over again. Access to public services and specialist support is critical for people living in racist and classist carceral states; accordingly, governmental actions to strip funding to public services is an articulation of necropolitics at work to foster a deathly society in which Joanne, and others like and unlike her, are allowed to die. Those who are ‘degraded and socially excluded’ by law, Dayan contends, ‘interpret legal precepts and proscriptions for themselves and reconceive the rules: *not the opposite of law but its haunting*’ (2011, 252, my emphasis).

This haunting occurs well in advance of Joanne’s death; she haunts within a social death-in-life. The public servants of the monologues, in their witnessing, haunt the system too; they also re-interpret the mandates of their roles, ‘reconceiving the rules’, as police officer Grace does when she chooses not to report Joanne. Each one of the public servants – they who are in some ways on the stand in this theatre for letting her down – are themselves hindered by poverty, grief, exhaustion, and frustrated ambitions of their own. From within a schema of both necropolitics (Mbembe) and necro-citizenship (Castronovo), the monologic women of *Joanne* are needed by the government in order to maintain a violent and racist disequilibrium: as frontline public servants, they are ‘kept alive but in a *state of injury*’ (Mbembe 2003, 21). Hostel manager Alice, cleaning up after Joanne has died, critiques the government’s lack of accountability even as she feels herself fighting against her own ongoing injury:

If you want it, there’s evidence. Evidence that *this* [system] is failing. Evidence that is busting out of all the places I’ve been hiding it for the last three years. Hidden in statistics, in case studies, in rent arrears, in staff sick days, in my head, in the bathroom mould, broken furniture, in the pains in my

neck and shoulders, in the one-ply toilet tissue, in staff assaults, in incident reports, in my acne breakouts, in nine-nine-nine calls, in prison recalls, in my occasional stress-induced yeast infection, and in my lack of – (*in her mum's voice*) 'potential prospects'. And the *need*... the need is blinding, deafening, the smell of it hits the back of my throat on my way to work and makes me gag, it assaults and is assaulted, and I hold my phone with both hands, as I walk from the station, in case it tries to steal it. (Bruce et al., 36)

Alice's archival list of evidence – furniture, toilet tissue, yeast – burrows deep into the midden heap piling up outside the law – like vegetable peels of need, formed of law, the detritus of law. Her speech reflects her own outraged agency, compelled to assist in creating this midden, at her own peril and with no reward. A blistering, scandalised cadence to Alice's outrage also figures it as a midden for justice itself – justice's burial site, right there in the messy remains of St Bart's hostel. In his article 'The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority' (1990), Derrida writes of justice as outside the law, animating the law but in conflict with it: law 'only defers the problem of justice. For in the founding of law or in its institution, the same problem of justice will have been posed and violently resolved, that is to say buried, dissimulated, repressed' (963). Law, for Derrida, is legitimated through force, often illegal. Through these transgressions of justice, law establishes its means to adjudicate on propriety; Colin Dayan draws out these violences as law's taxonomies of unacceptable personhood, deployed to unmake people. In Alice's monologue, the personification of a threatening, assaulting and assaulted need, stalking the streets, conjures a spectral law that both terrorises and polices life in the margins.

The burial of justice along with the evidence of law's own violence forms a crucial part of Derrida's analysis of the spaces and architecture of law. Within Derrida's 'cryptic' space of law, 'both the burial and the return are made possible by the strange anarchitecture of the crypt' adjacent to the house of legitimate (and legitimating) law (Wigley 1993, 156). The cryptic space of law silences and

memorialises the violence of law, just as it protects and annexes it – ready to revivify as soon as required. Alice ‘gags’ on her knowledge of the evidences of law’s burial crypt, detailing them as mould, breakouts and infections: evidence-laden miasmas of law intended to be sequestered to the tomb, but leaking out. If the crypt is part of the home of law, the theatre of *Joanne* is itself a crypt of law.

When this evidence surfaces, it is already a corpse: ‘The evidence. The need. It is found, cold and rigoured, face-down on the concrete, drowned in her own vomit’ (Bruce et al. 2015, 36). Being gagged and vomiting – or for hospital receptionist Kathleen ‘I’m choking on you’ – is an articulation of the restricting vice of authority that silences, drowns and buries. Creating haunted citizens, social corpses, the spectral crypts of law exist to facilitate law’s visibility; the crypt, standing for and performing the absented, substantiates the law’s continual ‘metaphysics of presence’, as Costas Douzinas puts it (1991, 25). To once again rouse a theatre-law corollary, if law depends upon an unflagging presencing, theatre – operating under a similar need – can critique the law via its ability to visibly absent, a point Aoife Monks makes so strongly in her discussion of law and tribunal theatre. As such, Joanne’s absence in the play resonates to the law’s own vocabulary of itself as sacred and present, with separate dwellings for its excluded ghosts. For miasmatic performance, bodies exhumed from law’s crypt perform the ritualised, supernatural of law within an infectious decomposition that dismantles perceptions of law’s unassailability.

In *Joanne*, performing what is supernatural of law, or – to return to Dayan’s terms – ‘haunting the law’ occurs through several methods, including a heterogeneous aesthetic created by five writers. This polyvocal approach in *Joanne* haunts the liminal partitions of monologue, an effect further enhanced by the body of a single actor as host to the ghost of contestation against oppositional binaries (death/life;

public/private; citizen/prisoner; voiced/voiceless). This helps to maintain the potency of the ghost as a critical figure in a corrective mode, giving the ghost what Alice Rayner calls ‘affective force’ through ‘multiple kinds of styles’ (2006, xxvi). Pivoting, in a sense, between stylistic realms materialises a range of registers and perceptions, articulated through Tanya Moodie’s singular body. This is not (merely!) a haunting, this is a séance – and so within *Joanne*’s model of haunting the law, Moodie’s body is critically important. As a Black woman, playing medium to several characters who themselves express a kind of death-in-life as they confront the death of a young woman on the streets, Moodie expresses and resists the ‘old codes’ and ‘supernatural’ jurisdictions of law that continue to define the racist protocols of negligence and imprisonment in carceral societies today.

### Wake work and mediumship in Moodie’s performance



Figure 19. *Joanne* at Soho Theatre. Set design by Lucy Osborne and lighting design by Emma Chapman. Photograph Katherine Leedale.

As with many of the productions investigated in this thesis (the notable exception being *Pests*), in terms of lighting, set and costume design *Joanne* has a minimalist aesthetic. Tanya Moodie stands, sits and strides around a set of luminous and empty

frames, and as she shifts from one character to the next, so does the colour tone of these frames. A highly reflective floor tile deepens the aesthetic of wavering divides: between séance and tribunal, between life and death, and between the quintet of monologues as they seep into each other through Moodie's performance.

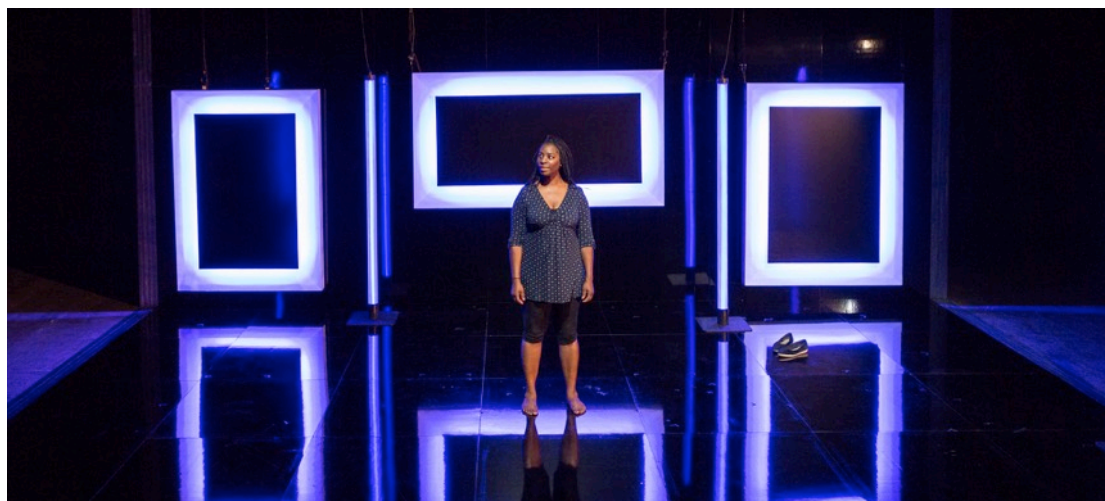


Figure 20. *Joanne* at Soho Theatre. Photograph Katherine Leedale.

Her hair shifts, up, down, shoes come on or stay off. A lack of props echoes the social commentary of *Joanne*: key supports have been removed, and there are only empty windows where a face fails to appear. These stripped down aesthetics help to concentrate the focus of the production on Moodie's performance as a series of embodiments. How can this be contextualised as an especially miasmatic aspect?

Moodie's embodiment in *Joanne* performs multiple characters, each of whom is involved in a nexus of struggle and resistance to structural inequities. These characters come together across multiple sites (A&E ward, hostel, prison gates, among them); these sites in turn chart the spread of carceral territories of the city through the body. Sites and identities, interlaced with one another, become coordinated within Moodie's body as consequences and responses to a death. Moodie's identity as a Black woman brings this mapping into critical correspondence with what critical race theorist and geographer Katherine McKittrick proposes as a

‘demonic’ cartography of Black women’s struggle (2006). McKittrick considers what happens when Black women’s geographies, storylines, politics and poetics, traditionally treated as ‘unrepresentable’, unpredictable and yet possessed systems, become the defining legend for a new map. McKittrick’s concept of ‘demonic grounds’ carries deep relevance to *Joanne*’s protest and subversion, in that it provides a critical framework for how performances by Black women radically re-invest the theatre with voices and stories silenced through the racism of carceral society.

Demonic grounds are, for McKittrick (building on Sylvia Wynter), predicated on multiple readings of the term ‘demonic’: in one, more ecclesiastical sense, demonic denotes a spirit possession; yet another sense relates to a systems understanding of the demonic in mathematics, physics and computer science, in which it connotes any unpredictable, unknowable system. ‘With this in mind,’ writes McKittrick, ‘the demonic invites a slightly different conceptual pathway—while retaining its supernatural etymology—and acts to identify a system (social, geographic, technological) that can only unfold and produce an outcome if uncertainty, or (dis)organization, or something supernaturally demonic, is integral to the methodology’ (2006, xxiv). Where Black women’s knowledges and imaginations have been violently absented and silenced, the ‘demonic grounds’ of Black women’s experience can cause human geography to become radically re-presented. This schema is formative of a new consciousness in the navigation of *Joanne*, in which Moodie’s performance radically reperforms carceral structures of social possession and dispossession. The mapping going on in *Joanne* articulates a death from ‘slipping through the cracks’ (Clean Break 2018) by *becoming* those cracks through fragmented narrative and ‘demonic’ possessions. These subaltern territories empower Moodie through *Joanne* to ‘stack time and place on top of one another ... becom[ing] a site of

radical possibility, supernatural travels, and difficult epistemological returns to the past and present' (McKittrick 2006, 1-2). Such sociospatial departures, returns, and possessions *limit* sites of violence and racist, classist struggle as much as they delimit them.

Moodie's 'demonic' mediumship also builds on a longstanding tradition amongst theatre actors 'who think of themselves as mediumistic vessels and who have a paranormal understanding of themselves as "channeling" a force which is outside them' (Luckhurst and Morin 2014, 3). In an interview with David Jays for *The Guardian*, Moodie doesn't use the term 'channeling' but nevertheless describes her acting practice as 'accommodating emotionally fraught characters "on a psychophysical level"':

Characters steeped in conflict burrow deep in her body. "I've had shingles five times in three years." Shingles, a residue of chicken pox, can be triggered by emotional shock – "and every time I've had it I've been playing a character that has that shock. Every freaking time! Somehow I need to communicate to my psyche that it's the character who is getting the shock, not me. ... If the director suggests an improvisation where I'm a wife whose husband has just died, that's what I am. Period. There's no thinking myself into it." (Jays 2016)

I recall a conversation with Moodie, following her press night performance of *Joanne* at Soho Theatre, in which, exhausted and exhilarated, she told me the emotional and physical labor of *Joanne* had made this round of shingles particularly tough – one of five instances of the illness she refers to in the interview above. Here, having shingles articulates a transmission, both of character and of trauma ('emotional shock') – a contagion that colonises and inhabits Moodie's own body, even drawing on her own dormant past (the chicken pox of old) to become virulent again. Hers is a uniquely physical expression of what Mary Luckhurst refers to as 'giving up the ghost' of acting in which an 'annihilation of self' is at risk (2014, 170). For Moodie, performing/becoming emotionally 'shocked' characters is inseparable from an

actively political aim to contribute to social justice and women's equality movements (Jays 2016). It is this nexus of political embodiment, wrapped up in contagion and expressing the contingencies of carceral society, that makes Moodie's performance miasmatic: her experience of the political and personal 'stakes' of *Joanne* is an extremely heightened exhibition of conditional social obligations to making 'livable life'.

Moodie's 'psychophysical' investments multiply exponentially as she performs the single dead and five living characters of *Joanne*: a kind of party-line channeling in which each of the characters *also* channels Joanne (and other ghosts) in her own manner. These characters are mediums-within-the-medium. The model is one in which personal agency is highly performed, a 'dynamic communication with an absent presence' (Luckhurst 2014, 172) in contradiction to the passive participation traditionally associated with feminine mediumship (and as described by Castronovo's 'sociocelestial' discourse). One of the conceits of the Victorian spiritualist movement was that anyone had the potential to become a medium: by miasmatic extension, the audience become interpellated as mediums-in-training, as much as they are also, at times, addressed as coroners. They undertake something between an investigation and a hosting of severe social inequity and its consequences.

This something between the two – inquest and séance – is perhaps best expressed as 'wake work'. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) proposes wake work and 'wake being' in response to, and in the wake of, oppression that impacts and imperils Black communities around the world today. Sharpe's being in the wake does not suggest a 'resolution' to abjection and violence; it is, instead, a 'form of *consciousness*' formed of 'contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as Black



modes of resistance’ (ibid, 14, original emphasis). To engage in wake work is to dwell experientially in ‘paradoxes of blackness’ that acknowledge the conditions of violent exclusion but do not try to pitch a utopian vision of civil or human rights that would somehow heal this or remove it as a reality.

Moodie, as a Black woman performing monologues that circulate within the poisoned eddies of structural violence, manifests a being in the wake together with audiences: image and language are tossed and jumped in the wake of *Joanne*, just as the subjecthood of the five characters comes under investigation. For all their heterogeneous polyvocality, the monologues of *Joanne* circulate shards of images in commonality – a big water bird, a heron, is one; such images possess the language of each individual character briefly. The heron features in the final monologue, in which Becky, Joanne’s former teacher, walks through the countryside. It is the morning after Joanne’s death ‘and there was this bird. I think a heron actually, huge, and the way it lifted up, out of the reeds... like it could levitate’ (Bruce et al., 45). Becky connects it to Joanne’s soul in passage. But long before, when police officer Grace attends the aftermath of Joanne’s fight, the bird has already appeared. ‘Some great beast of a bird that has been nailed to my shoulders all this time has just taken flight,’ (ibid, 17): a body nailed to another body takes off, and the second body – a police officer’s – whooshes into the sky. In a similar way, the monologues are nailed to each other, and to Moodie, proceeding from each other in connected, but haphazard and unpredictable ways that interrupt a clear procedural causality from one point to the next.

The joins are at times painful. Moodie never leaves the stage, as director Róisín McBrinn says: ‘At best, we would see a silhouette of Tanya “morphing” into the next character. At worst (when she was going to Theresa’s monologue [*Alice*]) we saw her put her hand behind one of the light boxes and pick up a sweeping brush’

(2018). These interstitial moments, in which Moodie's changeover becomes visible, make her performance all the more relevant to being in the wake: 'the tension between being and instrumentality that is Black being in the wake' (Sharpe 2016, 21). Being nailed, jostled, and catching the actor out, as she proceeds about her business, are all motifs of wake work.

The wake is a process in which episodic actions, like monologues, occur as part of a continuum. The dissolution of public support services is a process in which episodic actions, like individual deaths, occur. It is in this way that the mourning part of wake work is compromised: 'how does one mourn the interminable event?' asks Sharpe (19). In *Joanne* Moodie's presencing is never finished – it is always catching up and predicting itself, both as an actor working hard to embody the next (last) piece of a string of disparate texts, and as a fiction catching up and predicting the last (next) actual loss of a life. The public service workers Moodie embodies are left behind, both by Joanne's death, and they are left behind in the course of the narrative; Moodie's evident 'morphing' on stage into other characters pulls the audience focus onto her body's new possession of/by the next, and correspondingly, dispossession of/by the last, character.

Moodie's wake work is miasmatic in the indeterminacies between characters, who leave trails in the space of performance, and on her body. A fluctuation of dramaturgical and performance techniques in *Joanne* coalesces as a miasma as Moodie, alone on stage, becomes dispossessed of several texts – sometimes abruptly, sometimes lyrically – and she makes breaks always evident; the mute morphing on stage is evident. A gesture of Becky's reminds us of Grace. These are unsettling, miasmatic moments: if Moodie is unsettled, so is the procession of one monologue fluidly to the next, and so is, in part at least, the proposal of a universalizing narrative

resolution to the social problems tackled by the production. It is why *Joanne*'s work haunts the law, and one way to mourn an interminable event of necropolitical social violence.

In this section, 'Miasmatic Investigations', I have explored how *Joanne* and *Charged* each propose a model of the carceral imaginary, in which multiple perspectives converge in a macro-framework of carcerality that includes punishment, discipline and death, but also redemption, hope and resistance. These multiple sensibilities in each production are maintained through large coalitions of writers, performers and directors; the tension between individual and collective overtly permeates the framework of both productions and is critical to understanding how the carceral imaginary works in carceral society. Miasmatically, these productions each question linear causality in the criminal justice system. In Chapter Five, the prejudices and pitfalls of case format come under stark exposure, as audiences for *Charged* are summoned to investigate a case without a crime. The 'case' under consideration becomes one of criminalisation through social stigma itself. In the sixth and final chapter on *Joanne*, an investigation into a death is prevented from becoming typified by case structure, wavering into séance and wake work. This destabilised genre work draws attention to the state's reliance on necropower and abandonment to continue to discipline citizens post-release from prison. The productions in this section, therefore, drive hard at waking audiences inured to mass mediatised carceral narrative by involving them in live proximity to a deconstructed, shifting case structure.

## Conclusion

### **Do you have to let it linger?**

*‘If you, if you could return...’* keens Dolores O’Riordan’s voice in The Cranberries classic from 1993. ‘Don’t let it burn... don’t let it fade... You’ve got me wrapped around your finger.’ She is in so deep, she pleads: ‘Do you have to, do you have to let it linger?’

These days, as the coronavirus sweeps across nations, and people around the globe cope with the conditions of lockdown, there is much talk of never returning. Of a world that will never be the same again. So, if we could return? I hope we would let some of it burn and fade, starting with incarceration and policing.

When we don’t know if we can return, what do we want to (not) let linger? Put differently, when worlds seem long gone, or never to arrive, what does miasma have to teach us about lingering in what is here? If we can say one thing about miasma, it is that it is the ultimate lingerer, even that it extends at every opportunity to malingering. It is the return that you never thought possible, and happening all the time. The great skill of miasma is to masquerade as a discredited, long-gone, even folkloric concept; when it becomes miasmatic performance, I have suggested, miasma’s power is to reveal that what was thought never to return, not only persists, but continues to regulate contemporary life.

To linger, miasmatically, proposes a way to attune to conditions of living, and dying, in ways that surpass normative modes of ‘thinking’ we know what’s here and isn’t here; and most especially, what we think isn’t here, but is over there somewhere. Miasmatic lingering causes us to feel, and also to think and un/know, through multiple temporalities, atmospheres, and emotions. Through miasma, I have

proposed, we experience structural, stratified power, what has us ‘wrapped around its finger’, as intensely local, and collective, and personal.

In pursuit of a last linger, in these closing thoughts on the Clean Break’s work and miasmatic performance, I want to return briefly to the building where my entanglement with this company began, and where the first notions of miasmatic performance began to drift around in my mind. It has been almost a decade since I first walked up the cobbled alleyway to Clean Break’s studios in London’s northwest borough of Kentish Town, that ‘odious swamp’, as Mary Shelley once wonderfully called it. (She lived only one street over on Bartholomew Road.)

*Head down Kentish Town Road from the tube station, and take a left on Patshull Road. Next to the Jobcentre, you’ll see a little alleyway. Go all the way down the alleyway. Clean Break has the big wooden gates at the end. Ring the bell and we’ll buzz you in.* Clean Break’s studios are an open secret in Kentish Town. They can be hard to find, and when found, have something of a protected rampart about them, with impossible-to-scale solid gates (I’ve tested them out). It may appear counterintuitive, and in some ways it is, to have such a foreboding perimeter guarding studios in which theatre is taught and practiced precisely on principles of personal freedom and social change. The gates provide a protection from real dangers – keeping the building invite-only is critical to keeping it a safe space for women who attend Clean Break’s theatre education programme, many of whom are the victims of crime themselves, and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. Yet the building is actually anything but cloistered: from the first floor up in any of the surrounding properties, there are unobscured views into the company’s gardens. A soundscape of laughter, chatting, singing and shouts from the women in the garden achieves a radical bounce off the surrounding walls.

Moving between insides and outsides of the company's building and garden grew the first tendrils of what became the present research, into the formation and dissipation of carceral atmospheres between audiences and performers. As General Manager it was my privilege (and, at times, exasperation!) to take care of Clean Break's building, fixing it, nurturing it, thinking about it and how it worked. Housed within a nineteenth century factory, Clean Break's three studios host a programme of theatre education for women with experience of the criminal justice system: courses in costume, acting, playwriting, and devising, to stage management, stage design, make-up and lighting. When designing the studios, Clean Break's brief to the architects was to 'create a feel which was "non institutional", light and high quality – [in] contrast to the prison environment that many of Clean Break's participants have experienced' (Clean Break Press Release 2014). There are overt resistances to domains of discipline throughout the building: huge windows in the common areas, allowing for circulation of air, light and people, as well as many areas that are private, with no opportunity for observation.

In addition to these spatial efforts to facilitate free movement and creativity, the building carries a temporal echo of performance through its history affiliated to music and fashion, first as one of the many piano factories of Camden and Kentish Town from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and then as a tie factory in the early days of Christian Dior. When Clean Break purchased the premises in 1995, the building was derelict and long decommissioned as a source of employment for the community. This palimpsest of performance and discipline within Clean Break's building, therefore, is only meaningful when it is also considered as a continuum of precarious social conditions, between difficult conditions of factory work, lack of employment, and prisons for the working-class poor. Such a palimpsestual seepage

between architectural histories and environments becomes all the more miasmatic considering the overall situation of the building down what is today a privately-owned cobblestone alleyway, difficult to navigate for anyone with restricted mobility, where flytipping is a common occurrence.

British theatre director Joan Littlewood held a passionate belief that ‘good theatre draws the energies out of the place where it is and gives it back as *joie de vivre*’ (in Ezard and Billington 2002). In October 2014, out of the odious swamps of Kentish Town, students on Clean Break’s education programme devised and performed *This Is Where We’re From*, a promenade piece that took visitors through Clean Break’s building and gardens. The play was one of over 100 ‘Fun Palaces’ created around the UK to celebrate Joan Littlewood’s centenary. For *This Is Where We’re From*, the cast of twelve students researched and performed events from the lives of women who lived locally to Kentish Town and Camden: Mother Red Cap (a purported witch called ‘The Shrew of Kentish Town’), prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, and Edith Garrud, a martial-arts practicing suffragette who developed ‘suffrajitsu’ in the early 1900s. In the final musical number, created and performed with directors Suzy Davies and Vishni Velada-Billson, the ensemble gathered in the garden to sing: ‘It’s up to me / it’s up to you / to never stop trying / we’ll justify their struggle and strife.’

I thrilled to the sight of neighbours all around coming out onto their balconies to listen and watch the women perform. I thought of the astounding *fourteen* party wall property agreements these neighbours made, so Clean Break could build a centre to help women recover from their hardships, celebrate their lives and successes, support each other, and dream. And linger. Most of all I thought of the tremendous gift these women offered to their neighbours, in being here. The moment powerfully

demonstrated not only the support of Clean Break students in the immediate community, but a liminal convergence of community and criminal justice, buildings saturated with lived lives past and present, and – most of all – theatre’s ability to draw these strands into a crucible of performance that scrambles, reshapes, and reinvests perceptions of how women are caused to enter, and indefinitely remain, in the criminal justice system. In these ways, *This is Where We’re From* demonstrated the porosities, seepages and underminings of carceral power inherent to the performance aesthetics that I have developed in this thesis through the concept of miasmatic performance. It is also one of the sites of miasmatic performance where pleasure and hopefulness came through for me most palpably.

The touch of that moment envelops me. It lingers with me; it lingers with me in such a way that I can’t come away, nor would I want to. The lingering of miasmatic performance draws my body into awareness of carceral power. It implicates me in its structures; it implicates me in a resistance to those structures. As miasmatic performance, *This is Where We’re From* lingers with me every Thursday at 8pm in London over the past several weeks where, as in many parts of the world, we are in coronavirus lockdown. I lean out of my third-floor flat, over the back gardens. So do many of my neighbours. We’re clapping and whistling and shouting our support to carers, to National Health Service nurses, porters, doctors, paramedics and staff. We are whistling our support for migrant workers, delivery drivers, teachers and farmers.

We are, or at least I am, whooping with defiance at the negligence of the Conservative government, which has acted with extreme, and necropolitical, irresponsibility. In the coronavirus pandemic, the classist and racist politics of British government, like buboes of plague, have become shockingly evident (though they have been malingering for centuries). People of colour are becoming critically ill with



coronavirus at a rate of 35%, more than double the rate in the wider population. People living in poverty are now even more vulnerable to critical illness than ever before; in the UK, they were already four times more likely to die of preventable health concerns (Hirsch 2020). Afua Hirsch writes, ‘I wanted to believe the comforting thought that, when it comes to coronavirus, we are all in this together. That knowing we’re all equally at risk, we’re pulling together in the same direction, bearing the strain equally. ...To say coronavirus is a disease that does not discriminate is wishful thinking’ (2020). We are not fighting coronavirus on equal terms; and the same is true for the fight against carceral power. Miasmatic performance seeks to declare the ways in which viruses and prisons collude and collide. The women from Clean Break are not in the gardens below, as I hang out my window. Yet their message, ‘It’s up to me, it’s up to you’, hazes around the space.

Miasma, especially in its relationship to contagion, not only needs an audience – *it is* an audience. Miasmatic performance is concerned with how discredited notions, among them miasma itself, continue to inform and limit contemporary understandings of imprisonment, contagion and public space, and it seeks to point out seepages of carcerality through multiple discursive and aesthetic structures which, together, manifest fantasies of disorderly bodies. These fantasies leech through the social field, and despite their attempts to maintain non-porous boundaries, in this dispersion they in fact demonstrate the inherent failure of boundary walls to limit populations. This not to say that boundaries – of prison, of nations, among others – do not damage, threaten, and kill with frightening regularity: they do. They do it every day. Yet as I have endeavoured to discuss through my concept of miasmatic performance, to focus on the wall, and the penal institution, as the source or even as the ultimate performance of disciplinary mechanisms in society delivers only a

fraction of the approach needed to contend with carceral power.

To return to a question I posed in this thesis – what might a miasmatic model of efficacy involve? (Chapter Three): the challenge to applied theatre practice is how it can resist rhetorics of instrumentalisation. What is deeply miasmatic about Clean Break's theatre is that it puts the focus onto the audience as co-creative of carceral narratives; in doing this, it relieves social (and carceral) pressure on women with experience of the criminal justice system to hold responsibility for these narratives, or to 'rehabilitate' through them. One of the overall concerns of miasmatic performance is to prompt the question in audiences: How did we, as a society, get here? Further, rather than apportioning blame, how can we imagine and conspire a way out of this calamity? What is inspiring, stunning, righteous and radical about where we are and who we are right now – and how can we linger in that? How does this radical potential already linger in us, in our bodily responses at the theatre? As theatre practitioners, how can we activate this, return to it again?

Clean Break's theatre asks these questions when it plunges audiences into a collectively held social imaginary. Far from being an irrelevance of a bygone era, the discursive and material attributes of *Pests*, *Sweatbox*, *Dream Pill*, *Little on the inside*, *Charged* and *Joanne* suggest miasmatic thinking is fundamental to the way that contemporary British society operates. As waste, contagion, sweat, guts, ghosts and tears course through these productions, they create distended carceral ecologies that work to reveal social and legal conditioning in the audience.

Though beyond the framework of this thesis, I want to suggest here that the implications for miasmatic performance are rich for any performance practices that work with bodies and identities marginalised by white heteropatriarchy and hegemony. Most simply, miasmatic performance is about empowering atmospheres of

theatre to interpellate audiences into the social conditions that have created marginalisation. Though I have developed it here through a vector of women, crime and theatre, miasmatic performance is not *for* any one group but is an apparatus to combat social stigma in its tentacular violence and oppression. Throughout this thesis, I have located the inquiry of miasmatic performance in theorising the carceral function of theatre audiences who, as majority white and middle class, are themselves not routinely policed and criminalised. This carceral function of audiences becomes undermined when its fantasies become overwhelmingly re-presented, so intensely presented as to become aspirated into the atmosphere at the theatre. However, I encourage the indices of miasmatic performance to be broadened out, to develop; in fact this is crucial: the inquiry is about social fantasies of any kind, which contribute to public and private disempowerment for so-called ‘minority’ counterpublics.

In Section One, ‘Miasmatic Aesthetics’, I proposed aesthetics of decomposition and secretion as important lubricants or vents for miasmatic process to occur in the theatre. Through the carceral fantasy of *Pests*, collaborations between human and nonhuman animals, waste and language, conjure the extralegal and exclusionary forces of carceral power. Seepages and decompositions are powerfully at work within the prison van of *Sweatbox* in Chapter Two, but here the compressed space brings audiences into close confinement with carceral narrative. The performance in the van verges into reenactment, through which chrononormative temporalities of violence become secreted; a communal sweating of bodies labours under the miasma of this recognition, offering what I explore as an instance of *perfumative* resistance. The aesthetics delineated throughout this section pull on audiences’ imaginaries of waste and poverty, incarceration and the passage of time, manifested through seepage, decomposition and fluids. Their main function is to call

up the most extreme fantasy and drench it with the nascent, embodied awareness of the audience.

In Section Two, I turn to contagion, first through a consideration of how the audience know or unknow the conditions of carceral society. Through an examination of miasmatic crying at *Dream Pill* in Chapter Three, I question how these epistemologies of carcerality become communicated, transferred and transmitted at the theatre. As they become challenged by the unacceptable scenario of two girls trapped in sexual slavery, audiences' experience of grief and pain extends to a necropolitical mourning. However, miasmatic performance here also involves audiences in permeable collective with one another, carrying a hopeful potential. In Chapter Four, I move the consideration of necropolitics and contagion into the scenario of a *Little on the inside*, which was first presented as part of a double bill with *Dream Pill* in 2013. As audiences encounter the innocent girls of *Dream Pill*, followed by two adult women in prison in *Little on the inside*, played by the same actors, I extend miasmatic performance into a formal concern. Here theatre manipulates the conditions of one scenario into a consideration of how carceral society might determine a future for that scenario. The work gives the audience a crucial role in carrying that narrative to bearance, proposing outbreaks of fleshly language in the play as resistance to the policing algorithms which have been enticed from the audience's carceral imaginary by the play.

Section Three takes on how audiences interact with the dominant artistic form of the criminal justice system: the detective or police procedural. I ask: If theatre can be understood as doing a medium-specific form of casework, how does it do it? In order to answer this question, I first look to *Charged* in Chapter Five to elaborate the specific ways in which miasmatic performance draws on the carceral imaginary to

sustain a critique on how criminal identity becomes assigned in carceral society. As audiences for *Charged* are summoned to investigate a case without a crime, moving through spaces of staged risk and staged imprisonment, they clarify the role of the carceral imaginary in defining outcomes in the criminal justice system. In Chapter Six, *Joanne*, an investigation into a death is prevented from becoming typified by case structure, wavering into séance and wake work. The productions in this section drive hard at waking audiences inured to mass mediated carceral narrative by involving them in miasmatic proximity to – and complicity with – a deconstructed, shifting case structure.

Through a miasmatic register in these plays, live performance fosters, reveals, and combats the inter- and extralegal porosities of social stigma, prison, public health, and policing, as they emerge within performance practice and audience exchange. This is theatre that engages in what queer theorist Jack Halberstam calls a productive *failure to see like the state* (2011). Failing to see like the state means accessing and mobilising ‘unbounded forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order but with inspiration and unpredictability’ (2011, 10); Clean Break’s dramaturgy of carcerality, in a similar approach, frequently departs from the realm of prison as empirical sign, leaving it gestural and porous. The productions I have investigated in this research engage what Halberstam calls ‘new rationales for knowledge production, different aesthetic standards for ordering or disordering space, other modes of political engagement than those conjured by the liberal imagination’ (2011, 10) within the punitive turn.

Ultimately, these Clean Break productions draw attention to and confuse the audience’s desire to ‘think we know’ about what prison is for, and who it is for. They represent, in this way, a failed writ of habeas corpus, instead engaging audiences’

participation in the co-construction of criminal identity via performance strategies predicated on hazes, seepages, and bleeds of carcerality through bodily proximity to narratives of stuckness, surveillance, stigma and social contagion. In their dramaturgical lines and aesthetic provocations, the Clean Break productions I have discussed here are at the pinnacle of the company's prodigious ability to push the boundaries of theatre and criminal justice into embedded activism for change.

So: *Do you have to let it linger?*

In the case of miasma, the answer is yes. You do have to let it linger. But as this thesis has endeavoured to demonstrate, in miasmatic performance a lingering does not entrench the suffocations of corruption and power. Quite the opposite. Miasmatic performance is an open framework: as a seeping notion itself, diachronically assembled, it is allied to atmospheric transgressions of any kind. Above all, miasmatic performance resists taxonomies of difference and deviance, preferring an invigorating, maddening, discredited cloud of mutating citations.

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