



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

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## CORACLES, CASTANETS, CADAQUÉS

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This ReView takes the form of a theatrical script written for the stage. It is a ReView of a series of therapy sessions that took place two years ago, over a period of seven months. The therapeutic encounter unwittingly repeated what might be called the *sonic dramaturgical form* of past events and actions from everyday life. While the therapy sessions were spent discussing my relationship to experiences happening in the present, my somatic feelings approximated a kind of auditory *déjà vu*. That is, in the therapeutic encounter my bodily sensations took the paradoxical shape of an old musical loop with new notes: the tune was vaguely familiar, but the new notes left me constantly guessing as to when I may have first heard the tune, or if I was hearing it for the first time in my therapy sessions.

Psychoanalysis offers one paradigm for understanding this experience. It is the interrelation of trauma with the repetition compulsion. It goes something like this: we repeat our traumatic experiences unconsciously as a way to rewrite history. The problem is not with the attempt to rewrite. To me, the pain or problem comes from the inability to understand that a repetition is occurring at all. The additional complication is that this unwitting repetition is understood as a compulsion to rewrite *trauma* while we are all the time standing inside of it—a kind of immanent critique gone awry. What is it to rewrite history when a past “event” never presents itself as a narrative or a series of visual images? How does the repetition compulsion “work” if there is no origin story for trauma that will stay put?

An alternative to considering past events as discrete images or narratives to be recalled, is to think about them as continuous sound formations. In some respects, this is a challenge both to our stubborn persistence on using Euclidean visual space to map our relationship to time, and to traditional theories in psychoanalytic philosophy because of the long history of the relationship between psychoanalysis and narrative (Freud), and psychoanalysis and archetypes (Jung). What if our philosophical inquiry was to begin with auditory perception and did not default to visually-based models of knowledge-production? As Walter Ong reminds us, unlike visual images, “there is no way to stop sound and have sound.” Sound, in other words, lives in fulltime present awareness. “All sensation takes place in time, but no other sensory field totally resists a holding action, stabilization, in quite this way” (Ong 1982, 32). What is it to see in auditory space, to see with our ears? How does this story tell different stories about our movement in psychophysiological space and the way it produces our affects and actions? In “The Future of Music: Credo,” John Cage writes: “the principle of form will be our only constant connection with the past. Although the great form of the future will not be as it was in the past, at one time the fugue and at another the sonata, it will be related as they are to each other” ([1958] 2013, 5–6). This ReView cannot revisit history in images, which is the paradox at the center of this image-laden performance.

One of the ways that new content was generated in the therapeutic context was in my surprisingly literal manifestations of what psychoanalysis calls transference. Typically, transference is the redirection of desires and feelings—especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood—toward a new object. Perhaps both my performance and research training predisposed my imagination to be analogous to the stage, which is both literal and metaphorical: I started “transferring” important works of art onto my therapist. The most important artwork (that you will come upon in the performance extract below) was a Byzantine Icon I had recently written about in relation to sound: Christ Pantocrator (Gough 2016). My therapist began moving like the painting; the painting sounded like him. It was here I had my first experiences with synesthesia as an embodied reality and not a subjunctive metaphor.

Ultimately, the therapeutic relationship disintegrated for reasons that were never able to be resolved or revealed, but the loop continued. Since this sonic hyperarousal persisted, I decided to turn a keen dramaturgical ear to the auditory qualities that had shaped my somatic stories of hurt into sublime images. In the ReView included below, Act I of *Coracles, Castanets, Cadaqués*, you’ll hear the WRITER describe the theory of complementarity developed in the field of physics by Niels Bohr: “you can recognize a deep truth by the feature that its opposite is also a deep truth” (Wilczek 2015, 52). One of the most profound aspects of Bohr’s theory is the idea that both “deep truths” can be meaningful and informative, but it is impossible to apply them both at once. In this theatrical ReView of my therapeutic encounter, psychopathology is looped with a psycho-spiritual encounter: our wounds that never heal are our encounters with creation and imagination. *Enter THEATRE stage right.*

## CHARACTERS in ACT I

KATIE	female; 40s; theatre professor living in Burlington, VT who begins writing a play because of the preternatural experiences that take place in her therapist's office
MARK	male; late 40s/early 50s; Katie's therapist; type-A; formal but with some boundary issues
ACTOR A	male; plays: BRITISH THEATRE PROFESSOR, ALLEGORICAL FIGURE (LONELINESS), DANCER
ACTOR B	female; plays: ALLEGORICAL FIGURE (NARCISSISM), DANCER
ACTOR C	female/gender neutral; plays: TIGER, ALLEGORICAL FIGURE (CONTROL), DANCER

*(Scene begins with William Blake's Tyger on the screen, and a white light on an empty podium. KATIE goes to podium, hits the "play" button on an iPad and then opens an oversize book labelled "JOURNAL"; the voice we hear is the recorded voice of the "WRITER" (KATIE's inner voice) which is almost an iconic voice which indicates KATIE's flair for the dramatic: think Maya Angelou or Patti Smith. KATIE then lays down on a couch center stage. ACTOR C as TIGER appears on stage—just walks around, checks out the audience, is both weird/creepy and funny like a trickster figure. KATIE doesn't notice—and won't notice—TIGER until ACT III. MARK is the third person to arrive on stage in quick succession and takes a seat in a comfy looking office chair.)*



William Blake, "Tyger" (1795). British Museum, William Blake Archive: Collected in Songs of Experience.

WRITER

I had only been to see him one time when I had the dream. I think it happened because I was there. It was time.

MARK'S VOICE

"Maybe the tiger never left,"

WRITER

he said, about seven months later, when I had the dream a second time. But his return this time was different. The tiger wasn't me, or wasn't only me. Tiger arrived to visit me during a silent meditation retreat. I woke up on day three, eyes wide open, and whispered softly to myself:

*(creepy whisper with electronic echo)*

"the tiger is back."

*(Beat)*

I was a teensy bit reticent to say anything to Mark. Mark's an important character in this story so I thought I should give him a name. I knew he'd say something to the effect that:

MARK'S VOICE

"Everything or everyone in our dreams is a version of ourselves."

WRITER

And then I'd say something like: "that's nice, but it's also a rabbit, or Marcel Duchamp, or a bus, or a tiger using its paw to get into my parents' kitchen door,

*(next part is said in staccato, more than a hint of frustration)*

and I'm in the kitchen and the tiger is not me because it's the fucking tiger!" But when he said things like this, I didn't actually say what I was thinking. I mean, does anyone *really* do that in therapy? I smiled politely and nodded my head in a well-mannered passive aggressive way. He did this too.

*(KATIE and MARK get up and circle each other around the podium slowly—three steps forward, one step back, repeat during the following monologue)*

At first I very rarely saw eye to eye with him. But that may be because my eyes had started turning into ears. That's when I knew we had been fighting for over a month.

*(Beat)*

This is something the tiger and I have in common: both of us have a weirdly acute sense of hearing.

*(TIGER on stage demonstrates this next part)*

A tiger's ears can swivel around like a radar dish honing in on subtle sounds around him. He doesn't need his eyes to track his prey. I think he gave me his mad skillz when I was with Mark, but I'll get to that later. Back to the tiger.

*(TIGER joins this two-person conga line behind KATIE—she never notices but MARK is behind TIGER, alarmed at first; he keeps a close eye on him)*

Now don't fret. I promise this is not going to be like some stage version of the *Life of Pi*. This tiger is not Richard Parker, and he's not god, and he's not even allegorical. Well, maybe a little allegorical in that he says other than what he means and means other than what he says. Actually, he doesn't say anything, but you know what I mean. I didn't grow up in India and my family didn't own a zoo. I've never actually seen a tiger in real life.

*(Just before TIGER is about to attack KATIE, she hears a noise like a tiger growling, but can't be sure; then MARK pushes TIGER to the side of the stage just before she notices)*

KATIE

*(pauses the recording on the iPad)*

What is it?

MARK

*(thinking quickly)*

You've changed your inner voice this week.

KATIE

Yes. I thought I'd mix it up a little. Make it a bit more theatrical. Why?

MARK

*(gives a sneaky side eye to TIGER)*

Nothing. I like it.

KATIE

Can we just listen to the end of the audio thought bubble, please? It's not much longer. Then you can talk. Alright?

MARK

You mean then *you* can talk?

KATIE

*(quizzical, slightly frustrated stare at MARK)*

Sure. Whatever.

*(hits play on the iPad)*

*(TIGER moves things around during the recording: changes the location of props or furniture. KATIE is oblivious, involved with listening to her thought bubble; MARK pays careful attention to the TIGER and attempts to put things back where they belong.)*

WRITER

There's this theory in physics called *complementarity*, which means that you can recognize a deep truth by the feature that its opposite is also a deep truth. Sometimes it's useful to think of this truth in one way, and sometimes it's useful to think of it in another. Both ways can be deeply meaningful and informative in different circumstances. But it's impossible...uhh... I hope I'm getting the theory right. Yes! It's impossible to apply them both at once. I'm telling you all of this so that you feel some comfort in knowing that this performance is based on a very important scientific theory in the world of quantum mechanics.<sup>1</sup>

*(Beat)*

I can't guarantee that in this performance I can give you a cathartic Scooby Doo ending so that we all understand it was Mr. Withers in the amusement park all along, because this tiger is a shape-shifter. And even though he keeps popping up like a bad penny,

*(TIGER looks up, pissed off, then exits)*

you put up with him and even find a kind of weird comfort in his visits...

*(Lights change—KATIE notices audience for the first time. MARK stays on stage. When she's not speaking directly to MARK, he does what a therapist does—he's like a one-person on-stage audience who sometimes participates.)*

KATIE

*(Walks around, says hello to audience, gets a sense of the space—like she's used to being behind the scenes)*

This is a play that I started to inhabit in my therapist's office. But I didn't know I was living inside a play. I thought it was just therapy. But then shit started to get real. Like really real. Like theatre.

*(Spotlight here at the phrase "like theatre" that is first on KATIE and pans to MARK when she addresses him)*

I think the rising action for the whole therapy-turned-performance began on the day I looked at my therapist and told him,

*(turns to MARK)*

"You know, you kind of remind me of a Byzantine icon I've been studying."

MARK

First time for everything...

KATIE

As soon as I blurted it out, I thought: fuuucck, my brother is right. I do always sound like a character in a Wes Anderson film. Full disclosure: I think that almost everything in the world functions like a play, and that if we just know what genre we're inhabiting when acting out different moments in our lives we can figure out *a lot* about what's going on around us. You know how when an event occurs and you say something like "This is melodramatic, or this is surreal, or this farcical, or this is *tragic!*" Investigate that. It might be that you have stumbled into a story that has particular conventions that you can't escape if you stay in that genre because that's how the genre works. Those are the rules of engagement. If you want to change stories you probably need to change genres. This is how I figured out that Mark was behaving like a medieval icon. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Before I get to the really real I need to back up to tell you a story about medieval art. And Byzantine icons. Because they're a bit like unicorns.

*(Sound design includes They Might Be Giants "Istanbul (not Constantinople)"; ACTORS A, B, and C dressed as Flamenco dancers (1) and Whirling Dervishes (2) appear on stage; images on screen include some of the mosaics inside Hagia Sophia. All of this will only appear on stage until KATIE says "Wait. Wait. Sorry"; everything will repeat later at greater length.)*

Byzantium. Constantinople. It surprises me that this is where my story begins, but it was kind of decided for me when my therapist started to move around the room like a Byzantine mosaic. We'll start in the seat of the Christian world that was also the seat of the Muslim world. But this is before it was Istanbul. This is Constantinople. Wait. Wait. Sorry. Just before I get to Constantinople I need to take you there by way of Italy.

*(Song "Istanbul (not Constantinople)" is replaced by "La Donna E Mobile" from Rigoletto; pianissimo to begin and growing annoying, sentimental and loud.)*

It's the Summer of 2012 and I'm in Assisi with my best friend.

*(music too obnoxious to continue)*

Seriously? Stop it.

*(“La Donna E Mobile” ends and turns into Gregorian chanting, perhaps mixed with Steve Reich’s “Proverb”—it should provide a kind of rhythmic score for the story)*

Okay. It’s the summer of 2012 and I’m in Assisi with my best friend. I was living in Scotland, my best friend lives in San Francisco, and she has family who live on an olive farm outside of Rome. I know. Right? So there we were in Assisi after an adventurous road trip accompanied by a GPS that went on strike in sympathy with the railway workers.

*(As the next part is spoken, an image of the Porziuncola appears on screen and the lighting on stage approximates that of a dimly lit chapel.)*



*Image 2: Tavolo di Prete Ilario di Viterbo (1393), Altarpiece in the Porziuncola, Assisi. Photo © Adrian Fletcher, 2012.*

Somewhat by accident we found ourselves inside this tiny chapel called the Porziuncola (which means little portion of land) along with two hardcore German Catholic tourists. You know what I’m talking about: full-on-wooden-crosses-on-the-back-pious-looking-uber-pilgrims. So this Porziuncola is inside the Basilica of Santa Maria of the Angels. This is where the Franciscan movement started—with St. Francis’ make me a channel of your peace, tame the wolves, and feed



the doves philosophy. There's one of those super trippy 13<sup>th</sup> century medieval frescos inside the chapel over the altar.

*(MARK uses a pointer to direct audience to the image of the Annunciation KATIE is discussing)*

The image that stuck with me was the Annunciation. You know, when the angel Gabriel tells Mary she will give birth to the son of God? I mean, seriously, that's a game-changer. Imagine being Mary: you might think that Gabriel is the mayor of crazy town, until you realize that Gabriel's an angel who decided to stop by for a chat one evening while you were reading a book and announce your upcoming virgin birth, so the only resident of crazy town in the room is *you*.

Immediately I decided I wanted to start writing about medieval art. I didn't know anything about medieval art, but it has always fascinated me: Why were the images flat? Why was there so much acid-trippy doodling between pictures? Why did most people dress like a cast member in *Jesus Christ Superstar*? Mostly, the medieval era is the last historical moment where I find Christianity really interesting. It is the last time that mystics roamed the earth in great number without being medicated or placed in insane asylums. I think that this magical relationship to the celestial world is still felt in the mind-bending ways they painted—that the paintings still give us access to the magic...

*(She is lost in thought; MARK hurries her along)*  
*(TO MARK)*

Ok. God, you're so impatient.

*(To Audience)*

So here's some stuff I learned. Oh yeah, I guess I should mention that I teach theatre history for a living. Geeking out to tell you things is an occupational hazard. Ok. For medieval peeps, the physical world wasn't all that interesting. Just kind of so-so. Maybe this had to do with all the fighting and famine and plagues and whatnot (kind of like now), but the spiritual realm was the primary reality. This world, this physical world happening in real time and space with me talking to you—this is just a metaphor for a much more mysterious reality.

*(Beat)*

I mean, I know, I know this is theatre so this really IS a metaphor, but for the medievals, the "all the world's a stage and we are merely actors" was real—maybe in part because Shakespeare hadn't even written this line yet. They were post-premodern that way.

Another thing: Medieval people liked their paintings. They weren't dragging their knuckles and hitting their heads against a wall thinking "Why can't I make a house look like a house?" Or "Why do I keep making Jesus bigger than the peasants he feeds?" Or "Why is that saint's face so flat?" No, surprisingly. The medieval artists were making a cultural choice about what they found to be

important. They didn't paint in some flat 2-D style because they were stupid. They were simply not interested in portraying the concrete three-dimensional world.

*(Beat; looks to audience)*

Okay, now that we understand *that*, we're ready to go to Constantinople.

*(Loop Gregorian Chant to song "Istanbul (not Constantinople)"; return to the original Istanbul (not Constantinople) "number"; ACTORS A, B, and C as dancers also return and fill the stage with festive atmosphere for about 15 seconds, then exit)*



*Image 3: Christ Pantocrator Deësis (c. 1261), Hagia Sophia.*

This is a picture of the Byzantine Icon I was studying.

*(Image of the Christ Pantocrator appears)*

You know, the one that reminded me of my therapist? This one is called “Christ Pantocrator.”

*(Staring at image)*

Yeah, I already get how loaded it is that this image reminded me of my therapist. You should have seen his expression when I told him.

*(looks to MARK, playful)*

But it wasn't that the image so much reminded me of him -- well, maybe a little -- but the image *sounded* like him.

*(Beat)*

Maybe I should stop here to read part of the “Dear Mark” email I sent him. What do you think? I wrote, like, 27 “Dear Mark” letters which were meant mostly for myself. Over the course of seven months, I sent him two. This is an excerpt from the first one. This is when shit started to get real.

*(TIGER circles the performance area. KATIE accesses the email on her iPad which is on the podium; when WRITER returns as voice over perhaps email is projected onto the screen.)*

KATIE

Dear Mark, “Greetings...” Then blah blah blah “Crazy shit happening...” “Emotional ups and downs in the past couple weeks....” Okay, here it is:

*(WRITER returns as voice over; MARK begins by reading the email silently as the audience listens; TIGER enters and reads over his shoulder. A very subtle soundscape begins here and doesn't end until KATIE says “and then something stopped my mind.”)*

WRITER

“I have felt all along that there are two simultaneous conversations taking place in our sessions, and I have found it really disquieting: there is all the stuff I talk about (the “real stuff,” which I guess it is in a way), and then there is this subterranean conversation that I can explain more when I see you. The best way I can describe it is that it feels like shadowboxing.

*(During next section there is choreographed movement between TIGER and MARK which, along with the soundscape, helps illustrate a sense of synesthesia.)*

This past week, I became aware of a really weird feature in my memory of our weekly therapy sessions: from week to week I can't remember the shape and size of your office, or exactly what it looks like. Every week I come in and take note as if for the first time: oh yes, there *is* a bookcase; *that's* what his desk looks like; oh shit, there's no corner there to hide like I was hoping there might be this week. While I know that you always sit in the same place in our meetings—in a chair in front of me at a neutral distance—that's not how I remember it. The room expands and contracts in my memory, and this has to do with how close, or far away, or at what angle you choose to hear me

during a particular session (where an emotional angle becomes a physical angle in my perception). It's as if we inhabit auditory space: where hearing me instead of seeing me is the most important thing.

Sometimes you seem very far away, and frustrated, and the office becomes cavernous, like it is echoing. But last week I felt that you were sitting close, but at an angle so that I saw you in profile with your right ear in the foreground. I've been seeing you up close, far away and at a variety of different angles and it keeps changing the shape and size of your office. I've been writing about sound for the past two years, but I never realized until this past week that I started to inhabit the world as an auditory space a couple years ago when I began having daily panic attacks, and continued to have the sensorial experience of there being no solid ground. So I just try to listen deeply to feel if I'm connecting." ...

*(TIGER exits; lights up)*

KATIE

And then the overlong email continues. I thought this might be a good way to give him some advanced notice before I told him he reminded me of the Byzantine Icon. I'm sure you'll agree that finding the right way to tell your therapist he reminds you of an image of Christ without having him hit the panic button, or inflating his ego in all sorts of unproductive ways is a wee bit of a challenge.

*(Beat)*

I should say that I didn't even know if I really wanted to be in therapy with this person. I was ambivalent but also desperate for help. He wasn't overly friendly. When I walked into his office on the first day, and told him about my paralyzing loneliness—like the kind that doesn't go away even in company, the kind that feels like a disease, the kind where you avoid people or they avoid you because either you or them think it might be contagious—he asked me ... Mark, do you want to tell the kind audience what you asked me?

MARK

Hmm.

*(trying to remember)*

Do you think it's your karma?

KATIE

Yes. That is what you asked. I thought that this was such an odd question to ask a stranger on the first day of therapy that I decided to stay. My self-preservation instincts were still in development at the time.

*(Turning back to the audience)*

Remember when I told you that I think that most of life operates like a play, and that if we understand what genre we've been moving in we can figure out a lot about what's going on in our life? Yeah? When I started speaking to Mark I was teaching medieval morality plays to theatre history students. I had only been living in Vermont for six months. During that time, I had been on a handful of dates that started to fit the pattern that was oddly aligned with the morality play tradition—where everyone represents a virtue or a vice.

So, naturally, the dramaturge in me started to attempt to figure out what had been happening in my life by sketching out current events as a medieval morality play. I had already cast myself as bewildered ego, the protagonist, and these different male-people from my real life

*(three ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS arrive on stage)*

—let's call them allegorical figures—started to arrive to the stage in order to play the different vices. Let's call them:

*(ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS speak in a way most befitting of the quality they represent)*

ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER / ACTOR A

Loneliness.

ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER / ACTOR B

Narcissism.

ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER / ACTOR C

Control.

KATIE

But I couldn't find a pattern for the subterranean relationship I was having with Mark because it was a relationship that I had never had to name.

MARK

*(Confessional aside to audience)*

She tried to talk to me about the confusing feelings she was having, terrified that they might be romantic feelings.

KATIE

*(interrupting)*

You see, Mark is difficult and cold, and I have a long history with difficult and cold male people.

MARK

I was the only person who she admitted these feelings to...

KATIE

And what did you do, Mark?

MARK

*(Long beat; before he speaks the audience needs to see MARK do what the line says)*

I froze...

KATIE

*(to MARK)*

...Just decided that therapy was not the place to be discussing feelings. It was very New England of you.

*(KATIE registers hurt, then returns to addressing audience directly)*

Anyway, the more I thought about what part Mark might be playing in this medieval morality play, the more confusing it got. Then I started replaying in my memory the last conversation we had in his office. At one point he threw his hands up in the air, and said:

MARK

"Wake up! Your romantic feelings are not why you are here!"

KATIE

And I yelled: "How the fuck do you know why I'm here?"

*(quieter now)*

Seriously. Do you know why I'm here?

*(to MARK)*

I really wanted to know if you knew why I was there. The truth is ...

*(notices the ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS are still on stage listening to her)*

ummm, I don't know

*(turns to ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS)*

Oh, sorry guys. You can go now. Thanks. Great job. Way to work the vices!

*(Waves goodbye; long beat)*

So...the memory of this conversation with Mark totally alarmed me because//

MARK

*(He's still cautious/confused/concerned about this past experience)*

//because we never spoke to each other this way.

KATIE

Then something stopped my mind.

*(the subtle soundscape throughout this scene stops abruptly; everything becomes deathly quiet)*

It was his location in the office when we were fighting.

*(MARK runs around the space attempting to demonstrate)*

Mark was located near a wall where he never sits, at a desk and filing cabinet that may or may not be in his office—I could never quite get a factual accounting of the office contents. This conversation happened in silence while we were having a conversation about my neuroses, and I knew it wasn't just my imagination.

*(The next phrase is said in the same creepy whisper as "the tiger is back" from the opening scene)*

*It was as real as trees.* I had never thought that something that seemed almost mystical could feel so traumatic. Or, that trauma could activate what felt like mystical experiences.

*(Beat; wondering out loud to MARK)*

Mark, do you think it's possible that medieval mystics were really trauma victims?

MARK

*(totally frustrated that KATIE might once again attempt to turn her psychopathology into an historical examination. His frustration—exhibited through choreographed movement here—leads into the next section where the exhilarating and terrifying experience of something like emotional synesthesia happens. KATIE might be in her chair moving slightly but only in relation to how Mark is moving and gesticulating. He's down a corridor; then, near the door with his hand on the door handle and then in the air, eyes rolling; then a hugely oversized right ear enters the stage very close to where KATIE is sitting; etc., etc)*

*(For this section the sound has to be loud and layered or simultaneous—a mixture of two people talking that is sometimes difficult—like pulling teeth—and sometimes you can hear laughter and certain things stick out like “ex-priest,” “week of the dead dads,” “paralyzing loneliness,” “Dusty Springfield,” “Footwashing for the sole,” “Byzantine Icon,” “Disintegration Loops,” “lots of follow-up questions,” “Censorship,” “So much judgment,” “Boring you”)*

KATIE

*(shouts loudly; visibly upset; pushes MARK without quite realizing it)*

**BASTA! Ennuuuuff!**

*(she's surprised by her own outburst; attempts to regain composure, then quietly, apologetically)*

**I can't yet.**

*(closes her eyes; as she does TIGER comes up beside her but she doesn't notice; long beat and then TIGER leaves as KATIE says: )*

**It's too soon.**

*(Lights change—MARK brings a coracle to the center of the playing area and KATIE sits inside of it; MARK then sits in his office chair stage right and watches this scene from a distance. TIGER comes up behind MARK and watches with him. Sound of water, maybe the Radio 4 shipping forecast is mixed in to the sound design; then castanets, Flamenco sounds begin, subtly at first and then rhythm becomes louder)*

In 2013, exactly 12 months after I visited Assisi, I was on a tour that left Barcelona and went all the way out to Cadaqués—where Salvador Dalí lived, and where I was going to take a tour of his house.

*(vacation photos appear on screen)*





*Image 4: Salvador Dalí House with egg on top. Portlligat, Cadaqués. Photo by author (2013).*



*Image 5: Bear inside the entranceway to the Salvador Dalí House. Portlligat, Cadaqués. Photo by author (2013).*



*Image 6: Katie poolside at Salvador Dalí House. Portlligat, Cadaqués. Photo by author (2013).*

Here's an egg on top of his house; here's a picture of the bear that greeted me as I entered his house; and here's a picture of me sitting poolside at Casa de Dalí. As the tour was about to leave Barcelona I met a man who teaches theatre in England.

*(actor arrives on stage gesturing—a bit campy, a bit drunk, kind and very animated)*

He arrived to the designated location waving to people he may or may not have known, and while I couldn't be *too* sure, he appeared to still be the merest smidge drunk from a party the night before. Since I like people who are a little bit messy, we became best friends immediately and didn't stop talking for the next twelve hours.

*(ACTOR A as THEATRE PROFESSOR and KATIE sit next to each other in the coracle, pantomiming being passengers on a bus; THEATRE PROFESSOR remains animated, doing things that make KATIE laugh through the next bit of the story)*

On the bus I remember he told me this hilarious story about castanets...

THEATRE PROFESSOR

Sabela, a dancer friend who's from Northern Spain was auditioning for a performance program in London. Maybe at Central? Or RADA? Doesn't matter. Anyway, she was asked—quite out of the blue—to do a little Flamenco number, and someone called out to someone else to find her some castanets. She was totally bewildered. She hadn't a clue how to dance Flamenco and play the castanets, which, my dear, happens in southern Spain.

*(Patronizing but funny)*

Did you know that? Well, excuussee me but you are American.

*(Beat; pantomime bus going over a large pothole)*

The members of the audition panel couldn't *believe* she didn't know, laughed as if they were in on her joke, and called again for someone to bring her some castanets.

*(He pretends to play castanets and stands up to dance flamenco in his seat—poorly)*

*(Shipping forecast, water sounds return. A low table and two cushions for sitting placed inside the coracle; KATIE and THEATRE PROFESSOR sit on the cushions.)*

KATIE

*(to audience)*

We returned to Barcelona 12 hours later. Over dinner, I told him that the reason I think I was compelled to study medieval art is because it lacks perspective and orientation, and that it matches

the feelings I'd been having for the last year—the panic, the disorientation with the ground. He said:

THEATRE PROFESSOR

*(to KATIE)*

It sounds as if you have been attempting to navigate from inside a coracle.

KATIE

*(confused; doesn't know the word "coracle"; gives a slight Scooby Doo head tilt)*

THEATRE PROFESSOR

*(to KATIE)*

Yes? Coracle? A medieval boat? Ah, my dear: Coracles have been in use since about the sixth century. They were heavily used in Celtic regions: Ireland, Wales and the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. Oval in shape and very similar to half a walnut shell, the structure is made of a framework of leather, as well as interwoven foraged wood tied with rope made of animal hair.

KATIE

*(to THEATRE PROFESSOR)*

So you're telling me that they have no front or back?

THEATRE PROFESSOR

*(to KATIE)*

Exactly. The boat of leather and foraged wood may seem to moderns a very unsafe vehicle to trust to tempestuous seas—and it is! But our forefathers fearlessly committed themselves to these precarious vehicles, and to the mercy of the most violent weather.

KATIE

*(to audience)*

Thanks to my ex-husband, whose name is the Gaelic word for seafarer, I had spent a lot of time in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. I have many memories of traveling in vehicles not fit for purpose—like riding a bike into the wind only to find I had turned into a cartoon character who peddled, but did not move. Or the times we used the windshield wipers on the car to clear away the waves from the sea as we were crossing the causeway on winter mornings. Despite myself, I fell in love with these little boats immediately, these coracles. It seemed so important that I knew about them—to

know that others had committed themselves to indirection, had somehow accepted—even reluctantly—that we actually have control over so very, very little. Then I parted company with my medieval surrealist companion and I never saw him again. Just like magic.

*(Surrealistic montage of images and bodies: coracle; ACTORS A and B as flamenco dancer and whirling dervish; Annunciation Fresco; Christ Pantocrator; vacation photos; ACTOR C as TIGER; image of tiger's tale that becomes a flame and then black out.)*

## End of Act I

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This description of “complementarity” is found in Wilczek (2015).

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## Biography

Kathleen Gough is an Associate Professor and resident dramaturge in the Department of Theatre at the University of Vermont. Her monograph, *Kinship and Performance in the Black and Green Atlantic: Haptic Allegories* (2013) won the 2014 Errol Hill Award for Outstanding Scholarship in African American Theatre & Performance from ASTR. Currently she is investigating how theories of sound and image as they are conceptualized in Byzantine and medieval European culture can be put to greater critical use in understanding current trends in contemporary experimental performance. Thanks to a Vermont Artist Space Grant from the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts and a Summer Research Grant from the Humanities Center and Office of Vice President at the University of Vermont, *Coracles, Castanets, Cadaqués* will have its first public reading/performance at the FlynnSpace in Burlington, VT in August 2017.

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