

Difficult Pasts and Revivals: Madrid Theatre Summer 2019



How do we make sense of a recent past where national events are bound up in a series of transnational currents? This question lies at the heart of Andrés Lima's "*Shock*" (*el cóndor y el puma*) (English title: "*Shock*" (*the condor and the puma*)), a piece written by Lima with Albert Boronat, Juan Cavestany and Juan Mayorga and loosely inspired by Naomi Klein's 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Lima takes Klein's argument that the free market feeds on disaster and that catastrophic events—whether financial, ecological, or military—provide an opportunity for the imposition of a neoliberal agenda. Linking Ewen Cameron's experiments in shock therapy in the 1950s as the site for wiping away the past to create a blank slate for a new personality to the idea of shock therapy at national level, Klein dissects the ways in which a crisis which leaves a populace in shock allows for traders to come in, and make sweeping ideological reforms that she terms "orchestrated raids on the public sphere." Deregulation, privatization, and cutbacks—effectively unrestricted economic freedom—have been unleashed as policies on populations in shock and therefore unable to respond as they might do in less chaotic circumstances. Economic freedom is rarely matched by political freedom. A crisis is effectively used to shut down discussion and the closing down of discussion effectively means the closing down of democracy.



Chaos as the excesses on the football pitch hide the horrors of the Argentine dictatorship in Andrés Lima's staging of *Shock* at the Centro Dramático Nacional's Teatro Valle-Inclán. Photo: Marcos Gpunto.

Lima does not “stage” the different examples of shock therapy delineated in *The Shock Doctrine*. Rather the piece focuses on mapping the development of shock therapy at McGill University in Canada, then its reformulation as an economic policy under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago in the 1970s and finally its operation—through Milton's Chilean graduate students—in Pinochet's Chile. Shock therapy in action in Chile (and subsequently Argentina) is positioned as part of Operation Condór, a program in which the dictatorships of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay collaborated to erase left-wing activists in each other's countries.

Beatriz San Juan provides a revolving central island, a constantly revolving circular turnstile which the six performers (taking on close to 40 roles) jump on and off. A props trolley and two smaller circular islands are moved across the space as needed. The audience is sat around the space in a rectangle that contains the performers, although on occasion they spill into the audience. The special configuration alludes both to the National Stadium in Santiago which served as a detention center in the aftermath of the Pinochet coup and the Monumental stadium where the 1978 World Cup Final was staged in Buenos Aires. It is as if we were inside these giant arenas and witnessed to the terrible actions therein. Four giant screens—on the two longer sides of the set—project images that engage with the performers' narration, at times illustrating points being made but most of the time entering into dialogue with the history that is being constructed by the actors. The link between Friedman and events in Chile is there from the piece's

very opening —Friedman’s larger than life image stares down at the audience from the screens, juxtaposed with Ramón Barea as Allende in the Moneda Palace battling the coup that is taking shape around him.

Acts of brutality and open warfare are juxtaposed with the “behind closed doors” arrangements that saw Ewen Cameron present his findings at McGill University on shock therapy to a receptive audience that included the CIA. Discussions are held around a table with whiskey and cigarettes. Juan Vinesa mimes Friedman’s words from the central turnstiles, a faceless figure—his facial features have been erased by a flesh-colored nylon skin-like mask on which Friedman’s signature glasses protrude. This early scene, authored by Juan Cavestany, creates a sense of men doing business—handshakes, drinks around a table, the coded language of commerce. There’s a dizzying sense of excitement as the table spins, the feverish conversations overlap and the sense of danger increases. Eduardo Galeano once observed that “The Theories of Milton Friedman give him the Nobel Prize; they have given Chile General Pinochet.” The video footage of the protests that accompany the Nobel ceremony evidences the “other” side to the euphoria that was witnessed around the table.

The piece moves across varied artistic registers. There are moments that are pure music hall. Ernesto Alterio’s Elvis Presley offers himself as an ambassador for Nixon’s vision of freedom, weaving his way through the politicians he wants to ingratiate himself with. He makes an attempt to seduce audience members—all sunglasses, ruffled shirt and black jacket—and teeters across the stage like an inebriated adolescent. The sequence is followed by projected black and white images of Elvis with Nixon. The production frequently follows an enacted scene with documentary images of the historical figures who have inspired the action. It serves to ground the action within a very specific context whatever the performance style is.

The 1978 World Cup engenders more vaudeville. Videla performs for the cameras—Ernesto Videla takes on the role, a telling choice in that Alterio’s family left Argentina for Spain to escape the dictatorship. Alterio, sporting an extravagant curly wig, also dribbles the ball across the stage as legendary striker Mario Kempes who scored twice in the 1978 World Cup Final at the Monumental Stadium, River Plate’s home ground, while thousands were tortured in the ESMA school, less than a mile away. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo with their headscarves speak to the “other” events that the *junta* tried to keep silence. The trashed stage at the end of the scene presents the trashing of the nation by the military dictatorship.

There is a strong Brechtian element to the piece. Props are brought center stage and openly deployed in role changes. Actors step out to address the audience about the clandestine Operation Condór. Paco Ochoa hovers over the action as head of the Secret Police and one of the architects of Operation Condor.

Juan Mayorga authors the piece’s most acerbic and brilliant scene, where Thatcher and Pinochet meet in London to “stage” a performance for the world’s media on how Pinochet bought democracy to Chile. The backstage intrigues as Pinochet’s wife, Lucía Hiriart (Natalia Hernández), tries to control the action, which is highly entertaining. Ramón Barea is superb as the image-conscious Pinochet while María Morales is hilarious in capturing the inflections of the iron lady. Juan Vinesa excels as Thatcher’s besieged translator. The scene soon descends into absurdist farce as the different elements vie for control before the camera.

Franco, of course, was a powerful model for Pinochet and Videla. They saw the Spanish dictator die in his bed and thought that they too would benefit from the degree of impunity that Franco enjoyed. Spain is

the shadow that hovers over the piece; it is only invoked once through the presence of Adolfo Scilingo (played by Ernesto Alterio), an Argentine officer tried in Spain for (and subsequently found guilty in 2005 of) crimes against humanity. It is to the credit of the production in which links are implied and suggested rather than drawn out.

This is a high octave production, one where energy and adrenalin prevail. The effect is of spinning plates, one set after another, creating a sense of impending chaos as one “act” follows another in a jazz riff on a particular theme. Casting is informed and telling. Barea takes on both Pinochet and Allende. Vinesa takes Friedman, Ewen Cameron and Kissinger—pointing to a link between the three. Alterio is both Elvis Presley and Víctor Jara, the musician killed by the Pinochet dictatorship. *Shock* is above all a piece about genealogy, linking Friedman to Pinochet, Trump and now Bolsonaro, the CIA to Operation Condor, Pinochet to Thatcher, Scilingo to Videla. And the production maps out these links across a range of theatrical forms—from vaudeville to farce, hypernaturalism to mime. This is a production which left me exhausted, angry and invigorated, but at the end through all the noise, it was with the silence of the disappeared that the piece ends, a silence that resonated powerfully across the auditorium of Madrid’s reconfigured Valle-Inclán theatre.

There was no reference made in the program but at the time of the run, the Library at the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid also featured an exhibition on the legacy of the Chilean students at the University of Chicago, “Unfinished Timeless: Chile, First Laboratory of Neoliberalism.” Setting up a dialogue between Chilean artists Patrick Hamilton and Felipe Rivas San Martín and the feminist protest in May 2018, it provides a mode of examining the economic violence promoted by Pinochet in the name of capitalism.



Dionisio's hotel room is taken over by the traveling theatre company in Natalia Menéndez's production of *Tres sombreros de copa* (*Three Top Hats*) at the Centro Dramático Nacional's Teatro Valle-Inclán. Photo: Marcos Gpunto.

I have always struggled to see *Tres sombreros de copa* (English title: *Three Top Hats*) as a wildly funny play but it regularly features in lists of the best-loved plays in the Spanish language. Written in 1932 but not published until 1947 and staged for the first time in 1952, there's an admirably absurdist touch to the tale of the fresh-faced twenty-something Dionisio coming to town to marry his girlfriend, Margarita. He's been courting Margarita—much referred to in the play but never seen—since coming to the seaside town on his summer holidays over the past seven years. Only the quiet night he has planned in the hotel is disrupted by the theatre company that has congregated in the adjoining room where the bubbly Paula is staying. When Paula rushes into his room, escaping her on-off boyfriend Buby, the troupe's head, and she mistakes him for a juggler because of the three top hats he has assembled for the wedding—two of his own and one given to him by his future father-in-law. Dionisio then begins a nocturnal adventure that has him questioning whether he should get married in the morning.

Natalia Menéndez—whose father Juanjo Menéndez took the lead role of Dionisio in Gustavo Pérez Puig's 1952 staging, orchestrates a pacey production. There is a unity of time and place to the play *that* demands quick-moving action. Menéndez delivers with jugglers, dancers and showgirls wandering through Dionisio's hotel room which mutates into a bright. The high walls of the hotel room set designed by Alfonso Barajas suggest tradition and solidity with an art deco twist. But there is enough lurid pink neon in the hotel signage as the audience makes their way into the auditorium to suggest the risqué element beneath the hotel's stolid walls. The body language of Pablo Gómez-Pando's Dionisio becomes ever more pliable as the action evolves. He loosens up and delights in the freedom symbolized by Paula and the playful company of performers. There is some sparkling dialogue that exposes the absurdity of hypocritical values as Dionisio's priggish father-in-law-to-be pays him a visit at the hotel, determined to ensure that he is prepared for the level of compliance that marriage to Margarita entails.

Three Top Hats has some problematic racist dialogue—the play's one black character is presented as violent, unreliable, and lacking self-control. This is addressed to a certain degree by having those that make derogatory remarks about him ridiculed as pompous—as with Mariano Llorente's lascivious Odioso Señor (Hateful Man) or dangerously naïve (Gómez-Pando's Dionisio who boasts an inane grin for much of the play). Mild-mannered Dionisio may blend into the room but he displays a less than generous demeanor in calling for Buby to be lynched. Dionisio's appearance is anything but that of the Greek god of revelry from which he takes his name. For after a night of revelry with Paula, he opts for married life with a safe girlfriend whose father is a pillar of the town. His mustache—recalling that of José María Aznar, Spain's former right-wing Prime Minister—looks curiously out of place on him, as if part of a disguise. At the end as Paula combs his wet hair, slicking it back, there is something that conjures the visual iconography of the pretty, well-groomed fascist; Rossy de Palma's Juana in Almodóvar's *Kika* famously notes that “men with mustaches are either queer, fascist or both.” Dionisio may want to be a man of the future, but his views are outdated and conservative. He likes the allure that Paula offers but won't come clean that he's getting married in the morning.

Laia Manzanares Paula with her neat blonde bob and waif-like figure has something of Marilyn Monroe

about her. Her childish voice also evokes Verónica Forqué—who played the role in José Luis Alonso’s 1983 production. She has a certain charm and her naivety further suggests parallels with Dionisio. But she too, for all her generosity, makes a number of problematic assumptions about Buby based solely on his skin color. Menéndez directs the action with the speed of a farce—wild comings and goings, slamming doors, characters turning up unexpectedly. Juan Gómez-Cornejo’s lighting moves incorporate various shades—from pink to blue—giving the stage the feel of a music hall. As the theatre company rushes in and out of the room and Dionisio seeks solace in this giant bed, it is almost as if the action is a dream. There are a number of running gags—a bearded lady who weaves in and out of the room, a military officer pursuing a showgirl who manages to strip him slowly and steadily of all his medals, the hateful man who keeps bringing out gifts from the different pockets of his jacket to woo Paula. Mihura’s play does, however, feel dated. The dialogue between Dionisio and his future father-in-law, the portly Don Sacramento (Arturo Querejeta) on the need for certain routines to be followed—including fried eggs for breakfast come what may—feels overly long. Menéndez offers a busy production with a distinct 1920s look. Slapstick routines hark back to the double acts of silent cinema; there are flapper dresses, and even a Charleston routine at one point. Mariano Marín’s original music boasts a distinctive 1920s jazz feel.

In the end, however, while Menéndez tries to deliver a high octave all dancing, whistles, and bells production, the play doesn’t stand up to a great deal of scrutiny. A number of the roles appear underwritten—functions rather than characters to keep the action moving. Dressed in a flat cap that positions him as an outsider, Malcolm T. Sitté delivers a strong performance as Buby in an underwritten role. Roger Álvarez is excellent as the dutiful hotel manager Don Rosario, obsessed with his dead son. Gómez-Pando and Manzanares are entertaining as the ill-fated couple, but in the end, the piece isn’t quite as magical as the production might lead an audience to expect.



Malena Gutiérrez's Margrethe, Carlos Hipólito's Heisenberg and Emilio Gutiérrez Caba's Bohr in Claudio Tolcachir's production of *Copenhagen* at the Teatro de la Abadía. Photo: Sergio Parra.

Buenos Aires director Claudio Tolcachir has a good reason to call Madrid his second home. His work in the city—including tours of his Timbre 4 theatre company production of *La omisión de la familia Coleman* (English title: *The Coleman Family's Omission*)—includes *All My Sons* (2010) and *Tierra del fuego* (2016). At Madrid's Teatro de la Abadía – where he returns with *Próximo* (English title: *Next*) between December 3 and 15, 2019 – Tolcachir's staging of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* enjoyed an extended sell-out run between May 23 and July 14. Frayn's 1998 play explores the rationale for physicist Werner Heisenberg's 1941 visit to his former teacher, Niels Bohr, and Bohr's wife, Margrethe, in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, when he was leading Germany's nuclear program. Heisenberg had studied quantum mechanics with Bohr in 1924 before taking up a position as Germany's youngest full professor at the University of Leipzig in 1926. The men had been close but Heisenberg's return to Denmark at a time at a politically difficult time where Bohr's Jewish heritage would have made him even more vulnerable clearly creates tension between them. Frayn's work eschews a linear logic, speculating instead on what might have been said; memory melds with dramatic motifs to create a reflection on responsibility, ethics, friendship, and speculation.

The piece takes the form of a post-mortem with characters speaking from an afterlife that is embodied in Elisa Sanz's ghostly grey set. Sanz provides a lean landscape of bare boards and stripped trees. The dead speak from the stage, emerging from the wooden door at the back of the sparse set where the tall windows and thin walls suggest fragility. At times, it appears to be an outdoor location, at other times the lighting points to an indoor space. A small round table functions as the site for the confrontation between the two men. Tolcachir often positions Malena Gutiérrez's Margrethe between Emilio Gutiérrez Caba's Bohr and Carlos Hipólito's Heisenberg —two legendary actors—or to the side of them almost like a choral commentator on the action. Hipólito lends Heisenberg a physical fragility. Slim and lean, his winter coat feels like a burden across his shoulders. He moves in a spectral fashion, his head down, his gait slow. Gutiérrez Caba's Bohr is a weightier presence: stocky, solid, and appearing as if on the firmer ground—physically, morally and philosophically. There's a passion that Gutiérrez Caba brings to the role that contrasts with Hipólito's cooler demeanor. The men disagree from the very opening with Bohr arguing that they met in September and Heisenberg insisting it was October. It's an indication that much is subject to variance in the world where the men inhabit.

There are numerous potential variations on what might have happened during their meeting. Tolcachir's production refuses to prioritize one narrative over another. The repetition of certain scenes with shifts in lighting and music and slightly different pacing allows for a change in emphasis. Bohr's reflections on responsibility are given a twist based on his later collaboration with the Allies—on fleeing Denmark, he went on to work at Los Alamos on the atomic bomb. It is never clear if Heisenberg seeks moral guidance on whether or not he should be developing the nuclear bomb or whether he came to find out about Bohr's association with the US nuclear project, but there is palpable tension between his evident patriotism—he identifies as a German and not a Nazi— and the requirements placed on him to develop a weapon that could cause mass annihilation. He insists to Bohr that he is not working on a bomb, but rather a reactor that will produce energy for the future. “When I went to America in 1949, a lot of physicists wouldn't even shake my hand. Hands that had actually built the bomb wouldn't touch mine.” Hipólito captures

Heisenberg's uncertainty with a softness that contrasts with Gutiérrez Caba's more restless Bohr. There is something in Bohr that finds it difficult to accept his former protégé's position, an anger that he finds hard to temper, a moral high ground that he insists on appropriating. Gutiérrez Caba imbues Bohr with a sense of entitlement, but the frustration is mitigated by the pain of loss—specifically, the loss of a child by drowning—, moments of recollection of past complicities, shared discoveries, long walks, and common recreational activities.

The men's father-son relationship moves between intimacy and antagonism—putting into action Bohr's theory on complementarity—seeing something from two standpoints that appear to be incompatible. There are times when Heisenberg appears to crave approval from his former teacher, at other times he confronts him more forcefully. There is a mystery to his motives that remains to the production's end. It is never made clear whether Heisenberg didn't calculate the precise amount of the U-235 isotope needed for the nuclear chain reaction because he couldn't or because he knew of the potential devastation that would follow if he did.

The resentment in Malena Gutiérrez's matronly Margrethe emerges in flashes. She is both Bohr's secretary and a minder, articulating the danger posed by Heisenberg's appearance. There is a snappy wit to her comments—she has many of the play's best lines—and her complicity with the audience is evidenced in the fact that the men's scientific conversation is rendered “so Margrethe can understand.” She may be presented initially as the most trustworthy narrator, but her partisan position becomes all too evident as the play proceeds. At the production's end, the three characters are discernibly separate, looking out at a world that they have knowingly or unknowingly helped to shape. I saw the production at a time of uncertainty in Madrid—a new right-wing leader taking control of the City Council, the Socialist party leader, winner of April's general election, unable to form a national government. Tolcachir's production gravitates around the politics of uncertainty, reminding the audience of the mysteries that remain amidst the “accidents” and unknowables that make up how history is constituted.



The frenzied energy of Miguel del Arco's staging of *La función por hacer* (*The Play to be Done*). Photo: Emilio Gómez.

It has been a decade since Miguel del Arco—now one of Spain's most admired directors—burst onto the Madrid theatre scene with an adaptation of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* rooted in contemporary Spain. First staged in the midst of *la crisis*, Spain's devastating economic recession, *La función por hacer* (English title: *The Play to be Done*) has enjoyed acclaimed runs in five different venues. Del Arco had worked as an actor in musical theatre, including a distinctive Javert in *Les Misérables*, and there is a choreography to the action of *The Play to be Done*, a rhythm in the delivery of the lines that gives the piece a sinewy musicality that evokes Beckett. There is a leanness to the adaptation signed by del Arco and Aitor Tejada, an economy that evokes Daniel Veronese's Chekhov adaptations rather than earlier Spanish translations of Pirandello's 1921 play. The play is here condensed: the visiting characters are four instead of six and they interrupt the performance of a new work rather than a rehearsal. The performance concerns a loving couple embodied by Cristóbal Suárez (Actor) and Miriam Montilla (Actress) whose relationship comes under some tension when he, an artist, shows her a painting that he has completed of her that she finds distasteful. Their bickering is disturbed by "the characters," two brothers and their wives: Elder Brother (Israel Elejalde) is married to a woman known as "Mother" (Manuela Paso) who is grieving the death of her child. She has taken it upon herself to mother the baby of her husband's Younger Brother (Raúl Prieto) and his Wife (Bárbara Lennie). (In the Spanish *mujer* can mean both woman and wife.) None of the six characters in the piece are given individual names.

The Actor wants to work with the foursome to create a new piece while the Actress is less than enthused by the new project. She doesn't feel there is anything new here; their tale is one that has, in her view, been done to death on television. Indeed, at one moment, she suspects there is a hidden camera in the auditorium and that they are now part of a terrible reality television program. He, however, senses the urgency in what is evolving in front of him. For her, however, truth is always relative and truth in theatre is always just a matter of appearance—one of the numerous references in the piece to Calderón de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*. Elder Brother has a different view: audiences come to the theatre because they know that the problem of "to be or not to be" will never be resolved. Art is an ongoing attempt to address that question.

Watching the production, I wonder if del Arco is offering a critical commentary on poverty porn—works where the lives of the vulnerable are put up for public middle-class consumption without any due ethical consideration. Domestic tensions prevail: Elder Brother attempts to buy off his Younger Brother; the Wife and the Elder Brother have been involved in a clandestine affair; the Mother is struggling emotionally to cope with the death of her child. The fact that the Younger Brother takes his sibling's money so readily annoys his wife. "Do you think I like to live off his charity?" Younger Brother retorts. The couple are victims of Spain's emotional crisis that produced a public deficit of 11.2% of GCP in 2009 with unemployment rising to 20% by the beginning of 2010. Unemployed and homeless, Younger Brother and his wife move in with his elder sibling. On losing the baby, the Mother is hospitalized. The issue of whose lives are up for exploitation, what agency means and how theatre might repackage life as performance is repeatedly debated. Del Arco fashions a reflection on theatre and its conventions, its narratives and its limits. The Actor talks of the importance of synthesis and simplification, "eliminating unnecessary details." The Actress and the Wife argue about the role of the audience and whether those spectators gathered in the theatre really want to witness the (mis)adventures of the foursome. The Actor reflects on Thomas Aquinas's view that beauty in art is "integrity, proportion, and clarity." But the Actress refutes his criteria when she sees his cubist portrait. There is something of Yasmina Reza's *Art* in the vigorous debate that the pair engage in over his portrait—del Arco went on to stage *Art* in 2017. Beauty, the audience is reminded, is always in the eye of the beholder and histories are retold as literature by those who take it upon themselves to narrativize the past.

Method acting comes under the scalpel too as the concept of what constitutes the real is debated. "Life," the Elder Brother observes, "is full of absurdities, but they don't need to appear plausible because they are true.... You work hard so that what isn't truthful appears so." "You will be real when we interpret you", the Actor tells the characters. "Perhaps more real but less truthful", the Elder Brother states. The passing of time, the people we become, how we relate to who we once were, is central to the piece. The relationships between truth and fiction and between life and performance are shown to be fluid and unstable. Nothing is quite what it seems in the play and nothing, not even an onstage death, can be posited as real.

The proscenium stage of the Pavón theatre has been reconfigured to place the audience on three sides of the action. The actors step across and into the audience and repeatedly disrupt the fourth wall. The performance style may begin in thrall to the naturalism of method acting but it moves into something far more disarming and physical as the action progresses. Bárbara Lennie's Wife bounces across the stage, a bundle of manic energy and passion with a heightened language that recalls that of the Bride in Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. She cuts through the auditorium like a knife. She confronts her husband, his Elder Brother and the Actor. She resents a vision of theatre where the Actor decides what can and cannot be

represented. She won't keep quiet and her urgency contaminates the action, lending it the pressure and resolve that balances Manuela Paso's Mother, who clutches the baby to her with a desperation that proves painful to observe. It is never clear if the baby is a ghost, a prop or a reality. And the piece is all the more disarming for this ambiguity. Miriam Montilla's Actress often watches the action from the back of the stage, interrupting the characters in the hope of moving them on but without success. Raúl Prieto's Younger Brother tries on numerous occasions to leave the auditorium, but he appears to be trapped in the room like the dinner guests of Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*. In contrast to his fluent and articulate Elder Brother, he distrusts words, doesn't like dramas and wants a quiet life. He lashes out in frustration, at one point attempting to hit his Wife while the other characters look on in horror. At times he paces the stage like a caged animal; his tracksuit bottoms and vest point to a man used to working-out who is now destined to wander desperately in an interior space where he feels painfully ill at ease.

There's palpable electricity between the Elder Brother and the Wife whenever they are in close proximity. Israel Elejalde excels in displaying the painful tension between duty and passion. Bárbara Lennie, now one of the most in-demand actresses of her generation, cannot hide the longing she feels for the Elder Brother. Her voice rings out, resonant and weighty, like an avenging Clytemnestra. She confronts him on his version of the story with a need to tell her version of their shared past. As the action is refashioned by the Actor, it becomes clear that none of the characters is happy with the version that is produced. Desire, the production shows us, always exceeds the means through which it can be satisfied.

Del Arco endows the piece with a resolutely twenty-first-century sensibility. Costumes feel contemporary, real and lived in. The Actor and Actress appear to dance across the stage as they play out their argument in physical terms. The characters who intrude on the action step into the theatre cautiously, catching both the Actor and Actress and the audience unawares. They come in search of an author but the Actor reminds them that there is no author here: in the twenty-first-century theatre, the roles of author, director, and actor appear to have merged in ways that the characters find difficult to come to terms with. The Actor seeks to take on the role of the author, but the Actress reminds him that they have worked on the text together. Control is often in male hands—the Actor working with the Elder Brother while the women look on as their lives are “packaged” and their agency removed. The interruptions repeatedly disrupt the fourth wall. Just as it looks as if the action may settle into a pattern, one of the characters spills into the audience to create a new sphere of action. There is no safe space in the auditorium, no place where an audience member can be sure that the action will not disrupt their anonymity.

Creating its own scenography across the actors' bodies with just a couple of chairs and an easel, this is a production where a world of intrigue is created through the unexpected encounters that the narrative initiates. *The Play to be Done* provides a twenty-first-century jazz riff on Pirandello's celebrated play that feels urgent and socially relevant, examining the politics of theatre in a society where anything, even the most intimate of traumas, can be bought and sold for human consumption.

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