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Glitchy Language: The Rosetta Theatre Project

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Introduction

The Rosetta Theatre Project, a collaborative, immersive, multimedia, multilingual installation at the University of Georgia (UGA) in 2018, combined the digital language of pixels, the visual language of historical illustration and costume design, the spoken languages of present-day demotic English and French, and the literary languages of Shakespeare and Molière. Two live actors in motion-capture ("mo-cap") suits and recorded voice actors presented continuously (with short breaks), two short scenes from Molière and Shakespeare in a "black box" theatre, scenes that were simultaneously remediated into four different computer environments with present-day and historical backgrounds and shown on four large display screens behind the live actors themselves. The two scenes performed – radically cut for just two actors – were the lovers' deaths in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (V.iii) and the so-called seduction scene (Scene V) in Molière's *Tartuffe*. Recorded, native English and French speakers voiced both Shakespeare's and Molière's early texts and "translations" of Shakespeare's and Molière's words to twenty-first-century, idiomatic speech. Additional recording offered "Fakespeare": Molière translated into a pastiche of Shakespearean blank verse, and Victor Hugo's classical translation of *Romeo and Juliet*.[1]

In addition to this polyglot and transhistorical audio-visual mix, however, an extra-textual language emerged through the installation, once it was in place. As spectators promenaded around the screens, gazing alternately at the podium where the actors were silently performing and at the large video displays with the recorded sound, the producers and programmers warned us to expect "glitches." Glitches, in common usage, are errors or failures of electronic systems, characterised by repetition, flickering, lines, pixelation, distortion, qualities deliberately adopted by the practitioners of so-called glitch art and discussed in art criticism as glitch theory. Paradoxically, however, the computer glitches made visible – and timely – a new subtext for both scenes. Unwanted, uncomfortable, and sometimes unseemly, these crude glitches, I will argue, on the video screens behind the living, breathing actors paradoxically transformed the rough computer animations into

[1] The Rosetta Theatre Project, November 2-3, 2018, Dancz Center, Hugh Hodgson School of Music, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA; see Appendix for full cast and credits.

fresh ways of experiencing old drama, ways of crossing time and space, and a heightened awareness of topical student concerns about mental health and sexual coercion.

Background

The Rosetta Theatre Project originated as an off-shoot from an ongoing collaboration between Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 (UPVM3) and UGA. In 2016 Professors Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (UPVM3) and Sujata Iyengar (UGA) won a multi-year, cost-sharing, international award from the Partner University Fund (PUF) of the French-American Cultural Exchange Foundation. The award, "Scene-Stealing/Ravir la Scène", permitted teams of faculty, PhD candidates, and post-doctoral researchers to visit each other's institutions to collaborate both face-to-face and remotely on research, teaching, or public service projects investigating dramatic scenes on particular topics in sixteenth-to eighteenth-century English and French theatre, including historical and contemporary adaptations of such scenes.

The collaboration began with a joint conference-festival in Montpellier in Fall 2016 on the topic of "Balcony Scenes", especially the archetypal encounter between Shakespeare's lovers Romeo and Juliet on stage and in screen, and in Year 2, a conference-festival at UGA on "Bedchamber Scenes".[2] There followed a series of study days in Montpellier and Athens, Georgia, USA on multi-lingual scenes in French and English drama from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment, in preparation for a November 2018 international conference on "Scenes in the Other's Language" at the University of Georgia.[3] We defined such "scenes" as sequences of dialogue in which a noticeable proportion of lines appears in a language that is not the dominant language of the rest of the play or in which on-stage characters identify a particular sequence as belonging to another language or as constituting jargon or an *argot*. Such scenes appear in, for example: Thomas Kyd and others' *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592); Thomas Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War* (1594); Robert Greene's *James IV* (1598); Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* (1598), *Love's Labour's Lost* (1598), *Henry V* (1600), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1623), and *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623); Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600); John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge* (1602); Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1602) and *The Case is Altered* (1609); Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part 2* (1605); William Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money* (1616); François Bonnet's *Le Jugement de Paris* (1628); Baudeau de Somize's *Les Véritables Précieuses* (1660); Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669); Guillaume Marcoureau de Brécourt's *L'Ombre de Molière* (1673); and many more.

David Saltz, head of our Theatre Department at UGA, was preparing a large National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant application as part of UGA's commitment to host the Alliance for Arts in Research Universities (a2ru) in November 2018. I approached him to ask whether there were ways that our grants could work together to create a performance piece. We decided to merge David's long-standing interest in digitally mediated theatre with the historical focus of our PUF grant.

[2] Both conferences seeded issues of the journal *Arrêt sur Scène/Scene Focus*: *Arrêt sur scène / Scene Focus*, 6, *Scènes de balcon / Balcony Scenes*, dir. / ed. Bénédicte Louvat, Florence March, Janice Valls-Russell, Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Montpellier, IRCL, 2017; *Arrêt sur scène / Scene Focus*, 8, *Scènes de lit / Bedchamber Scenes*, dir. / ed. Sujata Iyengar, Sarah Mayo and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Montpellier, IRCL, 2019.
[3] These conferences seeded both the current issue of *Arrêt sur Scène / Scene Focus* and the online, open-peer-reviewed textbook, *Focus on "Henry V": Navigating Digital Text, Performance, & Historical Resources*, ed. Sujata Iyengar and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Scalar, 2019, https://scalar.usc.edu/works/henry-v/index.

Our original NEA proposal was extremely ambitious. We called for "two visiting artists with an international reputation for physical performance … [to] be on site for two weeks to develop visually based performances of two scenes from the late 16th / early 17th centuries, one an English scene by Shakespeare and another a French scene most likely by Molière" to be performed at an "off campus arts venue" within an "interactive and immersive" environment with "four different animations in real-time […] projected onto one of the four walls of the performance space." We planned for each animation to "map the performers' motions onto different character models representing radically different cultures and artistic styles, with entirely different costumes and virtual scenery". Inspired by the 2013 "David Bowie…Is" exhibition in London and its five-year world tour, we imagined that every audience member could wear a "wireless headphone with location sensor", so that as they "move through the space, they […] hear an audio track that corresponds with the animation in the quadrant of the room where they are standing".[4] We hoped that each version of the audio could "consist of dialogue performed in real-time by UGA voice actors, and a culturally specific music track". Finally, we hoped that the project would have an afterlife on digital video and that we could combine "videotape of the live performance along with the four animations to create an online app that allows viewers to switch between versions much as they could do in the live event", and even "allow viewers to create their own audio track".

We needed scenes that included just two actors, or that could be edited to include just two actors, and that could be readily comprehensible through only gesture, not dialogue, to a wide audience including schoolchildren or members of the public with no background in historical or classical theatrical texts. We then decided that the lovers' death-scene of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – which in any case is misremembered and rewritten by many (in film, dance, opera, ballet and so on) as a duologue, a *pas de deux*, a duet – would be familiar to many audience members. We chose a scene from *Tartuffe* because the UGA Theatre department had just produced it the previous year, and again we thought that a seduction scene, in this case Tartuffe's wooing of Elmire under the nose of her husband, would again prove accessible, even or especially through computer animation and the space-age motion-capture suits.

We knew that we would have certain restrictions surrounding the blocking or stage action because of the motion-capture technology. We knew that we had to keep the actors on one level, because the suits would not capture action on the ground. We knew that we could not use properties, because three-dimensional objects would interfere with the ability of the mo-cap software to identify the sensors in the suits. Since we could not have Juliet lying on the ground or Romeo kneeling beside her, we decided to put Juliet on a table (a bier), even though including this object would mean that the software might have some difficulties capturing the motion of actors who were moving around the table.

Our plan was ambitious, and then we encountered our glitches.

[4] David Saltz and Sujata Iyengar, NEA grant proposal, 2017, unpublished mss., quoted with permission. On the five-year tour of the "David Bowie…Is" exhibition and its unique aural technology, see Amanda Marcotte, "David Bowie, up close and personal: How the 'David Bowie Is' exhibit was made", 20 May 2018, https://www.salon.com/2018/05/20/david-bowie-up-close-and-personal-how-the-david-bowie-is-exhibit-was-made/. Accessed 31 October 2021.

Execution

Michael Betancourt and others classify some kinds of electronic glitches as "hardware failures".[5] Our first glitches, however, were not electronic or hardware malfunctions as much as wetware (human) disasters and infraware (financial) failures. The biggest human glitch or disaster for the PUF was the unexpected death of a co-investigator, my colleague and close friend Shakespearean Christy Desmet, in July 2018, which in the manner of all glitches precipitated further glitches or distortions to the schedule and the project. My *bouleversement* restricted my subsequent involvement to a minimal amount of dramaturgy, namely the translation of our *Tartuffe* scene into Shakespearean pastiche, and to participation in a roundtable about the creation of the project.

The biggest glitch for the UGA Theatre Department was that we did not win our NEA award and had to fund the project through internal research funds and some help from a2ru, so we could neither hire professional actors, nor: rent an off-campus arts venue; purchase wireless headsets and location sensors; install multiple projectors; commission multiple composers and app developers; host a long-term web installation to serve as a teaching resource. Instead, we held the event on campus in UGA's Dancz Center for Performing Arts, a "black box" theatre amid three interconnected electronic music studios, and we used UGA Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) acting students as gesture and voice performers and as set designers and programmers.[6] We could not keep live voice actors on set the whole time, so we used eight soundtracks recorded by our voice actors that our actors heard continuously and to which they mimed their motion-captured gestures. We were successful, however, in generating "four different animations in real-time, each projected onto one of the four walls of the performance space", each animation presenting both the performers' movements and different time periods (denoted by costume and setting). In fact, the experiment became a funded project for several students earning MFA degrees in not only in voice or stage acting but also in Media Production, Set Design, and Costume Design.[7]

Since we did not have wireless headsets with location sensors for each spectator, we used directional speakers that broadcast each soundtrack within a limited range. Since we did not have enough money to support multiple music faculty and students' creation of culturally specific music, Peter Lane, a co-investigator and composer, wrote music derived electronically from the actors' movements. We were able seamlessly to allow audience members to immerse themselves in watching multiple sequential or episodic versions of the scenes, and in fact the absence of wireless headphones and personal soundtracks gave the installation a collective audience, changing over time, that added another dimension to the event and that will be memorialised in the documentary in progress.

We did have to give up completely on the idea of a website and an app that would have allowed remote viewers to mix and match scenes and soundtracks or to make up their own. We realised, however, that, as, Philip Auslander observes, the very notion of liveness itself is predicated upon an often imaginary, authentic, idealised performance.[8] There was thus an inherent tension between the idea of archiving an ephemeral motion-capture

[5] Michael Betancourt, *Glitch Art in Theory and Practice*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 21–22 and *passim*.
[6] Amy Cole, "UGA presents the collaborative, high-tech, multidisciplinary Rosetta Theatre Project", UGA Department of Film and Theatre Studies, 2018, https://www.drama.uga.edu/news/stories/2018/uga-presents-collaborative-high-tech-multidisciplinary-rosetta-theatre-project. Accessed 31 October 2021.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999.

technology in this way and the impact of "liveness"; the remote viewer and the recorded or remixed performances would have threatened to make static something that relied upon change and playful interaction. The photographs and the short video below illustrate both the strengths and the glitches of the performance.[9]

1. Romeo drinks the potion. Photo credit: Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.

2. Juliet finds Romeo. Photo credit: Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.

[9] "The Rosetta Theatre Showreel", directed by David Saltz, media director Anna Helen Courbould, recording and editing Dave Kreutzer, "The Stage Geek", YouTube, August 24, 2021. Accessed 31 October 2021.

3. Tartuffe confronts Elmire. Photo credit: Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.

4. Tartuffe corners Elmire. Photo credit: Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.

Link to the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_J1RkW8rC78

Glitch Theory

Alice Dailey helpfully summarises glitch theory (drawing on Mark Nunes, Tim Barker, Rosa Menkman, and Michael Betancourt) in the following words:

> The glitch is an other that is not other – an aberration that appears contrary to the mechanisms of a system but is, in fact, a production of that very system. Such failures are the central focus of practitioners of glitch art, who exploit errors in digital systems to explore the potential or virtual possibilities built into those systems.[10]

Dailey goes on to explore the rich possibilities of glitch theory in the context of representations of the dead throughout history, in a timely intervention that ranges from relics and chronicle plays through selfies, x-ray imagery, glitch art, cloning, and zombies. I would argue that Dailey's work also anticipates other interactions among the living/present and the dead/absent, such as the quasi-immortal younger avatars of performers on stage.[11]

Michael Betancourt, who has both written extensively about and created glitch art, builds on Adorno's suggestion in *Aesthetic Theory* that the "interruptive" qualities immanent to art activate an audience into critique.[12] High modernism, argues Betancourt, would argue that the interruption, or "stoppage" enabled by the glitch, provides a space to reflect upon and critique the supposedly seamless or transparent interface of digital technologies.[13] Betancourt suggests that such critique must originate with an active, engaged audience, with the reception of the glitch rather than with the generation of the glitch, otherwise the audience is once more cast as the passive receptacle for the glitch. Moreover, Betancourt suggests that such critique must disrupt a system of semiosis, rather than an individual experience or isolated sign, and that this critique can happen only "when an audience *chooses*" to engage within such a semiotic system.[14] Rosa Menkman likewise argues in the *Glitch Studies Manifesto* (2006-2011) that glitch art is a "procedural activity demonstrating against and within multiple technologies", one that can uncover "the inherent politics of any kind of medium" or signifying system.[15]

Gina Bloom has called the RSC's 2016 sophisticated and much-mooted motion-capture *Tempest* "an ethical failure" because of the way the production interfered with the

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[10] Alice Dailey, in *How to Do Things With Dead People,* proof mss., forthcoming Cornell, New York, Cornell University Press, proof pp. 139–140, quoted with permission; Mark Nunes (ed.), *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2011; Tim Barker, "Aesthetics of the Error: Media Art, the Machine, the Unforeseen, and the Errant", in Nunes (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 42–58; Rosa Menkman, "The Glitch Studies Manifesto" and "The Glitch Momentum", 2006-2011, *Network Notebooks*, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer, prod. Margreet Riphagen, Amsterdam, Institute of Networked Cultures, 2011, http://www.networkcultures.org/networknotebooks, accessed 31 October 2021; Michael Betancourt, *Glitch Art in Theory and Practice*, London, Routledge, 2017.

[11] The forthcoming "ABBA Voyage" concert in London, planned to mix de-aged "avatars" of the now-elderly singers with living audience members and a live band, and the recent rebranding of Mark Zuckerberg's technology company as the "metaverse" confirm the prescience of this work; see Alexis Petridis, "Super Troupers!", *The Guardian*, October 27, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/27/abba-reunion-interview-voyage-younger-selves, accessed 31 October 2021; and Mike Isaac, "Facebook renames itself Meta," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/technology/facebook-meta-name-change.html, accessed 31 October 2021.

[12] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Betancourt, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[15] Menkman, *op. cit.*, "Celebrate the critical trans-media aesthetics of glitch artifacts", n.p.

audience's active engagement.[16] She suggests that the RSC's attempts to smooth out the crude animated glitches that seem inevitable with this complex technology try vainly to prevent the irruption or interruption of critique, which is for her one of the most valuable aspects of this technology. "[I]t's the riskiness of mo[-]cap and the tensions that it creates between the bodies of the human player and the digital avatar that make it such a fascinating technology", she argues, setting as counter-example her own interactive mo-cap performance game, *Play the Knave*, glitches and all.[17]

"[E]very digital work is produced live", Betancourt reminds us, before pointing out that glitches and our interpretation of them are both performative.[18] In this way, he suggests, glitches break the seeming bodilessness or immateriality of "digital capitalism".[19] They remind us of the hardware (and in mo-cap situations, the wetware, the human bodies and voices) required to create these supposedly ephemeral or virtual simulacra. Glitches manifest labour – failed labour and superfluous labour and well-compensated and under-compensated labour – as, Betancourt suggests, brushstrokes evoke the hand of the artist within the Arts and Crafts movement or just as (a Shakespearean might suggest) printer's errors allow us to touch the hand of the compositor across time and space.

Glitches of Adaptation

All four of the Rosetta Theatre motion-capture screens had to engage with two sources of potential laughter or audience glitches: the inherent comedy that modernised adaptation can often elicit and that threatens to overwhelm many performances of even conventional classic theatre (and that the best practitioners anticipate and use), and the associations viewers would make between the crude animations and early computer games. The humour inherent in adaptation or modernisation stems from surprise or incongruity, the tension Schopenhauer finds between our mental image of an object (our conception of something) and the way that object presents itself to our senses (our perception of that thing). Schopenhauer adds:

> Laughter itself is simply the expression of this incongruity…All laughter is occasioned by a paradoxical and hence unexpected subsumption, irrespective of whether it is expressed in words or deeds. This, in short, is the correct explanation of the ridiculous.[20]

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[16] Gina Bloom, Shakespeare's Birthday Lecture, Folger Shakespeare Library, 2019, quoted with permission, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6egGB5EayA, accessed 31 October 2021, transcript available at https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/mediawiki/media/images_pedia_folgerpedia_mw/c/c5/Gina_Bloom_Birthday_Lecture_Transcript.pdf, accessed 31 October 2021.

[17] Gina Bloom, *Play the Knave*, game for Kinect system, https://www.playtheknave.org/download.html; for an account of the game's genesis and theoretical framework, see Gina Bloom, *Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater,* Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2018; for analysis, see Gina Bloom, Sawyer Kemp, Nicholas Toothman, and Evan Buswell, "'A Whole Theatre of Others': Amateur Acting and Immersive Spectatorship in the Digital Shakespeare Game *Play the Knave*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67:4, special issue on "#Bard," ed. Douglas Lanier and Gail Kern Paster, 2016, pp. 408–430.

[18] Betancourt, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[20] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, trans. and ed. Christopher Janaway, Alistair Welchman, and Judith Norman, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Schopenhauer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, section 13, p. 84, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=335182&site=eds-live&custid=uga1&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_iii, accessed 31 October 2021; see also John Morreall, "Philosophy of Humor", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/humor/, accessed 31 October 2021.

Akin to the pleasure that Linda Hutcheon identifies as a mark of adaptation's "repetition with difference", the humour of adaptations, the tension that they may become "ridiculous", is amplified when such transformations surprise us in multiple ways, as did the Rosetta Theatre Project.[21]

Shakespeare and Molière as presented in the Rosetta Theatre Project created a tension between these literary luminaries and the crude graphics of the representation. Jarring, too, was the silent, black-clad presence of the actors in the centre of the room, on and around the podium, in contrast to the competing, multi-lingual soundtracks and the vividly-coloured, brightly illuminated screens that would remind viewers of the earliest animated computer games. Computer games have a poor academic reputation, despite ongoing attempts to incorporate "gamification" into education, probably because we all know that the primary purpose of a game is to entertain and that, as Horace wrote centuries ago, poems or creative works need to mix the useful with the pleasurable, *miscuit utile dulci*.[22] We have also tended to link computer games and the associated technology with children and in particular with young adolescent men, although this assumption has changed somewhat over the past twenty years.[23]

At the same time, we now use gaming technologies and styles for applications beyond game-playing, a process that has been called "gamification". Sebastian Deterding, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, and Lennart E. Nacke helpfully define gamification as "the use of game design elements in non-game contexts" and then further distinguish among "serious games" (the use of game elements, such as rules, competition, and a defined set of goals, for non-game situations), "serious gaming" ("the (educational) utilization of the broader ecology of technologies and practices of games, including machinima, reviewing games, and others"), "playful interaction" ("design for playfulness", distinct from games), and "game-based technologies" (the use of particular technologies associated with games in non-game contexts).[24] Theatre is closer than education to the idea of game or playfulness, but most present-day theatregoers, whether in the United States, the United Kingdom, or in France, are going to imagine a performance of Shakespeare or Molière as educational, to some extent.

According to the definitions from Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke, The Rosetta Theatre Project combined game-based technologies, namely the motion-capture technology associated with games and with cinema, and playful interaction, namely the audience members' ability to interact with the different soundtracks and screens in real-time, and the electronically generated music that changed according to the gestures of the

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[21] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006, rev. ed. with Siobhan O'Flynn, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 142.

[22] Horace, *De Arte Poetica Liber*, *The Works of Horace*, translated and edited by C. Smart, Philadelphia. Joseph Whetham, 1836, line 343, online, *Perseus Digital Library*, edited by Gregory Crane, Tufts University, http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0893.phi006.perseus-lat1:309-346, accessed 31 October 2021.

[23] On women as players of computer games, see Shira Chess, *Ready Player Two: Women Gamers and Designed Technology*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017; on the ageing and diversification of the gaming population in the US, see Anna Brown, "Younger men play video games, but so do a diverse group of other Americans", Pew Research Center, 11 September 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/11/younger-men-play-video-games-but-so-do-a-diverse-group-of-other-americans/, accessed 31 October 2021.

[24] Sebastian Deterding, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, and Lennart E. Nacke, "Gamification: Toward a Definition", CHI Gamification Workshop, online, 4pp., http://gamification-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/02-Deterding-Khaled-Nacke-Dixon.pdf, accessed 31 October 2021.

actors and the bodies in the space. A Shakespeare or Molière that partly looks like a computer game but that also incorporates many "difficult" or avant-garde artistic elements (foreign languages, classical literature, mime, black clothing, an intimate space) and playful interaction requires mental flexibility from its participants, including the audience, whose laughter might manifest contempt or a sense of superiority (as Plato feared) or nervous fear on one's own behalf to mask those or other inopportune or embarrassing emotions (as Shaftesbury and Freud speculated); startled surprise (as Schopenhauer suggested); and pleasurable wonder (as Bergson hoped).[25] My experience of the Rosetta Theatre Project suggested that audience laughter and engagement – certainly my own – followed this potted history of humour.

Glitchy Romeo and Goosed Elmire

Two short case-studies exemplify this movement through humour. The first was the translation of Romeo to a crudely drawn UGA "frat boy" in a hall of residence and the technical glitches that affected the animation. His first appearance initiated joyful laughter through the pleasure of "repetition with difference", as we admired his baseball cap and T-shirt complete with UGA logo. We also smiled as Romeo's body parts appeared and disappeared around the "bed", since the motion-capture technology could not "read" the actor's movements when there was an object in the way. The vignette suddenly became serious, however, as we heard the poignant soundtrack of a contemporary young American voice trying vainly to revive a comatose boyfriend who, in the words of the modernised Juliet, "took something" – the fate of today's Romeo.

In the contemporary US, college professors have read such stories too many times: students dying from accidental or intentional overdoses from alcohol or opioids or a combination of the two, combined with their friends' reluctance to call emergency services and their own inability or unwillingness to seek mental health care – the banal melodrama, if you like, of the twenty-first-century academic industrial complex.[26] Where I might have felt exasperated at an entire *Romeo and Juliet* set in a student dormitory (and perhaps rightfully so), the combination of live actors feeling and breathing next to me and the double-alienation-effect of the animated avatars on screen made me feel that these events were really happening, somewhere. I thought of students of my own whose mental health concerned me and others whose relationship to drugs and alcohol seemed imbalanced. I thought about Anne Ubersfeld's argument that theatre is always metatheatre, always Imaginary, and that the spectator co-produces the performance.[27] In a bizarre way, this multiply mediated, highly abstracted installation had given me a kind of access to a real emotion, which is what we hope theatre will do.

My second brief case-study concerns a more obvious glitch in the scene from *Tartuffe* in its digital seventeenth-century French computer-generated setting. When I first

[25] Morreall, *op. cit.*; see also Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, reproduced online, Project Gutenberg, 2009, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4352/pg4352-images.html, accessed 31 October 2021.

[26] For recent (albeit pre- pandemic) data on the mental health and suicide prevalence of US college students, see the American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment, Reference Group Executive Summary, Spring 2019, online, https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-II_SPRING_2019_US_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf, accessed 31 October 2021.

[27] Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le Théâtre*, Volume 1, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1977; I am also indebted to John Bernard's discussion of Ubersfeld and Freud in "Theatricality and Textuality: The Example of 'Othello'", *New Literary History* 26:4, Philosophical Resonances (Autumn, 1995), pp. 931–949, pp. 935–937.

translated what I have always called the seduction scene in *Tartuffe*, it did not occur to me that it could be called anything *but* a seduction scene. After the #MeToo movement, however, many of us have found in our classrooms that seduction is no longer available to us (if it ever was) as a mode of literary or dramatic eroticism. To our students, Marlowe's Leander is as guilty of ignoring the issue of consent as is Shakespeare's Angelo; the entire genre of epyllion or Ovidian imitation is suspect.[28] Watching the movements of Elmire and Tartuffe – as she dodged him around the table – made me wonder whether there was room in this text for Elmire's protestations to be sincere rather than hypocritical, her timely coughs to be part of an arsenal of women's weak weapons against the "witnesses" she fears would not speak up for her. An absurd and obscene glitch forced me to think about this further: as Elmire retreated behind the table and Tartuffe followed her, his digital avatar in one of the four settings (seventeenth-century France) became fixed behind her, repeatedly goosing her in a flickering rape. Viewers laughed and looked away; a few people snorted or rolled their eyes. To me, the ongoing contrast between the nuanced, silent flirtation of the live, physically present mo-cap actors (clad in androgynous black mo-cap suits, devoid of makeup and with minimal marks of gender expression) and the violent, voiced, stylised, historically costumed glitching rape on screen seemed a fitting metaphor for the different ways that we can stage and re-stage the patterns of so-called seduction in early modern drama to work through the urgent problems of consent, agency, and power we encounter today.

Audience members, especially those who walked through the installation more than once, as several did, thus worked through a condensed history of laughter and its functions. While the common humanity of entering a shared space to see youthful actors perform passionately in silence disarmed or quietened the contemptuous or mocking laughter feared by Plato, we moved through nervous relief, joyful surprise, and flexible wonder, channelling Freud, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. Beginning to watch in some anxiety, wondering whether we would need to feel embarrassed on behalf of the performers or to offer them support (I feel this way before any student production, and I am sure many teachers do), we then laughed in glee at the incongruity of the multiple, competing languages and the sheer volume of contexts that we could build among these building blocks of sight, sound, and space before ending with a sense of awe at the capacity of these old works in new settings always to make us newly flexible, less rigid in our ideas of what it might be correct or appropriate to do with classic texts.

[28] On the background and history of the #MeToo movement, see in this volume Philip Gilreath, "Props and Prostheses: Lavinia the "speechless complainer" (n.2), *Arrêt sur scene/Scene Focus*, 10, 2021, *Scènes dans la langue de l'Autre/Scenes in the Other's Language*, ed. Sujata Iyengar and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin. For a critique of the contemporary movement and a defense of "seduction", see Laura Kipnis, "Should There Be a Future for Seduction?", *The Cut*, June 10, 2018, https://www.thecut.com/2018/06/laura-kipnis-on-the-future-of-seduction.html, accessed 31 October 2021; for some of the ways in which women-authored and -translated versions of the classics are creatively but accurately responding to the violence in Homer, Ovid, and other classical texts, see, for example, Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, New York, Norton, 2017, and the review by Annalisa Quinn, "Emily Wilson's 'Odyssey' Scrapes The Barnacles Off Homer's Hull", National Public Radio, December 2, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/12/02/567773373/emily-wilsons-odyssey-scrapes-the-barnacles-off-homers-hull, accessed 31 October 2021.

Appendix: Full Credits for the Rosetta Theatre Project

Conceived and Directed by:	David Saltz
Media Director:	Anna Corbould
Assistant Director:	Phil Brankin
Movement Director:	Anthony Marotta
Composer (Tartuffe):	Peter Lane
Composer (Romeo and Juliet):	Kathryn Koopman
Dramaturg:	Sujata Iyengar
Virtual Costume Design:	Mirabel Lee
Recording, Video Engineer:	David Kreuzter
Modelling and Animation:	Elizabeth Gubler, Weixuan Liu, Jason Woodwarth-Hou, Samantha Hudson, Royale Walker, Jingyi Zhang

Translations

Tartuffe – Fakespeare	Sujata Iyengar
Tartuffe – Modern English	David Saltz
Tartuffe – Modern French	Emily Myers Shirley
Romeo & Juliet – Classical French	Victor Hugo
Romeo & Juliet – Modern French	Emily Myers Shirley
Romeo & Juliet – Modern English	Phil Brankin, Darcy Danielle Russel, Pedro Alvarado

Movement Performers (Live)

Romeo/Tartuffe:	Luis Omar Perez Ofarrill
Juliet/Elmire:	Eva Ramirez

Voice Actors (Recorded)

Elizabethan English Woman:	Atalanta Siegel
Elizabethan English Man:	Justin Hall
Modern French Woman:	Emily Myers Shirley
Modern French Man:	T. Anthony Marotta
17th-century French Woman:	Leah M. Merritt
17th-century French Man:	Philip Brankin
Modern American Woman:	Darcy Danielle Russel
Modern American Man:	Pedro Alvarado