Abstract

Title: Playful Parties: Transmuting Egyptian Myth through Immersive Theatre to Initiate Interpersonal Curiosity

Modern party structures encourage dispassionate connection-making, trading earnest engagement for maintained appearances. Through practice-led research, this thesis questions how can participatory immersive theatre critically engage audiences with each other by transmuting Ancient Egyptian myth into modern communal experiences? This thesis intends to unpick oppressive structures in the depiction of Egyptian myth through the exploration of common social rituals. I theorize that in the implementation of ancient practices during a party, a new mythology or allegorical narrative can be crafted to build curiosity for audience members in each other. I seek to unravel the idea of the social stranger through a redirection of attention in the initial ritual of meeting and encourage genuine curiosity in those at/in play, especially after the narrative moment concludes.

Highlighted by the conflict in Gaza today, Egypt historically has acted as the thoroughfare through which the West and the Middle East shape the region. This distinction makes it uniquely suited to stage questions of the historical context of Middle Eastern identity, calling for an urgent discussion of the Oriental persona on the global stage. To be globally staged indicates that the borders between the seating and the stage are not firm, and the audience is part of the action—they are immersed, in other words.

Immersive theatre is the current amorphous adjective for urban entertainment events that do not fit into modern colloquial understanding of seated proscenium theatre style performances. Given the liberal application and multifaceted

definition, immersive theatre encourages a more formal analysis of its lineage and content in Orientalist projections.

New mythmaking requires a series of seemingly disparate schools of thought that must converse to create a narrative palimpsest. To define a rubric for these idea conversations, Theodor Adorno's 'constellation' framework in *Negative Dialectics* was useful to "unlock some of the historical dynamic 'process stored in the object,'" Orientalism.[1] The constellation as a mythmaking tool becomes the fulcrum through which the amorphous nature of immersive theatre becomes an asset to its function as an interrogative tool. The immersive theatre object Adorno refers to is the Egyptian persona as the performer-researcher.

To understand the cultural context that formed the present understanding of the Egyptian figure, Edward Said's *Orientalism* provides a targeted launching point that examines Western staging of the Middle East. This thesis is concerned with the intentional Occidental framing of the Oriental as ghost-like, grotesque, and "dead." Ghosting of the individual, specifically in the case of film, is called hauntology by philosopher Jacques Derrida. In *Ghost Dance* (1983) and later in *Specters of Marx*, ghosts complicate time as they exist in the past and future simultaneously.

As both researcher and performer, performance time is fed by the constellatory repositioning of theory and practice in a self-referential cycle. What results is a transmutation of the Oriental figure into the alchemical Magnum Opus. By extension, the Magnum Opus, has a changed relationship with the audience, and thus a transmuted theatrical experience.

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[1] Pickford, Henry, and Lambert Zuidervaart. 2003. "Theodor W. Adorno." Stanford.edu. May 5, 2003. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/#NegDia.