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‘Performance as Research and Democracy’

Performance as Research Working Group

Reading and Writing Postdramatic Plays: Digital and Democratic Practices

This paper will engage the following inquiry initiated by the PaR Working Group: How do digital technologies impact on the distribution of PaR projects and what are the issues of participation, inclusion and rights involved in the circulation of materials online? To interrogate the relationship between democracy and PaR, I will analyse my playwrighting practice, which involves writing a play with a network of ‘collabowrighters’ in the form of what I name a ‘hyper(play)text.’ A hyper(play)text is a play presented as digital literature, located on the world-wide-web as a website where hypermedia enables a (syn)aesthetic reading experience. Considering the etymology of the term, ‘playwright’ which denotes a craftsman, I view playwrighting practice as a process of building and layering many forms of written language. Drawing from Barthes’ notion of *writerly*, I define ‘collabowrighterly’ as a process that blurs the lines between author and reader, involving an ever-expanding collaborative network to create through various modes of writing.

In 1968, Barthes declared that, “to give writing its future; it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes “The Death of the Author” 7). With dramatic literary texts, this notion is problematized by the law, when directors, designers and actors, who first approach the dramatic text as ‘readers,’ through practice, transfer the dramatic text into a theatrical text. It is my position that the law, which generally speaking, is designed to protect the ‘author’ by endowing ‘exclusive rights’ to his or her ‘work,’ is in conflict with postmodern notions that empower the reader to determine meaning for his or herself. The conflict between law and theory is further complicated in postdramatic theatre where the text is decentralized, and new definitions of “writing’ and new models of writing collaboratively prevail.

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In 1999, Lehmann originated the term 'postdramatic' to describe growing trends in avant-garde theatre since the late 1960's. Lehmann proposes that the "postdramatic" is not as focused on the drama itself, but rather a particular performance aesthetic that repositions the text, which had previously been at the center of the theatrical experience. As a playwright, I situate my practice within Hans-Thies Lehmann's 'postdramatic.' Playwrighting in the postdramatic becomes a curatorial process.

In 1982, The Wooster Group began development on a new work, *LSD (...just the high points...)*, which deconstructs Arthur Miller's iconic play, *The Crucible*, and integrates the writings of Beat poets such as Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac. *LSD* is an example of Barthes' definition of text as:

a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture... [where] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them (Barthes "The Death of the Author" 6).

LSD was ultimately closed due to the threat of a legal battle with Miller who felt that his play was being 'misrepresented.' The Wooster Group's 'postdramatic' deconstructions, specifically *LSD*, raise debate around respecting the source text, copyright law, and responsibility to the 'Author.'

Using the Wooster-Miller conflict as case a study, I will consider the dilemma of "authorship" in a postdramatic era from two perspectives: a theoretical lens, where deconstructionist theory empowers the reader at the expense of the author; and from the perspective of law, specifically in the United States. I will refer to a mix of Barthes' and Foucault's critical theories on text and authorship as a foundation with which to engage with more contemporary discourse around Lehmann's 'postdramatic' theater. First I will discuss the author as a functional principle of socio-economics, as presented by Foucault, in order to

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understand how and why Miller is empowered by the law. Second, I will consider the language imposed by The Copyright Act of 1976 in the United States, which would have potentially been invoked had Miller actually taken The Wooster Group to court. This act is an extension of the 1790 act, which is in part derivative of the earliest British copyright laws, which began in 1557 under the rule of Queen Mary Tudor, and was an instrument of censorship, rather than a protection of the author. In 1709, the ‘Statute of Anne’ was designed to encourage learning through the creation of new works, and introduced the concept of the ‘public domain.’ In the US, the 1976 act has since been revised, most notably with the 1998 Sonny Bono Copyright Terms Extension Act, which matched the European term limit on copyrights. Third, I will consider how postmodern deconstructionist theory has aligned with digital technology with such forms as the ‘Mashup,’ further problematizing the law. To conclude, I will discuss the ethics of postmodern dramaturgy by analyzing my current playwriting practice against the backdrop of the Wooster-Miller conflict. My practice-led research project, *Rumi High*, takes the digital form of what I name a ‘hyper(play)text,’ which frees itself from the confines of the print industry and locates the play at a website, to be read and accessed by a global audience, enabling a “(syn)aesthetic” reading experience (Machon). *Rumi High* too, deconstructs text from *The Crucible*.

The Author vs. The Public: Arthur Miller as a ‘functional principle’

The Wooster Group had previously deconstructed Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, which was in the ‘public domain,’ for their production of *Routes 1 & 9*. The ‘public domain’ is “generally understood as describing the repertoire constituted by non-protected material (works, etc.): when copyright in a work expires” (Sterling 1243). Ron Vawter, member of The Wooster Group, explains: “*LSD* is still such a problem because of... the whole notion of

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theatrical property. That's interesting to us, that words can be owned, and that you can trespass even by the way you interpret them" (Savran 206). In 1969, Foucault expanded upon Barthes' notion that the 'Author' is dead, by explaining that:

the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction (Foucault 21).

Here, Foucault takes on a legal and social conception of authorship. He attaches the 'Author' to ownership, equating a written work to marketable goods, over which the 'Author' has certain rights and responsibilities. Lamarque emphasizes Foucault's point that,

the mere act of writing (writing on the sand, jottings on the envelope) does not make an author. An author so designated is a more weighty figure with legal rights and social standing, a producer of texts deemed to have value... [it] is about social conventions and a class of persons engaged in particular acts; it is not about a persona, a fictional character, or a construct of the text (Lamarque 81).

For the purposes of this case study, I lean on Foucault's distinction that the term 'Author' is bound up with socio-economic implications, protected by law. After all, it was Miller himself who chose to look to the law for protection from what he felt was The Wooster Group's violation of his 'exclusive rights' as the 'Author' of *The Crucible*. Shillingsburg explains:

the sense of helplessness to control the life of the text that has always attended authorship... has led [authors] to perform a variety of acts and to stipulate a variety of provisions designed to influence readers to treat their texts as they intended them to be treated. Just read any preface to any book, any prologue to any collections of poems, any interview with any author about his or her works and you will see authors trying, after the fact, to control how people react to or understand their works (Shillingsburg 15).

In dramatic texts, playwrights may use stage directions in a manner that can be viewed as a method of instilling control over future performance productions of their 'work.' Stage directions may include notes on setting, lighting, character, costume, and physical actions; which influence how theatre-makers may develop a theatrical text.

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Miller threatened to force legal action on the premise that The Wooster Group used portions of his play without permission. Described as “a reading that breaks down,” *LSD* is performed in four parts. LeCompte describes the structure of *LSD* as a “[linguistic] disintegration of *The Crucible*” (Savran 195-96). In Part I, the male members of the group are seated behind a long table and take turns reading excerpts of writings by Timothy Leary and the Beat poets of the 1950’s and 1960’s, seemingly at random. These ‘readings’ of the Beat poets are juxtaposed with Anne Rower’s recollections of babysitting Leary. Part II is composed of fast-paced readings of excerpts from *The Crucible* performed by the female members (in 17th century costume), and the male members (who remain in their contemporary dress from Part I). In Part III, the first two parts collide as The Wooster Group re-enacts a rehearsal of Miller’s play conducted under the influence of L.S.D. Part IV ends the play with a dance, riffing off of the fear of dancing that permeates the world within Miller’s play. LeCompte, as advised by a copyright lawyer, made adjustments to *LSD*; cutting Part II down to twenty minutes, performing Miller’s text in gibberish and pantomime, and ultimately replacing Miller’s text with a different play, (*The Hearing* by Michael Kirby). None of these revisions satisfied Miller, who himself had only seen part of a rehearsal for *LSD*. Perhaps Miller felt that his play’s “dramatic tension [was] undermined” (Savran 180). Perhaps he couldn’t see beyond the traces of his own play to understand that The Wooster Group was not producing *The Crucible*. Miller appears to be motivated by his own qualitative criticisms of avant-garde theatre, which he expresses in an interview with Christopher Bigsby:

They did a production of *The Crucible* in which everyone spoke at a rate of speed like an automation and this was celebrated in the *avant-garde* circles as the wave of the future. Of course, it’s a form of graffiti; they take a work and scribble on it, like children often do, and cut up the pages and so on. It’s creating nothing excepting the excuse of not being bored. You see, since you can’t understand quite what the characters are saying it becomes interesting simply to try to make out what’s going

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on... what that has to do with the investigation of human beings and society escapes me (Bigsby 136).

Whereas Miller equivocates the work of The Wooster Group to that of a bored child, Heuvel explains that, *LSD* "emphasized the discontinuities inherent in reading: between the temporalities of the writer and those of the reader, the intentions of the writer and the reader's interpretation, and so on. Reading is staged not as a passive activity but as the writing or the inscription of a text, as an act of interpretation, an exercise of power" (Heuvel 148).

The Wooster Group's director, Liz LeCompte explained to Miller, in writing, that her use of excerpts from *The Crucible* was an attempt to "put the audience in a position of examining their own relation to this material" (Savran 181). Miller stated: "The issue here is very simple. I don't want my play produced except in total agreement with the way I wrote it" (Massa), and, "I don't want the play mangled that way" (Shewey 123). I will argue that the issue is not simple, and that Miller's own language in response to The Wooster Group, filtered through agents, lawyers and the media ("*my* play," "the way I wrote it," and "mangled"), is problematic in a postdramatic era. Although Miller himself is not writing within the postdramatic paradigm, his 'works' are inevitably susceptible to contemporary readings, re-interpretations and deconstructions, as they enter the historical canon of dramatic plays. Miller has been a strong advocate for the rights of writers, having served as president of PEN International (1965-1969), and in 2004 he gave testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary in support of 'The Playwrights Antitrust Licensing Act: Safeguarding the Future of American Live Theater.' Savran, who offers the most comprehensive account of the politics of *LSD* in his book, *Breaking the Rules*, highlights the great irony of the conflict between Miller and The Wooster Group:

Miller's threat of legal action has proven the veracity of the Wooster Group's demonstration. It has confirmed the suggestion that the sphere of interpretation is not a pure, aesthetic realm but the world of political power. In this world, Miller's own

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reading of the play is distinguished from all others not because it is more correct but because it is empowered with the force of law. By insisting on his own interpretation, Miller has, ironically, aligned himself with the very forces that *The Crucible* condemns, those authorities who exercise their power arrogantly and arbitrarily to ensure their continued political and cultural dominion (Savran 219).

Next, I will further Savran’s position by considering how U.S. copyright law has evolved since the 1790 act, in order to understand how “postmodern sensibilities and new technologies... expose... deep flaws in the law” (Vaidhyanathan 5).

‘Stifling’ vs. ‘Mangling:’ Copyright Law as ‘creative enabler’

Barthes states that, "[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes "The Death of the Author" 6). Shillingsburg asserts that, "it seems just common sense to believe that most authors have long been aware that their texts are regularly appropriated by others for uses unrelated to their own original intentions" (Shillingsburg 14). Since Miller chose to pursue legal action, requesting that his lawyers issue a cease-and-desist letter to The Wooster Group, I will consider the implications of The Copyright Law of 1976, Shillingsburg’s “common sense” view, and Barthes’ notion that the ‘Author’ ‘limits,’ and thus closes off the text from the natural cycle of interpretation and reinterpretation. To further this point, I emphasize The Wooster Group’s perspective that Miller’s disapproval of *LSD* was connected to his concerns that their production would prevent a possible ‘first-class’ production of his play, a position which views the play as property with market value, in line with Foucault’s view of the ‘Author.’ Although Miller sought legal action, The Wooster Group was never taken to court because they ultimately complied with Miller’s request, closing their New York production. Since a lawsuit never took place, we do not know what rights Miller would have claimed in order to assert his authorial control over *The Crucible*. My reference to the Copyright Act of 1976 is

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merely speculative, as it stands as the most logical law for Miller to have invoked at that time.

In the US, “[t]he 1790 Copyright Act gave authors and their successors in title the sole right and liberty of printing their works: it fixed the initial period of protection at 14 years, with a possibility of an extension of 14 years...” (Sterling 12). US copyright law was designed by the founding fathers to encourage and reward creativity. Acknowledging that the production of creative works has a direct affect on both the economy and the education of American society, the 1790 law was passed on the premise that “creativity depends on the use, criticism and supplementation, and consideration of previous works... authors should enjoy this monopoly just long enough to provide an incentive to create more, but the work should live afterward in the “public domain,” as common property of the reading public” (Vaidhyathan 21). *The Crucible* was first published in 1953. Under the 1790 law, presumably, Miller’s text would have been available, in the public domain, beginning in 1981. *LSD* was produced by The Wooster Group in 1983. Prior to 1976, the last revision to the Copyright Act was in 1909. Since that time, the notion of a ‘work’ had expanded with the development of television, film and radio industries. The 1976 Act extends the “Author’s” protection to life plus 50 years and awards widows and heirs to royalties for up to 190 years. Miller passed away in 2005, subsequently protecting his exclusive rights for *The Crucible* until 2055, and maintaining the play’s market value until 2245. The 1976 Act established six ‘exclusive rights’ afforded to authors for copyrighted works, of which one is ‘to perform work publicly.’ However, the 1976 Act also introduced, in Section 107, the ‘fair use doctrine,’ in order to consider “actions which do not constitute infringement of copyright, when done for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, research” (Sterling 1228). The doctrine, which considers four factors, "permits courts to

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avoid rigid application of the copyright statute when, on occasion, it would stifle the very creativity which [the] law is designed to foster" (Kinsey 309). The four factors are:

- (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
 - (2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
 - (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
 - (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyright work
- (Sterling 547).

Whereas Miller defines The Wooster Group's staging of excerpts of *The Crucible* as "mangling," interpretation of the 'fair use doctrine' might view Miller's objection as "stifling" the group's creative process. Further, as Kinsey applies the law to the Mashup Artist, "use of the copyrighted material may be considered 'fair' ... so long as it has a transformative, creative purpose and adequately satisfies the four factors established within the fair use doctrine" (Kinsey 308). In theatre, the dramatic literary text "occupies a privileged position" Fischer-Lichte notes, distinguishing the "theatrical text... [as] a performance of the literary text. The relation between the two texts thus becomes a problem... [T]he transformation of the literary into the theatrical text may be a process of translation in which a switch is made from one sign system to another" (Fischer-Lichte 191). She goes on to explain that, "[t]he transformation of the drama's literary text into the theatrical text of a performance can thus only be defined and described appropriately as the translation of signs from a linguistic sign system into those of a theatrical sign system. The drama's literary text is not, in other words, merely transferred into another medium" (Fischer-Lichte 192). The deconstructions of The Wooster Group can certainly be considered "transformations," as their 'works' do not substitute or replace the original works, in accordance with factor 4 of the "fair use doctrine," which evaluates the work, again, according to market values.

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The four principles of the “fair use doctrine” appear to be open to interpretation by court judges. A deconstructive reading of the law itself would perhaps use factor 3 to argue that The Wooster Group only used a small portion of Miller’s text, and that *LSD* is an entirely different ‘work’ than *The Crucible*, neither a translation nor an adaptation, and perhaps something even more extreme than a transformation, as defined by Fischer-Lichte. In considering factor 4, there is no indication that The Wooster Group’s production of *LSD* would decrease monetary value or prevent future productions of *The Crucible*, since they were not producing a theatrical text of *The Crucible*. Instead, they were performing a work that transformed excerpts of the play to create an entirely different work. I would further argue that, The Wooster Group’s enacting of Barthes’ “multidimensional space” brings new life to Miller’s writing, and perhaps would peak interest in the original work, rather than compete with it. This perhaps raises questions around why The Wooster Group initially pursued acquiring the performance rights for Miller’s play.

Absence vs. Fidelity: ‘MashUp Art’ as deconstruction

Miller’s play was merely one of many starting points within The Wooster Group’s creative process, including the writings of the Beat poets, and the group’s own history as an avant-garde performance group, having recently been defunded by the New York State Council for the Arts, on accusations that their production, *Routes 1 & 9*, was inherently racist. *LSD* and most works by The Wooster Group can be considered a ‘deconstruction:

The group takes an existing piece of dramatic literature, in this case *The Crucible*, and through a process of segmenting the text, repetitions and stripping away theatrical and dramatic contexts, finds resonances, meanings, textures and references in the text that were either not readily apparent or were not originally intended. The new, deconstructed text becomes a commentary on the old one. The process is naive in the sense that it does not proceed from a theoretical basis; it is an actual response by artists to other art (Aronson 75-6).

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Shillingsburg asserts that, "every time we analyze a text for what it hides or for what it reveals unwillingly (or unwittingly), we deconstruct the text... we exercise our reading rights without regard to authorial control or in direct opposition to it" (Shillingsburg 16). “*The Crucible* becomes present only in the form of becoming utterly unrecognizable and eventually absent” (Chon 7). In other words, these excerpts from *The Crucible* were ‘transformed’ into an entirely different theatrical work. The dilemma is, that deconstructive reading rights do not necessarily extend to performance rights, especially in the eyes of the law, where works have yet to enter the public domain. As previously stated, the current law keeps *The Crucible* from the public until 2245.

Here I will take a brief pause from the Wooster-Miller conflict to consider the published copyright statements in a number of case studies that I analyse in my doctoral research. The publisher’s pages of printed playtexts will often employ language that assert’s the author’s ownership of the work. The published printed editions of plays by Suzan-Lori Parks, Mac Wellman, and *The Living Theatre* contain copyright statements that highlight the tension between theory and law.

The publisher’s page of the collected works version of *The America Play* reads:

All rights including but not limited to, professional, amateur, recording, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are expressly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed on the question of readings and all uses of these plays by educational institutions, permission for which must be secured from the author’s representative (Parks).

Here, we see that Parks’ play assumes a much broader set of possibilities, leading me to wonder if I need permission to read the play aloud in the privacy of my own home as her essay, *Elements of Style* encourages. The copyright statement in Wellman’s anthology *The Difficulty Of Crossing A Field* addresses two types of potential use:

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No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No performance or dramatic reading of any script or part thereof may be given without the written permission of the playwright or his representative (Wellman iv).

The affect of technology is implicit in this statement, which addresses all of the potential ways that a play might be reproduced. The possible use of a playtext as a mediated text is clearly expansive. How these rights are controlled, and whether or not such restrictions limit the work's accessibility to a wider readership is worth exploring in an age where the lines around intellectual property are blurred. The most 'open' copyright statement is offered in *Paradise Now!* which states:

The play "Paradise Now" is not private property: there are no performance royalties to pay: it is free: for any community that wants to play it (Malina and Beck).

This statement is aligned with the ethos of The Living Theatre, and emphasizes the play's stated mission, to prepare the reader for revolution, a preparation that should be free and available to all. The politics of publishing raises many questions around the intended purpose of published *literary playtexts*. These copyright statements acknowledge the range of types of re-production, for both *performance texts* and *literary texts*. Can the language of these statements keep up with the ever-changing technological landscape where methods for access, exchange, reproduction and manipulation of all types of text becomes more widespread and complex?

Returning to The Wooster Group's deconstruction of Miller's text, which I will consider a 'transformation,' of *The Crucible*, (supported by the 'fair use doctrine'), we must interrogate deconstructive processes versus fidelity to text. Radoslavjevic states, "the only fidelity that is possible in the process of adaptation is the fidelity to one's own form of expression and the deployment of one's own language to enable it to effectively communicate the meanings of what has been understood and is being translated" (Radosavljevic 80). Miller

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too appropriated text: names and storylines from history itself. At the start of *The Crucible*,

Miller offers the following disclaimer:

As for the characters of the persons, little is known about most of them excepting what may be surmised from a few letters, the trial record, certain broadsides written at the time, and references to their conduct in sources of varying reliability. They may therefore be taken as creations of my own, drawn to the best of my ability in conformity with their known behavior, except as indicated in the commentary I have written for this text. (Miller 2)

Miller himself was deconstructing the stories of real people, and transforming the events of the Salem Witch trials into his own dramatic commentary on the McCarthy era. It can be argued that LeCompte was continuing the cycle of appropriation by treating Miller's iconic dramatic material as a historical document, to be deconstructed into a commentary on contemporary debates around interpretation, transformed into a new work.

In contemporary popular culture, the form known as the 'Mashup,' prevalent in the music industry, where the artist's "creation is often neither entirely the product of his own creativity, nor distributed online with the original copyright holder's permission," complicates common assumptions around authorship and ownership (Kinsey 304). Kinsey discusses the complications of The Copyright Act of 1976 and its 'fair use' doctrine in relation to this 21st century 'MashUp' phenomenon, which may include "sculptures, paintings, video, audio or audiovisual works... [or] any combination of these forms" (Kinsey 306). While literary and theatrical works are not included in any known definition of the 'Mashup Artist,' (a term more associated with digital media), for the purposes of this study, I would like to consider live theatre and performance as 'Mashup-able.' The Wooster Group, composes works through deconstruction and collage techniques, which transform pre-existing texts to generate new material; thus, they are the quintessential 'Mashup (theatre) Artists.'

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Playwrighting vs. Collabowrighting: Plays as websites

In 21st century performance, multi-media representations of dramatic texts expand the possibilities of how a playwright's work is transformed into a performance. Contemporary culture's emphasis on interactivity, choice and participation in the theatrical event, has reconstructed the meaning-making process for theatre-goers and makers alike. As Fuchs suggests:

In the games now being enacted in the electronic coils of virtual reality is emerging a much more radical theater of reading and writing than any performed on the stage... In these worlds, speech and writing, body and idea, presence and print, know nothing of former boundary disputes and appear in post-deconstructionist fusion. Room must always be left in the story, finally, for new human adaptations (Fuchs 91).

With law, the "fair use doctrine" makes room for postmodern notions of deconstruction.

However, the rapid expansion of technology's role in how we access, create and use works of art, continues to problematize the interpretation of law, and demands further revisions in order to remain true to the initial intentions of copyright law, to promote creativity.

My practice-led research involves writing a site-specific interactive play, *Rumi High*, with a network of 'collabowrighters,' amongst whom I include performers, designers and audience. I define my writing process as 'collabowrighterly,' where the lines between author and reader are blurred to encourage a heightened interactivity between writers and readers in the meaning-making process. If all participants are 'collabowrighters,' is the 'work' controlled by my vision? Does the ever-expanding network of 'collabowrighters' continuously (re)shape my vision into a collective vision that changes with each reader? My position that we are all writing *Rumi High* counters Miller's belief that he has total control of how his play is produced, presented and interpreted. Miller's belief system is protected by the law. Is it a matter of my choice to not invoke the law with regards to accessing and producing my work? Whereas I encourage readers to become writers, to transform the play into their

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own creation, the notion of a *collabowrighterly* process is problematized when my name appears in the byline (*Rumi High, an intifada by johnmichael rossi*). As I textually reclaim authorship, we must consider the ways authorship implies ownership, considering both the law and critical theory.

Rumi High addresses the topic of education and takes place throughout a school building where a multi-linear narrative is activated when the reader, situated as a ‘student,’ makes choice in what paths to follow throughout the ‘school day.’ *Rumi High* is composed of a multi-linear structure, enabled through hyperlinking, in order to empower reader to form their own plotlines amongst many possible plotlines.

LeCompte’s writing process for *LSD* began with a road trip to Salem, Massachussetts, which led to a series of readings of Miller’s play. According to Aronson, "*The Crucible* is probably one of the most frequently performed plays in high schools and colleges and, as such, has a certain degree of instant recognition, as a sort of theatrical icon." Coincidentally, my decision to use *The Crucible*, to write *Rumi High*, a play that critiques and parodies the American public school system, was inspired by my own work in New York City public schools, where Miller’s play is staple to most high school curriculum. *Rumi High* appropriates text from *The Crucible* as well as the writings of Rumi. My deliberate (mis)use of existing texts to construct a new text furthers the debate on whether or not a text can ever be owned or confined to the author’s intention.

In *Rumi High*, Debi`, a first-year teacher at Rumi High, is given a last-minute change of schedule that names her the school’s drama teacher. She protests on the premise that she knows nothing of drama, but ultimately accepts the task in favor of being seen as insubordinate on her first day. She discovers a stack of copies of *The Crucible* and decides to work on Miller’s play with the students. As Debi` struggles to adapt to the life of a public

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school teacher and teaches a topic outside her realm of expertise, the students grapple with Miller’s dated text. As the school, and the play itself, boils into a crucible of its own, the students become empowered when Debi` allows the students to put Miller’s text into their own words. Selecting the ‘high points’ of the story and adapting dialogue into their own invented urban vernacular, the students begin to deconstruct *The Crucible*. The student production is ultimately banned by the administration, and they decide to perform their play, *The Confuciblez*, in a secret location in the school. Only some readers will discover this plot point, based on choices made in their interactive reading of the text. In addition to *The Confuciblez* portion of the play, traces of *The Crucible* (direct quotes, variations of character names, plot points and themes) are confused as they infest the world of *Rumi High*, leading up to the presentation of the student production.

I define my writing process as ‘collabowrighterly,’ where the lines between author and reader are blurred to encourage a heightened interactivity between writers and readers in the meaning-making process. The notion of a collabowrighterly process opens the text’s definition to a more expansive definition, situating readers as co-authors who are part of an infinite readership. Playwrighting practice may also include the work of graphic designers, multi-media artists and software programmers to shape the work, as evidenced by this practice project. My notion of collabowrighting implies that there is not just one author, but many, who each leave traces in the text. While I acknowledge my authorial control as ‘initial writer,’ my playwrighting practice includes work-shopping, rehearsing and presenting texts-in-progress with designers, performers and audience members. If all participants are collabowrighters, is the work controlled by my vision? Or, does the ever-expanding network of collabowrighters continuously (re)shape my own authorial vision? Is the ‘grasp’ loosened or tightened?

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With the hyper(play)text authorial control is further instilled by my ownership of the domain and website. It can be argued that my choice to purchase a web domain that I own, and to construct a site with hidden pathways, is only deepening and expanding my control of the reading experience. As I encourage readers to become writers, to transform the play into their own creation, the notion of a collabowrighterly process is further problematized when my name appears in the byline (*Rumi High, an intifada by johnmichael rossi*). As I textually claim authorship, we must consider the ways authorship implies ownership, considering both the law and critical theory.

The collabowrighterly process is inevitably cross-disciplinary, and the hyper(play)text presents a model of collaborating that is even more expansive than the conventional collaborative network for theatre-making. My collaborations with two theatre ensembles, members of newFangled theatReR and the BEEz represent practices that are often seen in theatre-making processes. It can be argued that this practice project gives more authorial agency to various types of theatre-makers, and credits them more integrally to the overall work. Even the wide network of *performance readers* who I cite as collabowrighters, represent the view that the audience does indeed shape a theatrical work, as it evolves from performance to performance, production to production. The introduction of digital technology to enable collaboration is evident in Skype rehearsals, which allowed international collaboration, and the Facebook forum, which made possible a continuous streaming dialogue. The postdramatic context that *Rumi High* emerges from also suggests two other forms of collaboration that I will discuss here.

Appropriated Collabowrighting

Considering Kinsey’s definition for the ‘Mashup’ form, most prevalent in the music industry, where the artist’s “creation is often neither entirely the product of his own

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creativity, nor distributed online with the original copyright holder's permission," complicates common assumptions around authorship and ownership (Kinsey 304). While literary and theatrical works are not included in any known definition of the 'Mashup Artist,' (a term more associated with digital media), for the purposes of this research, I will consider plays as 'Mashup-able.'

Miller himself was deconstructing the stories of real people, and transforming the events of the Salem Witch trials into his own dramatic commentary on the McCarthy era. At the start of *The Crucible*, Miller offers the following disclaimer:

As for the characters of the persons, little is known about most of them excepting what may be surmised from a few letters, the trial record, certain broadsides written at the time, and references to their conduct in sources of varying reliability. They may therefore be taken as creations of my own, drawn to the best of my ability in conformity with their known behavior, except as indicated in the commentary I have written for this text. (Miller 2)

It can be argued that LeCompte was continuing the cycle of appropriation by treating Miller's iconic dramatic material as a historical document, to be deconstructed into a commentary on contemporary debates around interpretation.

Miller's text was appropriated and embedded into *Rumi High* in two ways: when the students rehearse, adapt and ultimately perform parts of the *The Crucible*. In a workshop with the BEEz, performers improvised the entire story of *The Crucible* after watching the 1996 film adaptation. Playing student characters from *Rumi High*, the BEEz improvised a thirty-minute performance that deconstructed *The Crucible*. This improvisation was filmed and later translated into the play that the student characters perform, *The Confuciblez*.

The second way, more subtle, occurs when fragments of Miller's text seep into the dialogue of the play. I began this approach to appropriating pre-existing text by copying and pasting lines of text into the developing text of *Rumi High*. At first, I italicized the text from *The Crucible* until the textual fragments were blended into the play. In addition to the text,

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some of the characters in *Rumi High* also echo the behaviors of characters in *The Crucible*. For example, BIG MIKEY BEE channels Reverend Parris and LILY-WHITE behaves akin to Abigail Williams.

I also exercised 'collaboration through appropriation' with Rumi's poems. I surveyed several collections of Rumi's writing, searching for poems that resonated with the storyline. In practical workshops, I experimented with different characters performing specific poems, to interrupt the plot, using the Rumi text to provide the reader an inner life of each character that runs counter to his/her appearance and behavior within the plot. Rumi's poems appear when a reader clicks on JaMz OF FABRIZ.

Through this method of collaboration through appropriation, texts are 'mashed up' as Miller and Rumi posthumously become a part of the network of collabowriters. The font designs and sound effects used in the hyper(play)text, it can be said, also have been appropriated. While this material is free to use, the intentions of the designs were not specific to *Rumi High*.

Deferred Collabowriting

Rumi High situates the reader as a 'student,' to experience a school setting, where learning is the objective. What is to be learned is never clearly defined. Hyperlinking is the primary tool for conceiving and constructing a multi-linear narrative that positions the reader as a highly active choice-maker within a dramatic structure. As Barthes states:

the work itself functions as a general sign... The Text... practises the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning,' its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*. Similarly, the *infinity* of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the un-nameable signified) but to that of *playing* (Barthes *Image Music Text* 158).

Each reader as student will inevitably *break* this Text into his/her own meanings, which will ricochet between individual and collective experiences within the frame of the 'work.' Each

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reader has the opportunity to construct their own narrative; one of many possible scripted narratives. Liestol states:

In reading hypertext fiction the reader not only recreates narratives but creates and invents new ones not even conceived of by the primary author. In hypertext fiction the key principles of narrative structuring, and thus the basic operations of authorship, are transferred from author to reader, from primary to secondary author... With hypertext fiction the reader is invited to take interactive part in the operations of what we may call the narrative machinery (Liestol 98).

It is my aim, with *Rumi High*, to provoke the audience, through playing the role of student, to write their own experience of the 'work;' to write into the Text, with their own experiences, both past and present. Here, the action of reading is not *deferred* so much as it is forged. The readers may not realize until after the experience that they have co-authored this work. This is deferred collabowrighting, as the reader's understanding and acknowledgment that s/he has contributed to the creation of the work and future readings, may not be immediately apparent.

The digital tools used to aid this writing process, not only opened pathways of collaboration, but manifest into the play itself. For example, social networking became a significant writing tool in developing *Rumi High*. By establishing a Facebook group page, *The S'kool of Edumacation*, I formed an ever-expanding network of educators, former students and artists, totaling 137 members, who share video, articles, images, personal comments and 'likes,' writing an ongoing dialogue around education that creates a content stream, that inevitably leaves its 'traces' in the play. Similarly the post-show discussions allowed *performance readers* to contribute to and engage with the work in a manner that ultimately influenced the on-going wrighting of the play.

My notion of a collabowrighterly process suggests an infinite opening of the meaning-making process continuously surrendering authorial control. If the 'Text' is a 'deferred action,' the processes involved in the publication of a printed *literary playtext*, the production of a *performance playtext* and the designing of a hyper(play)text, all

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collabowrighterly, should place into question whether or not I am the sole author, and whether any of the collabowrighters have authority over the 'work.'

Closings vs. Openings: Rumi High as provocation

Rumi High, to date, has not received a public performance production outside of public workshops and staged readings, though the play is 'live' on the web (www.RumiHigh.org). The play's relationship with *The Crucible* is undeniable. The 'hyper(play)text' itself cites and links the reader to references, primary sources and contextual information which acknowledges Miller's authorship, as well as the many other authors who are embedded in the playtext of *Rumi High*. The project is protected by the "fair use doctrine" in that the play is part of a research project, being developed for educational purposes. If produced outside of the realm of academia, or if the 'hyper(play)text' becomes a model for future works of this digital deconstructive nature, what role will the law play in allowing or preventing such creativity? Will authors 'stifle' the creativity of future authors, or embrace the notion of 'collabowrighterly?'

Barthes professed: "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination... the reader... that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes "The Death of the Author" 7). It may be said that Barthes' and Foucault's theoretical challenges to the notions of the 'Author,' are rooted in its own very specific historical and social context echoing the antiauthoritarian sentiments of the late 1960's. However, the affect of these notions around authorship plays out on a heightened level in the postdramatic era where the concept of 'deconstruction' becomes prevalent. Fuchs explains 'deconstruction' as "not the destruction of a literary work

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but rather the exposing in that work of contradictory possibilities of interpretation” (Fuchs 174). Proceeding from Lehmann’s notion that the theater of the late 20th and early 21st centuries is composed from a ‘complex system of signifiers,’ which may or may not be bound to the written text, we can begin to understand in a historical context, how “The Group’s working methods itself disrupts the most essential element of a conventional scripted drama: the integrity of the sign and an author’s ability to manipulate signifiers in order to render a predetermined meaning or theme external to the work” (Heuvel 101). It has been thirty years since the Wooster-Miller conflict, and digital technology and experiments in performance and theatre have only complicated theoretical discourse in relation to the law, which in appears to be confused by its original purpose: to promote and reward creative activity.

The collaborative potential in postdramatic playwrighting practices is increased by the hyper(play)text’s employment of new poetic layers to express various aspects of the play. This research project acknowledges the authorial input that performers and theatre-makers have always contributed to the writing of a play, and reflects on a process of ‘mutual creation’ that has increased their agency in the writing process. This playwrighting practice also includes the work of graphic designers, multi-media artists and software programmers to shape the work. The notion of a collabowrighterly process opens the text’s definition to a more expansive term of co-authors, which includes an infinite readership. While as playwright, I have maintained a certain level of control over the creative process, I have become critically conscious of my continual shift between ceding and reclaiming authority over the text.

Rumi High as a hyper(play)text problematizes ongoing debates around authorship and author’s rights, which in the 21st century have been renewed in other creative industries due

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to digital media. My use of pre-existing texts, particularly Miller's *The Crucible* and Rumi's poems, and the digital linking to online contextual material subverts the notion of copyrights and intellectual property. *Rumi High*'s intentional use of appropriated texts subjects the work to liturgical scrutiny, even though the work itself acknowledges the original texts. The hyper(play)text takes the play form into new territory where the site of reading, the Internet, enables a worldwide readership to access the play at any time, from any place. The reader also chooses the media with which to engage with the work; desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet or smartphone (or more recently, a wristwatch). The hyper(play)text makes the work vulnerable to unauthorized use and misuse of the text as the Internet enables the mass distribution, piracy and unintentional plagiarism of pre-existing works across the globe.

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