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Forbidden temporalities: the wayward aesthetics of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*

Abstract: Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* is an immersive theatrical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Hitchcock's *Rebecca* that has been staged in New York since 2011 with over 2000 performances. Sprawled over a hundred rooms within three intricately designed warehouses, the event offers a visceral exploration of a labyrinthine space and the potential for anonymous—even erotic—one-on-one encounters with a performer in the dark. This paper offers a new angle on Punchdrunk's immersive style by considering the embodiment of temporality in performance and its concurrent aesthetic politics. Borrowing from queer theory's temporal turn, it details how the company manipulates time in the space to create a 'wayward' aesthetic, borrowing from the etymology meaning "turned away" and the First Folio's name for the witches as "Weyward Sisters". Ultimately, it looks to encourage further queer readings of time in popular theatrical performance while also broadening the notion of resistant reading strategies to consider queer embodiment and theatre's haptic relationship to time.

Keywords: Performing arts, theatre, immersive; Critical theory, queer, affect; Temporality

In the New York production of *Sleep No More,* patrons explore a surreal 1930s world, an immersive adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Hitchcock's *Rebecca,* also weaving in references to the infamous 17th century Paisley Witches from Scottish lore[1]. Co-directed by Punchdrunk artistic directors Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, the event extends over a hundred rooms within three intricately designed warehouses. The experience feels like part expansive art installation and part avant-garde haunted house[2].

[1] White (2012: 221) defines immersive theatre as "a trend for performances which use installations and expansive environments, which have mobile audiences, and which invite audience participation".

[2] The production was first staged in London in 2003 and then revived in an abandoned schoolhouse outside Boston, MA in 2009 for a three-month run. A revamped, expanded version opened in March 2011 in New York's Chelsea district in the former site of a popular nightclub. The space was dubbed the McKittrick Hotel, a name derived from the hotel featured in Hitchcock's *Vertigo.* Following an extended hiatus for COVID-19, the production reopened for its open-ended run in Feb. 2022. In Fall of 2016, Punchdrunk also launched a Shanghai version.

The performance event has been analyzed from multiple vantage points, but not for its rela-

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Patrons circulate a labyrinthine space that embodies a gothic temporality that fails to move 'straight' ahead, mirroring the Macbeths' villainous preoccupation. One room features a nursery with an empty infant's crib and a mobile from which dangle twelve or more decapitated Victorian dolls. The empty blanket below channels the ghostly children that haunt the Scottish play: Macduff's murdered offspring, the bloody child of the Weïrd Sisters' apparition; even the missing baby Lady Macbeth claims to "have given suck" (1.7.54). Similarly, W. B. Worthen found himself struck by "a space emptied of children" in which "their bloody, dismembered absence is palpable, physically and metaphorically memorialized" (2012: 87).

When I first experienced *Sleep No More* in Boston (2009), things got even more twisted; Macbeth would chase a visibly pregnant Lady Macduff into the nursery before grabbing her by the arm and shoulder and repeatably slamming her body, abdomen first, into the wall. The attack was targeted directly at the womb, targeting the unborn child. In a further macabre twist, the woman's lifeless body was discarded in the abandoned crib with the dolls twirling above[3]. These moments articulated the Macbeths' fervent desire to undo Macduff's line of succession to the throne to ensure, as Lady Macbeth states, "But in them nature's copy's not eterne" (3.2.43). The affectively charged moment embodied a twisted time, an inversion of the reproductive economies that govern theatrical practice and normative temporal regimes.

This paper investigates the manipulation and performance of time in *Sleep No More* to uncover the technique behind what I call its wayward aesthetic. In *Macbeth*, the witches, who prophesy and ultimately provoke much of the action, are commonly titled the Weird Sisters, the etymology of the term "weird" referring to their supernatural powers, with reference to the Fates. As Ayanna Thompson (2010: 3) argues, this editorial move, which pulls from the Quarto rather than the Folio, works to sanitize the meaning of the sisters, likely to appease the sensibility of conservative 18th-century editors. However, in the Folio, the term "Weyward Sisters" is

tionship to homoeroticism and queerness. For a detailed description of the performance event, see Koumarianos and Silver (2013); for immersive practice, see Machon (2009) and Zaiontz (2014); for adaptation, Shakespeare, and immersion, see the cluster of essays on *Sleep No More* NYC in *Borrowers and Lenders*, 7, 2 (2012); For its relationship to postdramatic theatre, see Worthen (2012).

3 A companion that I attended the New York production with witnessed a similar attack, with Macbeth punching the pregnant Lady Macbeth in the abdomen, directly targeting the unborn child. The lifeless body still left for dead, see Fish (2016).

used, which merges "weird" (we-) with the term wayward[4]. The hybrid word recognizes the spiritual function, yet is permeated by a directional retreat from 'natural' order, its etymology from Late Middle English meaning "turned away" (OED). Within the context of this production, I illustrate how temporal dis/orientation (a movement away/ 'dis' from normative orientations) is central to the wayward aesthetic, but also how this is pleasurably and perversely aligned with sexuality and gender expressions that challenge the norm.

1. Theatrical time out of joint

The paper works from the premise that queer theory's 'temporal turn' can provide a useful means of understanding the performance of time and the temporal politics of commercial theatrical practice. The amount of theatre scholarship engaging with notions of queer time is limited. Most works, such as *Time Slips* (Pryor: 2017), focus on queer artists engaging conscientiously in progressive politics. However, the tradition of queer resistant reading strategies offers a useful model for reading mainstream cultural productions against the grain, epitomized by Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), or more recently, perhaps, by Stacy Wolf's lesbian feminist readings of American musical theatre (2011). The approach highlights how queer spectatorship can reveal the often-surprising desirous contours and ambivalent politics that can drive 'straight' cultural products. I look to follow this approach with my reading of *Sleep No More*. Further, I seek to add to the ample scholarship on the production a focus on the role of homoeroticism and queer spectatorship, which has been largely overlooked.

The theatrical forum as a medium is preoccupied with the construction, even deconstruction, of time. Bert O. States, in his treatise on theatrical phenomenology (1985), describes how theater "plucks human experience from time" and "imitates the timely in order to remove it from time" (50). Theater restructures time and "gives time a shape". Matthew Wagner (2012) has foregrounded how Shakespearean temporalities, as characterized in theatrical performance, are distinctively "rough" and "disharmonious" (5). Elizabeth Freeman in *Time Binds* (2010) details how Shakespearean time is

4 Thompson and Scott Newstok centralize the provocative potential of using "weyward" over the sanitized term "weird" in their edited collection on racialized performances of the Scottish play, *Weyward Macbeth* (2010).

at once embodied and, alluding to the story of *Hamlet*, also "out of joint" (1.5.211). In her reading of the play, the ghostly appearance of Hamlet's deceased father dislocates the body politic and the "the smooth machinery of political power, or the state's mode of *re*production" (2010: 14). An "out of joint" temporality drives plot, spurred by a desire to return to reproductive economies, such as the lineage of statehood.

Significantly, and central to the understanding of wayward aesthetics as a theatrical tool, such temporality also sparks affective and psychic engagement. For instance, the concept of suspense in the theatrical forum marks both a suspended time *and* a feeling, an embodiment of temporal delay with a consequent resistance, even a physical rush. From this perspective, the crafting of time becomes a central technique in the commercial theatrical vehicle that operates as a virtual affect-machine (Ridout: 2006). The dissident time schemes and their construction enact what Erin Hurley calls "feeling technology", mechanisms to solicit and manage the circulation of feeling among participants (2010: 4). In *Sleep No More*, Macbeth's virulent attack on Lady Macduff, and moreover the unborn child, challenges lineage, inheritance, and the reproductive economies that Freeman terms "chrononormativity" (2010) and Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism" (2004). The action embodies a violent temporal dislocation that simultaneously jars the audience's haptic experience. The solicitation of feeling "out of joint" generates a central product within the economy of the immersive theatrical exchange.

As Wagner (2012) and Freeman (2010) suggest, Shakespearean temporality creates disharmonious time schemes that challenge normative temporal regimes. Freeman is thoroughly invested in embodied forms of time, yet her readings of Shakespeare (both *Hamlet* and *Midsummer*) limit themselves to consider plays as literature, rather than as performance, opening useful space for further exploration into the role of the body and embodiment. Wagner suggests how Shakespearean performance primes audiences for "thinking about time" and "heightens the audience's sense of temporality" (100). Wagner notes a cerebral engagement and a way to understand time differently, but within the context of commercial immersive theatre, I would argue it engages principally as a mode of feeling. Punchdrunk's performance landscape encourages a visceral experience; as co-director Felix Barrett succinctly states, "Rather than being for the intellectual, for the brain, Punchdrunk is for the body" (Machon 2007). The startling moments

of Macbeth's infanticide performed a multifaceted dis/orientation, a movement away from normative orientations. This could jolt the bodies of surrounding observers temporally *and* affectively. The moment consciously pulled patrons out of their comfort zone to arouse what Patricia Clough defines as affect: the body's overwhelming or spontaneous responses to environmental change (2007: 2). The following section will further pursue the mechanics of *Sleep No More*'s wayward time and the embodied pleasures of temporal deviation.

2. Forbidden touch

The sensory experience of a time out of joint begins just moments after arriving at the performance venue. Entering the space after queuing outside, my companions and I were ushered into a darkened, candle-lit tunnel. While the prelude to Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* swelled in the background, we blindly maneuvered along a corridor as it curved around. Bartley describes this as the "most uncomfortable and frightening aspect of the performance [...] disoriented and squinting, I was forced to grope along the maze's walls" (2012: 4). The passageway offered a transition into the "spatially dislocated" world of the immersive performance (Richardson, Shohet 2012: 3). It established the rules of the theatrical contract, described by director Barrett as "a decompression chamber to acclimate to the world before being set free in it" (Machon 2009: 90-91). It drove me outside of my comfort zone to prepare me to engage with the performance's ambulatory style and the sensorial tasks that lay ahead. It even shifted attention to the process of sensory perception itself—as Martin Welton describes in his study of theatre performed in the dark, it can "draw one's attention to the motility of feeling as something to be sensed in its own right" (2010: 49).

The spatial was tethered to the temporal, but also to the sensorial. Wandering the tunnel, we were dislodged from the contemporary period. The swirling music gave the sense of traveling back in time, possibly to the 1950s or early 1960s, as suggested by the film noir soundtrack. Similarly, Glenn Ricci explains how music in *Sleep No More* "serves to heighten the dream-like qualities [...] dislocating us from time" (2012: 4). Rather than a linear, 'straight' model of time, the patrons embodied wayward motions, a way of engaging with the production founded upon physical deviations from the norm.

When we exited the dark tunnel, we entered a speakeasy dubbed the Manderley bar, where audiences could mingle and sip cocktails. The décor was fashioned after the 1930s, veering away from the tunnel's 1950s Hitchcock soundtrack. Several minutes later, my group was called off to the side where a performer informed us of the rules of the evening. We were equipped with Venetian-style masks and warned not to remove them and also to remain silent. Lastly, we were set loose down a staircase into the darkness[5]. Our only advice from the steward initiating our journey was "Fortune favors the bold!"

The performance event was structured around a mechanics of dis/orientation, which translated surprising environmental shifts into affective payoff. One of the primary ways this worked was through overstimulation. Entering the McKittrick felt like a lucid fever dream. I made my way through a detective agency, a tailor shop, a candy store, each room intricately crafted floor to ceiling and filled to the brim with antique-styled objects. When I ventured to a floor above, I discovered a sanitarium space, recalling Lady Macbeth's madness, then adjacent, a surprising expansive forest. Later, I would come to discover three additional floors below, with residences, a crypt, a graveyard, and a grand ballroom to name a few. The massive playing area stretched over 100,000 square feet, with an overabundance of items to explore in each room, producing an alarming proliferation of options, what Burton (2013) calls "the overwhelming anxiety of choice", a tactic that plays off "audience members' natural disorientation".

For director Barrett, the production's strategy is to pull the rug out from patrons, based on the fact that when "your comfort zone is removed, you don't know what to do" (Barrett and Machon 2007). As in the darkened tunnel, patrons must invent new pathways fueled by their own fantasy, even desire. Josephine Machon's research on Punchdrunk details how the spectator's (re)cognition is central to the success of the theatrical model. The technique of destabilization works to foreground the body over the cerebral as a "source of sense-making and making-sense"[6] (2009: 21). The

5 Alternatively, in Boston and in earlier visits to *Sleep No More* NYC, my journey began with a disorienting elevator ride. Our small group of masked patrons was set off on an unknown floor to begin the venture. One patron was plucked out of the group and dropped off alone on a separate floor to explore independently.

6 Machon develops the notion of (syn)aesthetics to describe how immersive performance fuses sensory and perceptual experiences, engaging the somatic/haptic and the semantic/cognitive in the individual moment (2009: 14-16).

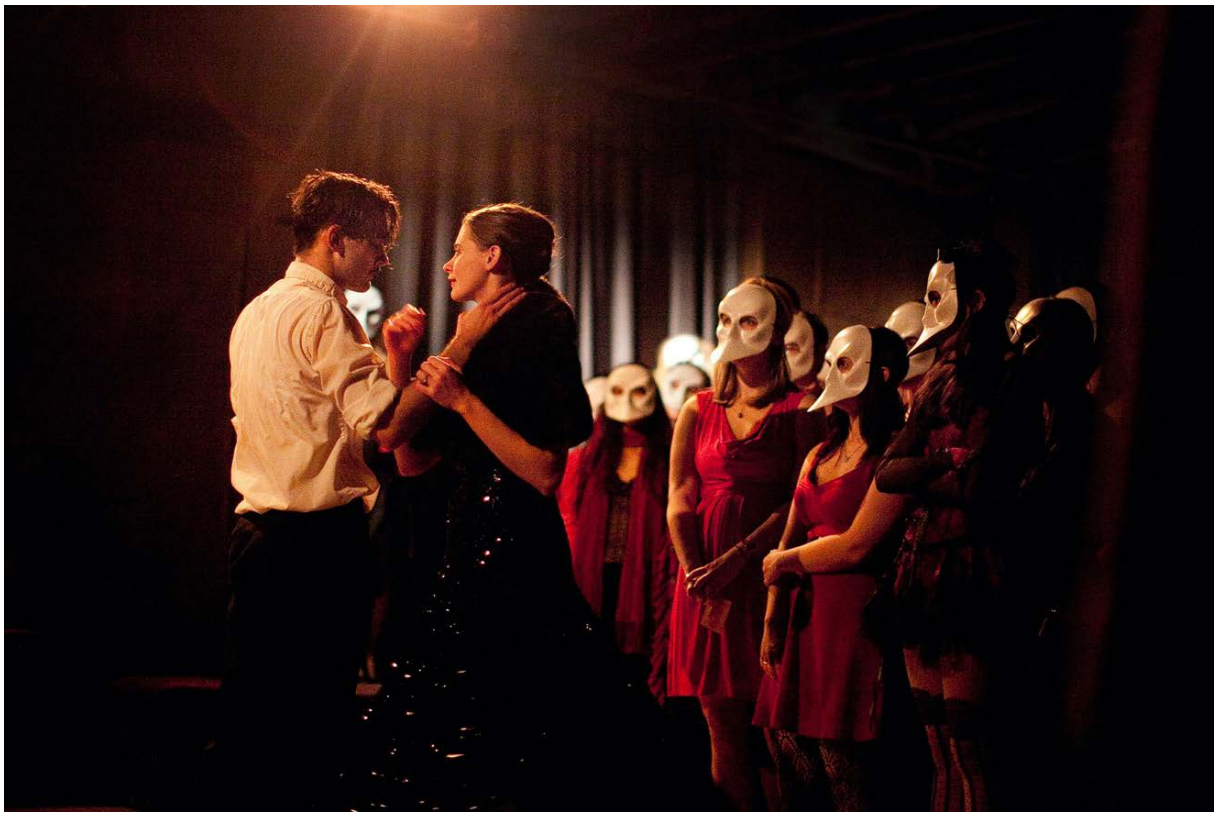

Fig. 1 Masked patrons watch performers in the immersive space. Photo by Robin Roemer for The McKittrick Hotel.

dual nature is key: generating sensuous feeling, while making 'sense' of the experience. The shift in sensory experience, often intentionally jarring, can produce swirls of sensation and even affect, a feeling that functions primarily "in excess of consciousness", going beyond the cognitive awareness of a particular emotional state (Clough 2007: 2). Machon's model, called (syn)aesthetics, functions as its own challenge to linearity, making the 'product' in the theatrical exchange more experiential. The performance lured participants away from merely coursing ahead, as one might with an Aristotelean storyline, to invite sinuous motions embodied by spectators and mirrored by the McKittrick's gothic time-space. Sara Ahmed details in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006:16) how the lines of story, like directions on a map, can become their own normative orientation device, a 'straight' way of traveling linearly that does not leave room to dally with desire outside the norm. The labyrinthine space also enacted a non-linear time out of joint. It encouraged visceral exploration—assisted by the masks—inviting audiences to attend to the feeling and pleasure of embodying waywardness.

The production's aesthetic is built upon challenging norms, whether

of story, space, or time. The strategies of the production seek to explore outside of normative bounds, but coded as a kind of wayward temptation. Doyle describes how the performance centers around "inviting a sort of forbidden touch": "We all remember the things that we shouldn't touch but do and then the excitement when we have" (Kennedy 2011). The mechanics are about a pleasurable deviation from the norm, like the sensation of excitement and shame of a child sneaking into a cookie jar. Although not a uniquely queer experience, the model embodies a dynamic often central to queer lived experience: opposing societal pressure in order to follow forbidden desires. The Chelsea performance space itself marks an appropriation of queer history. Its lower floors were the site of popular mega-club Twilo, a staple of the 90s gay nightlife scene that closed under pressure from mayor Rudy Giuliani in 2001. The cavernous warehouse setting, suited for pleasurable anonymity and challenging straight orientations, was recycled by *Sleep No More* into a mainstream theatrical event that lends itself to wayward pleasures.

I find Roland Barthes' notion of "cruising" provides a useful metaphor for the production's affective economy and immersive engagement. Cruising, for Barthes, goes beyond a strictly homoerotic or even erotic encounter to reflect a surprising engagement with the invisible hand of the author. He identifies a "voyage of desire" during which the body is in a "state of alert" (1980: 231). It reflects a fresh orientation "withdrawn from all repetition". Significantly, the practice connects the reader to the allusive artist hiding behind the sign-system. For Barthes, an author can conscientiously cruise by writing in "citations, turns of phrase, fragments", enacting a flirtatious hide-and-seek exchange with their audience (231). One particular example usefully illustrates how the production conflates erotic cruising and cruising for Shakespearean meanings. As a masked patron lurking anonymously in the darkness, I trailed the Boy Witch through several rooms. Suddenly, he pulled me out of the crowd of onlookers, inviting me into the tight quarters of an old-fashioned phone booth. When I was serendipitously selected, I experienced Barthes' "happiness of chance," which occurs as a chance encounter albeit "wished for…spied-upon" (231). The invitation was tinged with surprise and discovery, embodying a central tenet of cruising that "the catch is always fresh" (231).

My wishful encounter with the witch was also a wishful encounter with storyline. The performer stared at me, pressed against my body for

Fig. 2 Masked patrons gather around the character of the Porter who types a mysterious letter at his desk. Photo by Yaniv Schulman for The McKittrick Hotel.

an extended moment, then to end the exchange he removed a Roman-style charm necklace and placed it around my head. He leaned down and briefly whispered in my ear an incantation about how the trees will burn and Macbeth will perish, but that "this charm will keep you safe." Although the moment reflected a tactile sense of intimacy, even danger, it was also a tactile, intimate exchange with *Macbeth.* The reference to the trees alluded to *Macbeth's* infamous Birnam Wood, *Sleep No More*'s forest maze, and the witches' prophesy about the Scottish King's demise (4.1.108). Such a moment, like discovering an Easter egg, offered a sudden connection to the story, fueling me with the delight of recognition within the otherwise obscure theatrical experience. As W. B. Worthen (2012) suggests, Punchdrunk's unconventional performance is surprisingly sustained by many traditional trappings of conventional bourgeois theatre. This includes a reverence to source text, either literal or metaphorical, grounding the surreal production in Shakespeare. Rather than being transgressive, 'cruising' can become the narcissistic delight of uncovering a roadmap, a surprising orientation back to the Bard.

Patrons may search for story/lines as a way to create a more linear orientation through the performance and to bring themselves 'in line' with the event, or patrons may forgo these entirely for the sake of broader

exploration. For many, the experiential qualities win out, as patrons choose to attend to the pleasure of the space and the quality of perception. One blogger and *Sleep No More* regular describes how, following an "intimate exchange" with a performer, "I'd gotten a kick ass thrill, but most importantly, I no longer cared if I even got one iota of 'story' out of my night, or understood even remotely more than I did at that moment" (theatrejunkie 2010). The intimate exchange referred to a "one-one-one", a choreographed sequence in the production in which a cast member invites a lone patron into a private space. These secret moments, like my own with the Boy Witch, have become coveted among fans who often linger anonymously in search of a performer to lure them into a private dwelling. Following, the door is typically locked to ensure intimacy and the patron's mask removed. Producer Randy Weiner (2021) describes the one-on-ones as encapsulating his interest in a "flat-structure", since "it is not hierarchical" and the moments "have nothing to do with storyline". The exchanges effectively draw patrons *off* line, encouraging them to follow lines of desire over story.

The dramatic exchanges, often described by fans "in terms that echo an erotic pas-de-deux", are built upon a certain sexual promise, embodying the anticipation of Doyle's forbidden touch (Burton 2013). Rose Biggin describes how Punchdrunk's strategies of seduction create an experience of arousal for patrons (2020: 75). Bodies are oriented into fresh pleasurable alignments that trigger affective and desirous arousal. Amber Jamieson (2018) details how anonymity, lack of surveillance, and inebriated guests have led to several reports of sexual assault by performers over the duration of the NYC run. Security figures are present in most rooms, yet their all-black attire renders them virtually invisible. A more active presence is likely needed to help curtail inappropriate activity, yet the mechanics of the production hinge upon a sense of anonymity. The incidents are indicative of a theatrical model that manufactures a haptic sensation of waywardness, yet is unable to manage patrons who act completely out of line.

3. Wayward bodies/wayward times

Within *Sleep No More*, gender play and homoeroticism are intertwined with a time out of joint. One guest that accompanied me at the performance recounted an alarming one-on-one with the detective character, Malcolm,

in which he was pulled from a crowd of anonymous onlookers and ushered into an isolated room, after which the door was closed and locked. What followed was a strange ritual in which a series of eggshells were cracked to reveal not yolk inside, but dust (Fish 2016). Worthen's article (2012) describes the same interlude, unpacking the embedded symbolism (93). The eggs illustrate a future that is empty, dried up, dead. Worthen recognizes the metaphorical allusion to the Scottish play; during the infanticide of Macduff's children, the murderer, while slaying the son, cries out: "What, you egg!/ Young fry of treachery" (4.2.83-84). The discovery of the intimate exchange was a hidden fragment of Shakespeare, metaphorically embodied. Following Barthes, the carefully crafted "citations, turns of phrase, or fragments" reveal another hide-and-seek game between guests and *Macbeth* (231).

The one-on-one also spoke to the temporal dis/orientation of homoeroticism. The empty egg could symbolize the nonreproductivity associated with the intimate exchange between men, a forbidden orientation. One gay blogger describes his experience of "close encounters in the dark" with Malcolm as "a VERY intimate, homoerotic, sexual, hot experience with him, some eggs, and some close encounters in the dark" (Dmoldovan 2012). The blogger's enthusiastic response highlights a strand of resistant readership available within the production; it speaks to the drastic way one-on-one moments, cruising outside straight alignments, are highly charged both affectively and desirously. The private space and the removal of a patron's mask switched the encounter from a mode of anonymity to a self-entitled mode of engagement Zaiontz calls "presumptive intimacy" (2014: 410). It offers a *sense* of connection, albeit fleeting, and even a sensation of vulnerability. Upon entry, guests were never instructed on how to act in these one-on-one engagements, which can disarm surprised hotel guests.

The Malcolm exchange also alludes to the performance's ongoing indictment of progeny. Macbeth's attack on the pregnant Lady Macduff was a perverse twist on the nursery room, a space for nurturing youth, society's future, converted into a grotesque display of death. Cracking the eggs to reveal only dust embodied what Lee Edelman calls "anti-futurity" (2004). A wayward aesthetic is embodied within this specter of the child, here metaphorically represented.

The gothic landscape itself suggests a decay of reproductive order. Patrons may uncover the huge graveyard space, a forest maze of dead branches, a life-size coffin, or the sanitarium ward with empty beds (one

looks as though a figure is lying upon it, but if you remove the blanket, you find only a collection of rocks). Dead animals also abound, not only in the taxidermy shop, but in the hotel dining room that features an imposing stuffed deer. The deer refers again to Macbeth's missing children, described in the play as "these murdered deer" (Worthen: 86). The pervasive symbolism represents *Macbeth*'s assault on temporal order. Central to the play's disruption of natural order—"nature is dead" (2.1.50)—is its disruption of reproductive order as Macbeth will have no heirs; he wears a "fruitless crown" and carries a "barren sceptre" (3.1.60, 61). Carol Rutter offers a useful way to link Macbeth's war on the body politic: "Having no children, he (Macbeth) has no future. To keep that future at bay, he must kill it—by crushing the 'seeds of time' (1.3.56) that are the future. The children" (2007: 165).

The absent child is represented in numerous forms and often through abandoned childhood objects in the space. Several black prams are placed in particular rooms, filled with various objects: either stones, potatoes, unwrapped presents, or just left empty. One pram rested in the graveyard, juxtaposing the symbol of infancy—and futurity—with a space synonymous with death. In the ward, amid ten or so empty hospital beds, another pram created an ominous presence. In the Macduff quarters, there is a children's room with a porcelain doll resting on the pillow of the bed, a *Children's Bible* on the nightstand, and a toddler's outfit laid out neatly on the floor. However, if patrons happen to glance into the side mirror, they discover not their own reflection, but a trick mirror. The image of the child's bed is unraveled and stained with blood, abruptly turning the room into the site of a horrific crime, symbolically foreclosing on the child as a symbol of futurity.

In addition, several one-on-one exchanges featured stories about missing children. The actress playing Hecate led select patrons into the forest maze to recount the "haunting story of a child lost in a wood" (Burton 2013). A patron of the Boston production recalled the young actress playing the Mrs. de Winter character from *Rebecca* pulling her into a room and detailing a sad story about a child trapped in a well (Libonati 2011). Performers will, on occasion, whisper lines to patrons, such as, "Are you Fleance?", a reference to Banquo's child, sole descendant of the royal line (Worthen 2021: 94). When leaving the Manderley Bar, the host Maximillian de Winter hushed me by whispering in my ear, "Shhh! …you'll wake the babies".

Fig. 3 The character of Hecate, goddess of witchcraft. In a nightly one-on-one, she recounts the story of a young boy lost in the woods. Photo by Umi Akiyoshi for The McKittrick Hotel.

Sleep No More, as a theatrical model for commercial production, demonstrates how the careful construction of theatrical time can be used to craft suspense, even temporal suspension, creating an affectively and desirously charged event. The production illustrates how Edelman's psychoanalytic theory can be brought out of the realm of the purely symbolic to be employed in rather practical terms to heighten affective engagement for audiences. This addresses one of Freeman's critiques of the theory, that it evacuates the role of the queer body with its emphasis on the psychic over the social, thereby removing the "messiest thing about being queer: the actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and with objects" (2010: xxi). As the one-on-one with Malcolm suggests, anti-futurity within a theatrical experiment pushes beyond the purely symbolic value to demonstrate wayward time as haptic. The dis/orientation of time in the production lends itself to homoeroticism and queer characters, yet to an ambivalent political effect. It may draw patrons 'off line', opening up fresh, pleasurable orientations, or as Freeman states, the "meeting of bodies with other bodies".

Yet it can ultimately reaffirm normative temporal regimes, such as through the pervasive trope of the missing child, heightening investment in what Edelman calls reproductive futurism.

Several characters came to embody what Edelman describes as the side not "fighting for the children" (2004: 3). The role of Mrs. Danvers from Rebecca appeared in the production reflecting lesbian desire but also the sadism prevalent in Hitchcock's original.[7] During one sequence, she trailed the visibly pregnant Lady Macduff through a hotel dining room. In a violent exchange, she continuously tried to feed her drugged milk. The symbol of nourishment had been contaminated. Danvers' queer desire became the perverse arbiter of temporal dis/orientation. During another moment, I discovered Mrs. Danvers dancing intimately with Lady Macbeth in an intense exchange that ended with a kiss. The moments converged different source texts, opening new orientations of story and sexuality by aligning bodies that "have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy" (Ahmed 2006: 107). The promiscuous twist of story aligned two female figures through transgressive desire and a challenge to normative temporal regimes. Unlike the violent choreography that characterized much of the interaction between Sleep No More performers, here Danvers and Lady Macbeth's twisted orientations were fueled by passion and a wayward affinity.

Gender play was also associated with the production's time out of joint. As I wandered into an empty bar space on the second floor as part of the McKittrick Hotel, the Boy Witch appeared on stage to perform a lip-synch of Peggy Lee's 1960s ballad, "Is That All There Is?" The lyrics of the song marked its own negation of life and death, capturing the perspective of the young child, apathetic in the site of the spectacular. Verses detailed her first trip to the circus, watching her childhood home burn down, and later, her first time falling in love. Each refrain ended with the chorus "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is". The somber quality suggested we raise our glasses to toast, if anything, the meaninglessness of life. The lyrics worked to pervert stages of childhood development, eliminating wonder and the possibility of hope.

The gender-crossing and time out of joint merged into a wayward

7 The "Mrs. Danvers" character (Boston) was renamed "Catherine Campbell" (New York), after a Paisley witch.

aesthetic.[8] The witch challenged gender norms by performing Lee's song while presenting physically as male in a 1940s suit. The song also fit strategically with the non-linear structure of the performance. During *Sleep No More*, each character repeats the same physical score two-and-a-half times per performance. Each sequence ends with the death of Macbeth in the basement ballroom. The witch's sardonic lip-synch, featured towards the top of the cycle, reflected the emptiness of Macbeth's death, but also the disillusionment embedded into the production's non-reproductive temporal loops. During the production, two floors up, Hecate, the overseer of the witches, performs a parallel lip-synch to the same song, though in a ruined, haunting replica of the second-floor hotel bar, a space lit almost entirely in red. Her mirror performance in the abandoned bar added a further dimension to the cynicism within the lyrics of Lee's song.

Hecate's association with the bar, where she is featured prominently throughout the production, converts it into a lair for waywardness and salacious activity. The temporal alterity of the witches was best captured in Hecate's bar during a scene referred to as the 'witches' rave' or 'orgy'. When wandering through the space, I heard the dissonant sounds of techno rhythms, which I followed like a beacon out of curiosity. I uncovered a bacchanal celebration between the witches, which created an immersive adaptation of Act 4, Scene 1 when Macbeth receives the series of prophecies from the sisters. At the opening, the three witches (commonly referred to as the Boy Witch, Bald Witch, and Sexy Witch) gathered together to the sound of pulsing downbeats of the music, with Hecate onlooking passively. The jarring and contemporary rhythms stood out from the 1950s soundtrack and ambient sounds that underscore much of the event.[9] The music's rhythm continued to build and fuel the excitement as the assemblage of witches began to dance ecstatically, disrobe, and kiss. After the music shifted to a series of low, anticipatory pulses, it abruptly broke into a drum-and-bass beat, building in intensity.[10] When the music peaked, a strobe light pulsed as the Boy Witch appeared naked in a goat's head mask, referencing the

[8] Simultaneously, as Ricci (2012: 8) notes in the article, "Tracking the Scottish Play", Lee's song, drawn from 1960's, marks a dissonance in time since it is anachronistically placed within the 1930s world.

[9] The opening song is The Brash's "Mute", sample available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXNgpBQd3gA

[10] Ed Rush & Optical's "Reece", sample available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WokAKCsB_Es

Fig. 4 The Bald Witch (standing) in a moment of violent choreography. Photo by Umi Akiyoshi for The McKittrick Hotel.

occult deity Baphomet.

The rave highlighted how these out-of-joint beings, commonly associated with the night, embodied dissonant rhythm. The rave mirrored the inverted rhythms built into the language of the characters in Shakespeare's original poetry, signaling "turned away" from the norm. The witches' prosody often inverts the usual iambic pentameter entirely, stressing the first syllable rather than the second, demonstrating how these being are unworldly, even backwards.[11] The rave marked a form of temporal dis/orientation through anachronistic rhythm, but also a challenge to futurity. The third and final of the prophecies in *Macbeth* is that Banquo's child will become king. At the climax of the scene, a baptismal font was produced with an infant doll covered in blood. The image symbolically represented the demise of Macbeth's family line as well as the resurrection of Banquo's. It embodied what Ahmed (2006) would describe as a "death threat", as it "threatens to discontinue the

[11] For example, the witches' classic incantation: "Double, double, toil and trouble,/Fire burn and cauldron bubble" (4.i.35-6). Note that the stress is on the first syllable of the metrical foot rather than the second. The alterity is heightened by the reduction in the number of stresses (from 10 to 8), ending in a rhyming couplet.

father's line", also mirrored in the anarchic performance display (173, 77). To heighten the horror tropes, blood was smeared over the male witch's naked body, and the Bald Witch bared her breast in attempt to feed the gory babe. As with the characters' animosity towards the pregnant Lady Macduff, the theme of antagonism against the maternal continues, specifically driven by bodies associated with sexuality and gender expression outside the norm. The spectacle illustrated the temporal politics grafted into the aesthetic, which marked nonconforming gender and sexuality as alterity, the purveyors of wayward affective and desirous fantasy.

4. Against the grain

Sleep No More strategically employs a time out of joint, a mode of engaging dis/orientation, to craft a viscerally charged event to drive commercial audiences. The characters, such as the witches, embody a temporal regime that challenges 'straight' time, which is further elided by sexuality and gender expressions "turned away" from the norm. It may create tantalizing entertainment, yet it can also mark wayward aesthetics as a perversion of the norm and even a death threat. The aesthetic politics enacts a sort of ambivalent dance with audiences, luring them to explore outside of normative temporal bounds, yet resisting any subversion that would undermine commercial objectives.

I would like to conclude by briefly considering how queer patrons at *Sleep No More* may reveal an affinity for out of joint temporalities, opening another aesthetic dimension. For my own experience, I found select moments that recuperated derogatory associations with the characters (as "turned away"). Wandering the McKittrick, I stumbled across the Boy Witch alongside the character of the Porter, both men dressed in formal wear and entwined in a seductive dance. My interested was piqued at sight of the homoerotic exchange, but the tenor quickly shifted violently as the witch began a brutal assault on his dance partner, repeatedly slamming him into the wall. The Porter's brutalized body collapsed on the floor as the witch sauntered off. The interlude, once again, juxtaposed same-sex desire with violence, even suggesting a homophobic assault. Moments later, the lifeless body discarded on the floor began to stir. The anguished actor looked about and started reaching towards surrounding spectators for help. Only a few feet away, I reached out to the actor, with about 10 to 15 onlooking patrons. I assisted him to his feet and he stared

into my eyes for a moment before abruptly turning and racing me out of the room, down a dark hallway, and into an intimate, secluded office space. Once inside, he locked the door.

Unlike the other one-on-ones that I had read about or experienced, the exchange with the Porter did not align with what Biggin (2021) describes as strategies of seduction. I responded to a request to offer my hand and assist him off the ground, but not out of erotic desire. It was a response to what I witnessed and interpreted from my own queer perspective as a dramatized hate crime. The sequence had established the homoerotic as a threat, or as Freeman argues in regard to *Hamlet*'s temporalities, that a "time for love between men is, indeed, out of joint" (2010: 16). Within the Porter's private quarters, however, a brief storyline developed that diverged from the pervasive anti-relationism of the performance. The actor climbed onto his desk to retrieve a box hidden high up on a shelf. Secretly, he opened it to remove a blond female wig from inside. The wig seemed to mark its own "forbidden touch", a secret object that modelled being "turned away" from social imperatives. He pulled out an antique brush and then gingerly invited me to assist. I began to comb. My participation, like the assistance off the ground, was like a performative act of allyship. Within seconds, the actor began to cry surprising streams of tears. The secret exchange revealed a forbidden defiance of gender norms, but also a surprising kinship. I found myself—through my own personal experiences of prejudice—identifying in and with the character through the mutual embodied experience of waywardness.

The exchange with the Porter was abruptly cut short as he anticipated someone coming, scrambled to hide away the wig and box, and then aggressively pushed me against the door, his index figure to my lips to swear me to secrecy. As I later found myself ushered back into the Manderley Bar for cocktails and revelry at the close of the performance, I could not help but feel haunted by the Porter and our allusive connection in a realm founded on temporal disconnection.

The Porter character could easily align with popularized transvestite horror tropes: a bearded man, wearing a wig, overcome with fits of shame and even aggression. His overabundance of emotion could signal trauma and hysteria. Yet the moment also presented a way for queer spectatorship to challenge this dynamic. It could offer a moment to identify *with* 'wayward' orientation, an out-of-joint embodiment. Significantly, the intimate

exchange offered an alternative to Edelman's anti-relationism, bringing the symbolic into the realm of the haptic, the psychic in the realm of the personal. Patrons are able to uncover a moment to challenge the homophobic, even transphobic affective and temporal economy governing much of Punchdrunk's production.

5. Conclusion

Sleep No More's theatrical practice allows participants to venture pleasurably and sensuously outside of what Freeman describes as chrononormativity (2010) or José Esteban Muñoz succinctly refers to as "straight" time, a temporal logic that foregrounds linearity, reproduction, and inheritance (2009: 22). Although its temporal strategies may be out of joint, the performance fails to manifest any coherent queer political platform and resists outright transgression that might alienate audiences. Rather than label the production as 'queer' per se, this paper encourages thinking about how queerness can be built into a mainstream aesthetic for wide audiences, offering a heightened experiential quality to popular theatrical production. The commercial performance model marks an aesthetic politics that is largely ambivalent, using temporal dis/orientation as a feeling technology for entertainment value and theatrical frisson. Freeman and Edelman both illustrate how queer temporalities permeate and drive the affective engagement of mainstream cultural products from Shakespeare to Hitchcock without ultimately functioning as subversive. Punchdrunk builds upon these practices, from *Macbeth*'s own preoccupation with futures that are violently thwarted—"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" (5.5.20)—to the homoerotism driving Mrs. Danvers' attack on maternity. In that sense, it is less a craft of appropriating queer temporalities (as in something the production does not own). Instead, it focuses on uncovering, theatricalizing, even maximizing the divergent time schemes built into the source texts throughout the adaptation process.

Unlike Freeman, who refers to plays as literature, and Edelman, who refers to film, *Sleep No More* expands this trend into innovative theatrical terrain by heightening the audience's haptic engagement with time. The concept of wayward aesthetics functions as a way to conceptualize how time is crafted and then embodied in immersive practice, becoming central to theatrical practice and pleasure. It converts the visceral sensation of *feeling* time into a mode of popular performance. Further, it invites masked

anonymous patrons, following the circuitous paths of a wayward witch or the lure of forbidden touch, to cruise outside of normative temporal bounds between the margins of the pleasurable and the perverse.

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