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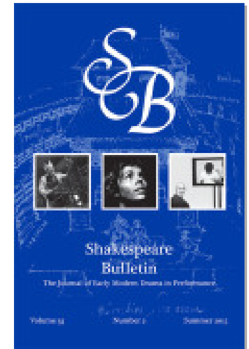

Guy Zimmerman

Shakespeare Bulletin, Volume 33, Number 2, Summer 2015, pp. 273-291
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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# The Performance of Counter-Sorcery in Lemi Ponifasio's *Tempest: Without a Body*

**Guy Zimmerman**
*University of California at Irvine*

## 1. Theatre and the Lagoon

In October of 2009, Maldives president Mohammed Nasheed attempted to redraw the boundaries of postcolonial discourse when he convened a cabinet meeting in full SCUBA gear at the bottom of a lagoon (Associated Press). Images from this underwater meeting circulated in the international media and online, underscoring the implications for low-lying Pacific island dwellers of Western habits of consumption fueling global warming. In his theater work, another Pacific Islander, the Samoan choreographer and director Lemi Ponifasio, has helped to clarify the stakes in this ongoing catastrophe, the interwoven cascade of environmental ills already delivering what paleontologists call the "sixth great extinction" (Erwin), while also exacerbating the existing social inequities of the North/South divide. Speaking about the increasingly interconnected nature of things in a world defined by global capital and sea-level rise, Ponifasio says, "what you do here in the US affects the reality over there. So I'm here to intervene in your actions" (Sellars). One form this intervention takes is Ponifasio's majestic riff on Shakespeare, *Tempest: Without a Body*. In this touring production Ponifasio begins to rework the politics and the poetics of theatrical space, and also those of the medium's temporal structures in ways that resonate powerfully with various currents of Western thought in the postcolonial era.

First created in 2007 and touring globally through 2011, *Tempest: Without a Body* opens with a deafening wall of sound. At a performance at the Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles as part of RedCat's 2011 Radar LA Festival,[1] this heavy industrial drone seemed to exert a kind

*Shakespeare Bulletin* 33.2: 273–291 © 2015 The Johns Hopkins University Press.

of aural weight on a tiny winged figure appearing on stage, a stunted angel barely able to stand her ground. Facing upstage, the angel turned and, looking back, emitted a full-throated cry of terror that was itself a tragic act. The image held for a long time, the music rolling on, the angel periodically shifting positions to scream in terror once more. Then the music receded and a troupe of Māori dancers wearing monk-like robes swept on. Chanting softly in unison, they glided forwards and back across the stage with a calm, purifying dignity, the precision of their movements seeming reverent and restorative. Next, a man (originally the Māori activist Tame Iti, in 2011 this role was played by Charles Koroneho) slowly materialized, broad-shouldered, out of the darkness upstage. Wearing a business suit he strode forward into the light, his feet bare, his face tattooed in looping, Polynesian designs. Koroneho stood and looked out at the audience, and then began to dance, moving his large body in quick, birdlike steps and sudden pivots. He rolled his eyes and, his tongue unfurling in the expressive gestures of ritualized Māori warfare, began to deliver a long and passionate lament. In his business suit, this dancing figure made the image of modern Western man strange again, a de-familiarization effect suggesting new capacities hovered nearby. Also on Ponifasio's stage at various times were a golden figure writhing on his back with a slow majesty and a man moving with uncanny ease in a lumbering, animal gait on hands and feet as the droning industrial score gathered and released sonic energy.

Ponifasio is a celebrated presence within the postdramatic theater movement, which began in the late 1960s and gained broad traction in the 1980s with the rise of a new generation of theater and dance artists, such as Robert Wilson and Pina Bausch. The impact of Ponifasio's work shows the movement's global scope, and helps illuminate the political implications of its root formal concerns—nonrepresentational staging, deconstructed *mise-en-scene*, and a distancing from the written text—and how these relate to the increasingly ecological crises of the postcolonial present. Ponifasio's firm grasp of contemporary Western art and discourse—the elegant economy with which his tiny bedraggled angel connects to Benjamin and Klee as well as to Ariel—makes *Without a Body* a lens through which we can examine an array of contemporary theoretical frameworks to see how they pertain to the current moment. The specter of epochal climate change currently threatening living systems broadly can make the purely human concerns of twentieth-century progressives seem anthropocentric, even parochial. Yet those issues arise from the same root as the environmental ills now threatening to drown the people of the

atolls—a specifically Western mode of relating to experience that takes systemic form in the capitalist economy.

Given his stated intention to shift the register of postcolonial discourse, it is no accident that Ponifasio is using *The Tempest* for the foundation of his *Without a Body*. The choice can be understood as an act of surrogation, in which a cultural expression is embraced, in Joseph Roach's words, as "actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric" (2). With *Tempest: Without a Body*, Ponifasio is emphatically *not* attempting to table a version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. There is no dialogue, no characters per se; all is image, movement, evocation, and postcolonial counter-appropriation, as if Ponifasio has reimagined Shakespeare as a postdramatic, indigenous Fourth World dance-performance artist. *Without a Body* thus registers as an act of cross-cultural audacity, Ponifasio moving to fill a vacancy in Western culture of which we may only be dimly aware, while also completing the affective transmission of Shakespeare's play by carrying it down into its own dream of itself, where it manifests as a kind of animist invocation seeking to ward off an approaching endarkenment.

## 2. History as Storm, Politics as Sorcery

From its first image forward, temporal issues dominate *Without a Body*. The tiny winged figure on stage is based on Paul Klee's celebrated painting *The Angel of History (Angelus Novus)*, providing a bridge between Ponifasio's production and Walter Benjamin's essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. In program notes, Ponifasio quotes directly from Benjamin's Ninth Thesis on the *Angelus Novus*, presenting the celebrated indictment of the temporal construct of Western capitalism:

> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This is what we call progress. (258)

Ponifasio's staging of the *Angelus Novus* illuminates the careful way he interweaves thematic ideas from diverse sources, including Shakespeare and Giorgio Agamben and Peter Sloterdijk.[2] The storm that opens Shakespeare's play is happening off-stage here, hidden from the audience but in full view of the angel from her vantage point on stage. This is first of five

sections of *Without a Body*, named *State of Emergency* in program notes. In these opening moments of *Without a Body*, the underlying alchemy of Shakespeare's text is being genetically spliced with elements of indigenous Polynesian dance, and with contemporary theoretical critiques of Western hegemony. The cadre of chanting Māori monks who enter stage as the angel hobbles off connect to Miranda's calming words at the beginning of Scene Two:

> If by your art, my dearest father, you have
> put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.

Tame Iti's ritual dance in *Without a Body's* second part (*Sacred Man*) extends this act of cultural bricolage, relating both to Prospero's sacred magic as a protest against injustice and exile and to Caliban's assertion of his ancient sovereignty. Translated in program notes from *te reo* Māori, Iti's speech begins:

> Your Majesty, Queen of England
> My mother is the mist; my father is the mountain,
> Enquire as to where the mountain and the mist come from and I will tell you that is where I come from.

Panifasio, who was born into a royal family of neighboring Samoa, compiled the speech from remarks made by members of the Ngai Tuhoe tribe of New Zealand in 2005 when they appeared before a tribunal established by the Crown in 1975 to adjudicate ongoing violations of the Treaty of Waitangi, first signed in 1840.

If *Sacred Man* looks back to the sources of indigenous Samoan and Māori power, Part Three, *Prayer of the Angel,* and the two remaining sections *Transit of Venus* and *Home*, look resolutely forward. In *Without a Body*, Ponifasio uses the frame of Shakespeare's play to address the intraspecies relational drama modern man is creating with the ecosphere, and perhaps suggests ways to steer this drama toward a comedic or melodramatic closure rather than an utterly tragic one. "When we understand how to be human," he says, "we'll all rise up to the clouds" (Ponifasio).

The sorcery at work in the storm at the top of Ponifasio's production is that of Western capital, raising the question of what might constitute the harmony of marriage and restoration when its "magic books" are finally drowned. Despite mortal threats to our survival as a species, attempts in the West to slow environmental degradation have proven ineffective, suggesting resistance to change is arising, not on a cognitive level, but from

the embodied ground of affect and emotion. If, as a matter of cultural neurosis, this ineffectiveness indicates a collective anxiety disorder playing itself out in historical time, the affective, rather than the cognitive, dimension of these issues is perhaps where the levers of change lie buried. It becomes increasingly clear, in fact, that opponents of climate change confront a pan-cultural form of affective capture or entrancement, and that capitalism, in Isabelle Stengers's and Philippe Pignarre's resonant phrase, can be considered a mode of "sorcery without sorcerers." Writing in 2005, Stengers and Pignarre

> place capitalism in the lineage of systems of sorcery [. . .] in a very particular fashion, that of a system of sorcery without sorcerers (thinking of themselves as such), a system operating in a world which judges that sorcery is only a simple 'belief,' a superstition that therefore doesn't necessitate any adequate means of protection. (40)

The West is entranced, Stengers and Pignarre suggest, by a sorcery based on instrumental reason, an entrancement, arguably, attaining new emergent forms in Protestant England in the seventeenth century with the spread of industrial production. Quickly metastasizing East and West over the next few centuries, this entrancement now envelopes the globe in a technological web spewing out toxins and altering the basic chemistry of the planet. While Western modes of critique and activism have proven inadequate to the task of breaking this spell, *Without a Body* suggests indigenous animist traditions are perhaps better situated to serve this function.

### 3. Ponifasio and the Practice of the Postdramatic

Ponifasio's company MAU derives its name from the nonviolent popular movement against Colonial rule that began in the early 1900s and continued until independence in 1962. A quick review of MAU's steady output and touring schedule since 2010, including, along with *Tempest: Without a Body*, the environmentally-themed works *Birds with Skymirrors* and *Stones in her Mouth*, reads like a strategic campaign, a continuation of the Mau rebellion in an intercultural mode. Arrayed against other leading figures in the postdramatic movement of the last two decades—Robert Wilson, Jan Lauwers of NeedCompany, and Romeo Castellucci—Lemi Ponifasio emerges as a groundbreaking figure. "Merce and Pina are dead." Peter Sellars has said regarding Ponifasio, "People ask, who will replace them? He's standing right here next to me" (Ponifasio, *Mau*). One expla-

nation for Sellars's enthusiasm is the way Ponifasio uses movement and spectacle to forge cross-cultural dramatic paradigms, combining contemporary theoretical frameworks with indigenous modes of knowing. The postdramatic is, moreover, conspicuously well aligned with ceremonial aspects of indigenous performance traditions, and this alignment helps to clarify Ponifasio's final political and aesthetic aims.

In the history of postcolonial discourse, response to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been divided between those who view the text as an expression of a colonizer's mindset, and those who see in Caliban an early articulation of anticolonial protest and rebellion. Writing in the first blush of cultural activism following Kenyan independence (1963), writer and theorist Ngugi wa Thiong-o, for example, gives voice to the view that "in the story of Prospero and Caliban, Shakespeare had dramatized the practice and psychology of colonization years before it became a global phenomenon" (7). Other anticolonial activists followed the lead of Barbadian novelist George Lamming, and appropriated the figure of Caliban as an act of defiant self-definition and a rejection of Western dominance. Surveying this contested terrain in a 1987 paper for *Critical Inquiry*, Rob Nixon documented how *The Tempest* came to serve, finally, as a "Trojan horse" whereby "cultures barred from the citadel of 'universal' Western values could win entry and assail those global pretensions from within" (578). While Ponifasio's use of Tame Iti as a Caliban-figure affirms the essence of Thiong-o's perspective, in *Without a Body*, he has also retrofitted Nixon's Trojan horse into a new, postdramatic vehicle to penetrate the inner reaches of the Western psyche, where he can reconfigure the mechanisms of entrainment and capture. It is not the case that Ponifasio disagrees with Thiong-o's critique of colonialism or the activism it inspires, but rather that his *Without a Body* is a form of activism working in an entirely different register.

Compared to many postcolonial surrogations, *Without a Body* seems particularly sympathetic to the full complexity of Shakespeare's original, especially the somewhat wistful longing the play expresses for a premodern mode of being already in eclipse. In a similar vein, Stephen Greenblatt views *The Tempest* as more concerned with the surrender of power than with its abuse. "*The Tempest* is a play not about possessing absolute power but about giving it up," he writes (374). Centered around a sorcerer marshalling elemental forces to redress wrongs, the play was written when embryonic forms of industrial capitalism were already reworking cultural norms and raising alarms. The subtle mixture of protest advocacy and sophisticated cultural surrogacy on display in *Without a Body*

suggests Ponifasio is atuned to these ambivalences in the original text, and even identifies with the other conjuror on the scene—Shakespeare himself. Perhaps the closest antecedent to Ponifasio's work in postcolonial literature is the Nigerian playwright and theorist Wole Soyinka. The comparison closing this paper between *Tempest: Without a Body* and Soyinka's 1975 *Death and the King's Horseman* helps clarify what is innovative about Ponifasio's aesthetic. An analysis of Ponifasio's engagement with political theology will set the groundwork for that comparison.

Given Greenblatt's own work on the role of theater in the disenchantment of the world through its decenterings of the religious view, it is interesting to note recent work by scholars such as Kristin Poole and Philip Lorenz, to whom religion becomes again a form of political theology (Poole 29). Lorenz in particular explores the contradictions of sovereignty in Shakespeare's plays, tapping Giorgio Agamben's extensive work on the "state of exception" in ways echoing powerfully with Ponifasio's production (*State of Exception*). This move in Shakespeare studies toward political theology also resonates strongly with the framework of capitalist sorcery deployed by Stengers and Pignarre. Ponifasio's embrace of Agamben, in turn, links him to Prospero and his sorcery—an activist form of political theology—more strongly than to Caliban and his colonial abjection. The connection, finally, to the disarticulatory energies of capitalism is itself direct, and, indeed, Shakespeare's text has often been associated with the passage in the Communist Manifesto (quoted at length by Pignarre and Stengers) in which Marx describes how capitalism puts "into crisis everything that holds a society together" (52):

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed one become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (223)

"All that is solid melts into air" is actually a line from *Macbeth*, but the common misattribution to *The Tempest* reveals how the two plays express the dark and light aspects of the sorcery already at work redefining Shakespeare's world. It can be argued *The Tempest's* affective structure already aligns with the ameliorative environmental intentions animating Ponifasio's project. Shakespeare, from this point of view, was alarmed by the darker energies concealed within the affective structures of the rising Protestant ethos, and wrote a number of plays expressing his concern: *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and

many others, ending with the wistfully hopeful statement of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare emerges here as a kind of shaman casting protective spells, using the mechanism of the stage to warn of the dangers Ponifasio now addresses via *Without a Body*.

## 4. The Politics of the Postdramatic

As is commonly understood, national independence in the era of neoliberal global capital has too often led to new forms of invisible, de-facto colonialism. Under the guise of "development," the World Bank and the IMF entangle vulnerable postcolonial economies in debtor relationships that restrict and foreclose their freedom as fundamentally as armadas of gunships ever did. In a similar vein, theorists such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said have clarified the way those engaged in postcolonial struggle often suffer most from recursive self-images of abjection implanted within the psyche by the racism of their formative colonial milieus. Idealized imagos of the colonial Other, and abject imagos of the "native" self are often introjected deeply into the indigenous psyche via Lacanian dynamics that echo and replicate the pathology of the oppressive colonial relationship. A generation of postcolonial scholars and thinkers—from Fanon to Said, and from Chandra Mohanty to Gayatri Spivak—have illuminated this material and psychic battlefield, tracing out the lines of race and gender constructs along which colonial power retains its grip. While successfully opening a space for liberated thought and transformative political action on the ground, these theorists have focused on aspects of the problem that are relatively accessible precisely because they do *not* involve what Stengers and Pignarre mean by "capitalist sorcery." Unfazed by these efforts, the juggernaut of global capital, meanwhile, continues to limit and foreclose our species' common future.

Regarding Northern despoilation of Southern resources, and the neocolonialism of mapping practices laying out "investment boundaries that change constantly," Spivak decries the covert motivation to appropriate "the Fourth World's ecosystems in the name of development" (338). Though she was writing before the arrival of sea level rise exerted its amplifying effect on environmental discourse, Spivak deploys George Manuel's Fourth World rubric for the world's marginalized and nonindustrialized indigenous peoples, including the Māori and other Pacific Islanders. She thereby helps explain the discursive freedom and expansive energy of Ponifasio's postcolonial animism, in which connective embodiment undermines the separating effects of power. She writes: "the dream

of animist theology [is] to girdle the perhaps impossible vision of an ecologically just world" (339). In confluence with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and with affect theory,[3] Ponifasio's aesthetic activism invokes a sophisticated reconfiguring of traditional animism in which theater and dance have important roles to play.

Viewing Ponifasio as a Fourth World activist helps explain his apparent immunity from the need to struggle in the mode of Fanon against Lacanian introjections of the Master Discourse. "Actions that seek to erode and disconnect us from our traditions are actions that seek to enslave us within the regulatory frameworks of others," Ponifasio writes with understated confidence. His explicitly interventionist agenda underscores his awareness of the dangers involved with embracing deceptively useful Western perspectives and frameworks. In contrast to Tame Iti's Māori homeland of New Zealand, Samoa was colonized late by Germany in the 1890s during its tense pre-World War I competition with Britain, and was under the European yoke for a relatively short period of time. Much of this period, also, was characterized by devastating military conflict and social turbulence in the West, resulting in a loosening of the colonial grip. This confluence of factors helps explain the continuity of indigenous traditions registering so strongly in Ponifasio's work. From its first images, *Without a Body* exerts a subtle but powerful counter-hegemonic effect, replacing the narrative of victimization with one of global vanguardism. Ponifasio, in short, demonstrates how to *perform* anticapitalist sorcery, and his living connection to indigenous traditions of animism inform this project at every turn. Ponifasio does not want the West to stop messing with his head; his attention is devoted entirely to messing with *our* heads.

The ceremonial minimalism of postdramatic theater is well-suited to Ponifasio's task. As detailed in Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, the postdramatic is characterized by a move away from dramatic conflict and text, and an embrace of performance art, metatheatrical ironies, narrative fragmentations, and the kind of expansive ceremonial spectacles associated with Pina Bausch and Romeo Castellucci. From Lehmann's perspective, traditional dramatic forms reveal themselves to be inherently conservative in their sociological and political effects. Regardless of their explicit content, conflict-based dramatic tropes reinforce self-other dualisms that lie at the roots of capitalism's spell-like hold. The postdramatic, by contrast, strips away narrative architectures of plot and situation to activate the transformative ground of the underlying stage space. Among the strengths of Ponifasio's production, for example, is his clarity about the hidden connection between this formal minimalism and

the authoritarian jurisprudence of contemporary politics in the society of the spectacle. Ponifasio describes *Tempest: Without a Body* as, in part, a response to the way enemy combatants were stripped of legal rights in post-9/11 America, a development whose disturbing antidemocratic implications the U.S. public currently seems happy to ignore.

Relevant here is the fact that Tame Iti, along with another Ponifasio associate and sixteen others, was arrested for allegedly plotting against the New Zealand government (charges were later dropped.) In an interview with Peter Sellars, Ponifasio says that "Iti represents sacred man." "Sacred man" (or, *homo sacer*) is a term Giorgio Agamben borrowed from the German fascist thinker Carl Schmitt to describe that class of human beings so abject as to be denied even the most basic legal protections (*Homo Sacer*). Ponifasio here rides on the considerable indeterminacy of his postdramatic staging, Iti becoming a version of Prospero as well as Caliban. The shipwrecked sorcerer of Shakespeare's play is, after all, the victim of another kind of "disappearance," and the crime of his exile registers as a disruption of the proper course of events. Linked to Iti in this way, Prospero emerges as a kind of living *pharmakos*, the liminality of his exile acting as the source of his magic, as well as his suffering. He is the scapegoat who has escaped from beneath the knife, and he brings some of the magic of the sacrificial designation with him into exile. The speech Ponifasio gives to Iti is liturgical, a counter-spell more than a litigation, and he invokes the *aporia* of the postcolonial situation—"I look at the endless horizon/questioning my direction" (Ponifasio, *Without*)—to invoke the aid of archetypal forces.

Extending this line of thought, Ponifasio cites Agamben to underscore the political dimension of another "magic island": Guantanamo. In interviews, he addresses how "unchecked state powers, illegal detention and the erosion of individual freedoms" indicate an incipient fascism based on the "state of exception" (Ponifasio, *Mao*). By quoting Agamben in the context of Guantanamo, Ponifasio directs our gaze to the glaring inconsistency of Western jurisprudence and political theology cropping up in recent debates in the U.S. about the "unitary executive."[4] Carl Schmitt's "state of exception" is the sovereign's ability to exempt himself from the legal structure underlying his claims to legitimacy. Seemingly innocuous, this furtive clause suspending the noncontradictory commitments of Enlightenment rationalism acts as a trap door for totalitarianism, reducing democracy to mere window dressing. The *exception* for Agamben is fundamental to the "imperfect nihilism" of modern political life exemplified by the extremity of the Nazi camps. As "a zone of anomie in which all

legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated" (*State of Exception* 50), the exception opens a chink in the armor of instrumental reason, revealing an indeterminacy at the roots of Western political structures, an inherent gratuitousness power must conceal and deny at all costs. As well as generating *aporia* and anxiety, groundlessness becomes the source of an underlying performative mobility to which the sovereign lays exclusive claim.

The relationship of the state of exception to the art and practice of theater—and particularly tragic theater—needs to be examined carefully. The lawlessness of the state of exception, for example, underscores the "gratuitousness" of power claims by political actants generally. Notably, "gratuitous" was among Antonin Artaud's choice terms for the dangerous quality of the stage space (25)—its basic morphogenetic or form-generating properties and its exemption from laws or restrictions of any kind. Along similar lines, Greenblatt illuminates how Shakespeare's *The Tempest* pertains to the magic of the theater space: "Shakespeare's principle model for the magician's realm is the theater, with its bare stage and its experimental openness—a world where *anything is possible*" (373). If the world is indeed a stage, and that stage is everywhere, and at all times available to everyone, so is an "exceptional" sovereignty. The "magic" of theater lies in the fact that the stage is a perfectly virtual space, unactualized but nevertheless fully a part of the real. The postdramatic rejects dramatic contrivances because they over-encode the stage space, tethering it to causal narratives giving the sorcery of capital too much of a hold.

On a formal level, Ponifasio's *Without a Body* explores how performance relates to the state of exception defined by theatrical space itself—how performance creates an open, unmarked space and then defines it. This open space pertains directly to the colonial mindset—the blankness and absence Europeans in the early modern phase projected on the rest of the world, leveraging the modern into existence as a contrasting fullness or plenitude. As anthropologist Michael Taussig underscores, modern Enlightenment identity enacted itself as an Other counterposed to the shamanic as "the joint construction of the healer and the sick in the semantically generative space of annulment which is the Colonial death-space" (461). Exposing the performative roots of Agamben's exception, Ponifasio shows how the state of exception *is* the state of sorcery, and the ownerless stage space its natural home.

## 5. Without a Body and Time

If *Without a Body* provides a vehicle for exploring how the state of exception relates to stage space, it also provides a theoretical scaffold from which to approach the *temporal* legacy of colonialism. From the initial collision between Benjamin's frightened angel and the calming traditional dance forms that follow, the main thrust of Ponifasio's production is to engage Western audiences on the level of temporality—the habitual ways we organize past, present, and future. Ponifasio links these spatial and temporal concerns to traditional Polynesian conceptions of communal relationality: "There is no presence. There is no absence. The ancestors are always with us. Intertwined. In performance we weave our genealogy back to source" (Ponifasio, *Mao*). Ponifasio's statement suggests a determination to exist in connection, in a shared, relational present, rather than in separation as atomized subjects.

*Without a Body* thus clarifies Ponifasio's approach to the temporal aspects of Shakespeare's original, the intensive arrangements of past, present, and future that seem particularly relevant to his project. With respect to time, Ponifasio's imagery and his use of traditional dance motifs do not register as anachronistic. Ponifasio's postcolonial imagination rejects the way Enlightenment temporality disentangles past, present, future, giving rise to the civic religion of progress and dissolving any restraint based on respect for tradition or the past. The cornerstone of modern temporality has been the institution of *ownership* that has typically seemed so inexplicable to indigenous people. Ownership—private property—asserts and enforces linear continuity and homogeneity across all three temporal zones, eliminating the relational flows that arise from the intensive differences between them. Like an iron bar shorting the flow of electricity between wires in a circuit, ownership (as opposed to, say, stewardship) short-circuits the cultural processes that flow between past, present, and future. Against this infernal intrusion, theater poses its restorative alternative, reviving a nomadic present in the unencoded temporal zone of the stage.

Ponifasio's awareness of Western philosophical and literary history arms him against epistemic capture and allows him to enlist Shakespeare in an assault on Enlightenment temporality. The elaborate temporal structure of *The Tempest*, featuring the pagan prehistory of Sycorax, the dramatic back story of court intrigue and treachery in Milan, and the future of Miranda and Ferdinand invoked through Prospero's final speech, lends itself to this effort. The conceit of linear causality and the Enlight-

enment's deterministic vision of a clockwork universe contests with the looping, temporal exertions of Shakespeare's play, and Ponifasio enters the imagistic substrata of *The Tempest* through these baroque portals. His aim is not to seize the reins of history; he seems rather to recognize the linear temporality of Western modernity as a bewitching potion for colonized people, a sure fire source of self-disempowerment.

In Ponifasio's staging, the triangular plot structure of *The Tempest* becomes an attempt to bring the three temporal spheres back into intensive contact so that sacred processes may resume. In one plot, Prospero subverts Antonio and Sebastian's conspiracy against Alonso and Gonzalo; the crimes of the past are invoked and then transcended by acts of magic. A second plot line is defined by the comedy of Caliban's encounter with the clown-figures of Trinculo and Stephano, each of them bound to a present in which magic has no traction. In the marriage between Miranda and Ferdinand, finally, Prospero works to arrange a future state of healing and union. The assemblage of all three zones is the complex premodern mode of temporality Prospero seeks to enter in scene one, act five when he promises to "drown his book," a mode Ponifasio identifies in his program notes with the final entry: "the chaotic tempest of life." To understand the implications of this "chaotic tempest" when it comes to our current postcolonial moment, it will help to compare *Without a Body* to Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

## 6. Ponifasio and Wole Soyinka

In terms of the temporality of postcolonialism and tragic drama, Wole Soyinka is Ponifasio's most significant forebear. The three temporal zones Soyinka emphasizes in his work on Yoruba tragedy remains especially salient, reappearing in the conceptual ground of Ponifasio's *Without a Body*. Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and his essay "The Fourth Stage" help clarify Ponifasio's view of sovereignty and the temporality of the stage. The two artists seek to defeat vestigial colonialism as a temporal construct in which future benefit is allowed to trump the concerns of the present, while also negating any debt to the past. And yet, while a comparative analysis of the two plays suggests areas of broad agreement between their Third and Fourth World modes of tragic surrogacy, there are also some telling divergences.

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka depicts the moment in which *spatial* domination becomes *temporal* capitulation—the letting go of the future/present/past. At the climax of Soyinka's play, the protago-

nist, Oba Elesin embraces traditional ritual and, to fulfill his traditional role as the Chief's horseman, begins to drift toward the present-past of the archetypal consciousness of Yoruba myth. Elesin's completion of this ritual death, however, is interrupted by the English governor Pilkings. Soyinka links this catastrophe to the ensorcelled somnambulism of Pilkings and the other colonials as they drift through a neo-Victorian dance at a masque taking place on the same night. In this study in temporal contrasts, the Yoruba whole of past-present-future is opposed to the alienated, lack-based temporal construct of European modernity, where the present exists as a deferment of a future that has no past. Intensive connection between the three realms would allow for a balancing of the affective energies, which instead arrive as colonial oppression driven by a Dionysian frenzy or tempest. Ogun/Dionysus' prominence in *Death and the King's Horsemen* marks Soyinka as first and foremost a Nietzschian thinker and artist. Dionysus and Ogun are affective deities, correlates of internal but also intrasubjective processes, crossing the boundary between inner and outer, subject and object, reconciling oppositions with an incommensurability also characterizing tragic drama.

About ritual, Soyinka's protagonist Elesin declares: "It is buried like seed-yam in my mind / This is the season of quick rains, the harvest" (152). In his use of seed and egg imagery, Soyinka is describing something very close to the instinctive unconscious of Bergson, which, through Deleuze and Guattari, has animated much of the current theorizing around new materialist doctrines of the posthuman. "It's getting dark. Strange voices guide my feet" (153) says Elesin as he begins to slip down into that dark of somnambulism. "In the nightmare [. . .] the sleeping subject is comparable to the embryo in the egg, being twisted and turned about," Christian Kerslake writes in *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, "always on the verge of being torn apart" (186). In language that underscores the disarticulatory energies at work, Kerslake continues: "the nightmare takes us beyond the dream-image, as nightmare-images carry an intensive visceral affect."[5] As in Bergson and Jung, this struggle, as the expression of an archetypal "instinct," is also a *surrendering* of self, toward an embrace of a deeper, groundless multiplicity. Our sense in the West that we have transcended this kind of influence is simply a symptom of our Enlightenment somnambulism.

Both *Horseman* and *Without a Body* embrace the stage as a means of maintaining the contact between the three zones of temporality so that differential becomings may unfold in a balanced way. In both cases, the tragic moment thus entails a recognition of a preexisting or originary con-

dition rather than the story of good fortune gone wrong. The groundless Dionysian frenzy in Soyinka and the sonic tempest opening *Without a Body* afflict those who refuse to honor the differential deity (e.g. Dionysus or Ogun). Ponifasio and Soyinka both grasp the ontological implications of tragic drama, which point in the direction of blind, intensive forces as a more fundamental reality than essence or unity. From this point of view, the frenzy or tempest of capitalism—that which gave rise to colonial aggression in the first place—represents a *refusal* to engage with Dionysian energies. Our stubborn commitment to ideas of unity and essence makes us into a collective Pentheus refusing to pay deference to the deity, as if Western history since the Enlightenment has been reenacting Euripides's *The Bacchae* on a grand scale. The planet's various environmental woes represent, perhaps, the gathering of the threatening and disarticulatory force of this deity warned of by Ponifasio's terrified angel. Ponifasio's postdramatic mode of working allows him to amplify Soyinka's temporal concerns in forceful ways. Unlike *Horseman*, the focus of *Without a Body* is resolutely forward, rather than back: "Who we are in front of ourselves," Ponifasio says to Sellars, "not in the past." Using Shakespeare's hopeful text, Ponifasio seeks to bridge the chasm of Western nihilism, toward a resilient, postmodern form of animism.

## 7. Affect and Animism

In a world increasingly governed by transnational corporations adept at subverting prerogatives of the nation state, the *de facto* corporate sovereign now embodies the distributed hegemony of Stengers and Pignarre's "sorcery without sorcerers." One of the crucial aspects of political activism promoted by Stengers and Pignarre is how "any agreement with sorcery is fatal." What they have in mind here is the kind of temporal separation Ponifasio counters in *Tempest: Without a Body*. Once you agree to the framework of past-present-future as distinct and separate entities you are lost, defenseless against a sorcery already working its spell, entraining your actions even as it cloaks what it is doing, inspiring you with the delusions of free will and agency. To the Western mind the invitation to think without this kind of temporal schema delivers an immediate encounter with groundlessness and *aporia*. Agamben points to this kind of *aporia* as a symptom of the split between the "I" of semiotic annunciation on the one hand and the experiential individual on the other. To stand in the *aporia* between them is, to Agamben, the basic ethical act—a way out of the dead zone of disenchantment ("Idea" 45). This, it seems to me, is the

portal through which Ponifasio's postdramatic theater seeks to connect with indigenous animism.

"I'm trying to fight your thoughts," Ponifasio says, "to fight the image of the world you have, to get to your pre-thoughts" (Ponifasio, *Mao*). Through "pre-thoughts," Ponifasio refers to affective states, which, in Deleuzian terms, can be viewed as the intensively charged presubjective material out of which thoughts and identities arise. Affect is the terrain at which sorceries—capitalist and animist—aim their resources. Affects have no objects and precede notions of self and other. Emotions become that subcategory of affects that have fallen under the domain of a self, acquiring objects and directionality—*telos* and the appearance of agency. Instead of tinkering with how subject and object interrelate, affect theory explodes the root dualism on which doctrines of ownership and private property are based. Affect theory also coincides with Deleuze and Guattari's embrace of multiplicity over unity. And an even more basic similarity has to do with how, in affect theory and in Deleuze and Guattari, difference *precedes* identity. The link between unified identity and the concept of ownership is clear: the self-image or identity is the first thing we seek to own, to *fix* in a relationship immune to change and to the differential forces of time.

Ponifasio's work thus exemplifies the political thrust of the postdramatic, suggesting how the visual spectacles of Wilson and Castellucci also seek to shift the political away from Enlightenment rationalism back toward the affective ground of aesthetic praxis and new forms of activism. In an era in which the major challenges—from social equity to resource depletion to species extinction—are interconnected complexities and, as such, emphasize connectivity over individuation, it is no surprise that theater would shed the dramatic structures that reinforce paradigms of disconnection and separation. Beneath these structures the inherent connectivity of the stage space lies waiting, and it remains to be seen whether literary drama will locate new modes of expression within this postdramatic paradigm.

In *Without a Body*, meanwhile, Lemi Ponifasio works a countercultural appropriation for the purposes of antihegemonic environmental localism. If the planet is quickly becoming a necrotic mass of toxicity and broken ecosystems, Ponifasio's repurposing of Shakespeare's final play reminds us that history is never a fixed affair; what happens next colors and revises the meaning of what has gone before. If the current blackening is the prelude to a greater flourishing some decades down the line, the actions we take now will seem providential rather than futile. Who knows—in

keeping with the comedic nature of *The Tempest*, perhaps there is no way for us to avoid our salvation for long. Viewed this way, the challenges ahead become perhaps a little less daunting.

## Notes

[1]The Million Dollar Theatre was chosen exclusively for Ponifasio by RedCat Director and Radar LA Festival curator Mark Murphy to accommodate the spectacular scale of Ponifasio's expansive staging and choreography.

[2]Peter Sloterdijk went on to write the libretto of Ponifasio's subsequent piece *Birds with Skymirrors*.

[3]See Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader*.

[4]Dick Cheney's office pursued this doctrine with particular ferocity. See Dana D. Nelson.

[5]Christian Kerslake, *Deleuzian and the Unconscious,* London: Continuum, 2007.

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