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Murray, Simon (2013) Embracing lightness: dispositions, corporealities and metaphors in contemporary theatre and performance. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2). pp. 206-219. ISSN 1048-6801

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Deposited on: 04 June 2014

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Embracing lightness: dispositions, corporealities and metaphors in contemporary theatre and performance.

Simon Murray

Abstract

This essay reflects on how *lightness* is invoked and engaged within theatre and performance. The essay reviews how selected theatre practitioners extol or deprecate the conditions of lightness, and how these attributes are used both metaphorically and practically by performance makers to engender the qualities they are seeking in their practice.

The essay will particularly consider how *lightness* is sought as a dispositional and performative virtue in theatre making, training and rehearsal and what qualities the achievement of *lightness* might suggest and embody. Taking Italo Calvino's essay on lightness in 'Six Memos for the Next Millenium' as a provocation, this essay explores how *lightness* as a metaphorical code slides across different aspects of performance from physicality and movement to the elusive qualities of complicité and interaction between actors and with their audiences. Whilst *weight* can suggest - not always helpfully - the potential 'deadliness' and bankruptcy of theatre, *lightness* seems to propose that theatre thrives when it possesses an agility and nimbleness of touch, posing questions rather than imposing answers. Although the essay will focus in particular on the pedagogical and performance practices of Philippe Gaulier, Jacques

Lecoq and Lone Twin, these are framed and contextualized in relation to literature and the visual arts. Here I particularly reference examples of children’s literature, the fictions of WG Sebald and contemporary artists, Tacita Dean and Wolfgang Tillmans.

In 1986/87 I spent a bountiful year in Paris “training” with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. It was the final year that these remarkable and idiosyncratic teachers worked together on an integrated programme of courses for their students. At the end of

Relatives of lightness: play, distraction, failure, association, uncertainty, generosity, circling, openness, complicité, lessness, detachment, disponibilité, tangent, agility, distance, oblique, multiplicity, pleasure, élan, imbalance, invitation, untethering, intuition, legerdemain, hope ...

eleven months Monika Pagneux told me that my shoulders had dropped by two inches.

My shoulders had ‘become lighter, lost weight’, she said. The most regular of many criticisms I received from Philippe Gaulier was that I was ‘trying too hard’ and that my actions and improvisations were too forced, ‘trop fort, trop volontaire’. Rarely at the time, but often since, I have become aware of the weight of my earnestness during that year in Paris, both as a protective defence mechanism and as a deeply felt, but seriously misguided, spur to achieve great things as a novice, yet almost middle aged actor.

In this essay I want to examine and play with ideas, metaphors and usages of lightness and weight in contemporary theatre and performance. More on lightness than weight, though the (different) virtues of the latter are not to be relegated into the wrong half of some simplistic binary. Echoing Italo Calvino, to whom I shall return, ‘...this

does not mean that I consider the virtues of weight any less compelling, but simply that I have more to say about lightness.’¹ In dance, lightness and weight have common currency in the languages and aspirations of bodies, movement, aesthetics and choreography. “Let your weight fall into the floor” was a customary, but always slightly perplexing invitation within the range of contemporary dance and movement classes I took in the 1980’s and 90’s. Whilst this instruction was code for relaxing one’s musculature it was also a summons to discover a lightness of movement and action, possible now that your weight had fallen into and somewhere beneath the dance floor, or seeped osmotically through the practice mat. Rudolf Laban writes of dance challenging inertia, ‘it brings about liberation ... in that man has crossed the threshold at which inertia is overcome by the desire for freedom and lightness’.² For Laban lightness is not merely a corporeal quality but, in linking freedom with this condition, clearly articulates a poetics and a cultural politics of dance as an art form. In contrast to Laban’s affirmation of the condition of lightness, Ann Daley, when writing of Pina Bausch, by implication, uses the term pejoratively. Citing Bausch’s often quoted remark about being less interested in how people move than what moves them, Daley positions Bausch as a ‘necessary corrective to the American art of lightness which all too quickly becomes an art of insignificance.’³ Here lightness, far from being an affirmation, speaks of inconsequentiality, a lack of gravity (and gravitas), an escape from the serious

¹ Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), p. 3.

² Vera Maletic, *Body, Space, Expression: The Development of Rudolf Laban's Movement and Dance Concepts* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), p. 52.

³ Ann Daley, *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 8.

business of engaging with the world and being human. Thus, by implication, Bausch's work articulates a weighty – and possibly severe - encounter with human relations and emotions: what *moves* us. Almost, it would seem, the suggestion that preoccupation with content = weight, whilst formally driven work is destined to be 'light'.

Of course such an analysis is contestable and I note these remarks not because they clinch an argument (about Bausch in relation to American modern dance), but since they sign a small illustration of the complexity of these terms and the conditions and aspirations about which they speak. Clearly, from the examples identified above, lightness and weight are slippery qualities, forever ideologically

Pina left us so quickly, so surprisingly, I think that in the end she left everything behind and was free. That's why I wanted to give her this moment of lightness, this feeling of weightlessness. (Pina Bausch dancer speaking in Wim Wenders film, *Pina*, (2011).

and ethically loaded. For Laban lightness is partner to freedom, whilst the perspectives cited by Daley seem to dismiss lightness as frivolity, triviality and an inability to engage seriously with the world and its weight.

Through examining how lightness (and often by inference, weight) is extolled, identified and claimed by a number of contemporary theatre practitioners and pedagogues this essay endeavors to investigate how lightness has become both a condition sought in the relations of practice, and a consequence of their enactment. I shall write about lightness in action and movement, but also as a generative disposition towards making, composition and dramaturgy. Moreover, I will note that in theatre and

other art forms lightness seems to announce an approach to material and to content which is at once distinct and elusive. I shall also speculate as to why lightness speaks to a certain temper of the times and to the conditions of cultural invention which have given rise to its embrace in the work of selected theatre artists.

Framing and thinking lightness beyond theatre

I return to Calvino, for it is he who in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* offers us an elegant and provoking framework for thinking about lightness. Indeed, I am tempted to suggest that Calvino's 'memo' on lightness⁴ proposes everything there is to be said on the subject, but here I *distil* what Calvino argues are the qualities and dispositions of lightness, both in literature and as a desirable state for being in the world. Calvino died before completing the sixth memo (it was to be on *Constancy*) and, in addition to *Lightness*, the other four – *Quickness*, *Exactitude*, *Visibility* and *Multiplicity* – similarly invite critical reflection and inquiry in relation to the landscape of theatre and contemporary performance. In *Lightness* Calvino invokes the myth of Medusa whose stare turned all to stone. To avoid such a fate Perseus was carried by 'the very lightest of things, the winds and the clouds, and fixes his gaze upon what can be revealed only by indirect vision'.⁵ For Calvino this myth must be an allegory for the artist's relationship to the world, 'a lesson in the method to follow when writing'.⁶ For Calvino lightness should not be confused with frivolity, superficiality or any lack of care or attention. It is a tactic

⁴ See Calvino, *ibid.*, pp. 3-29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

for dealing with the weight of things, intended 'to prevent the weight of matter from crushing us'.⁷ Significantly, although he extols a 'lightness of thoughtfulness'⁸ as a disposition for the (then) new millennium Calvino also suggests that the quality has a special connection with melancholy, arguing that the latter 'is sadness that has taken on lightness'.⁹ A connection here with Carl Lavery's arguments about the work of Lone Twin, proposing a new performance paradigm, or at least a different way of thinking about quotidian tragedy. I return with a more direct focus on Lone Twin later in this essay.

Film writer, Richard Raskin summarises what lightness means to Calvino:

Lightness for Calvino is identified with such properties as mobility, agility of spirit, knowledge of the world, subtlety, multiplicity, the precariousness of things as they are, levitation and freedom.

Correspondingly, heaviness is linked to inertia, opacity, petrification, sluggishness, density, solidity and the crushing of life.¹⁰

Lightness for Calvino occupies the terrain of language, thought and the emblematic nature of the visual. It may be found where language possesses precision and purpose but where its meaning is released through a 'verbal texture that is weightless'.¹¹ It may be found where

⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹ Ibid., p. 19

¹⁰ Richard Raskin, 'Italo Calvino and Inevitability in Storytelling' in *Danish Journal of Film Studies* (POV no. 18, December 2004), p. 104.

¹¹ See Calvino, *ibid.*, p. 16.

thought 'involves a high degree of abstraction'¹² and where the visual impress of lightness is captured through a memory, where verbal *implications* reveal sense rather than through actual words. Here, Calvino delights in reminding us of the scene where Don Quixote is hoisted into the air, having propelled his lance through the sail of the windmill.

And Quixote's eccentric though charming lightness leads us to children's literature where images and stories of lightness flourish. Jerry Griswold, writer on children's literature and Director of the National Centre for Children's Literature at San Diego State University, identifies *Snuggness, Scariness, Smallness, Aliveness and Lightness*¹³ as five areas that are essential qualities in children's experiences. Griswold argues that the clash between lightness and heaviness, fixity and flight, stuckness (rigidity) and flow reappear time and again in children's stories. Often heaviness/weight, fixity and rigidity are the conditions of being trapped, capture and of the grown up world. They are associated with punishment, boredom and the imposition of straight jacketed adult values on the child's imaginative world of play. Griswold points to Hans Christian Anderson, William Steig, Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame, Mark Twain and JK Rowling (amongst others) where the tension between these qualities is regularly explored and given material form through the narratives of these writers. In Barrie's *Peter Pan* 'aerial mobility is the perquisite of the young and loss of lightness is the inevitable price of maturity'.¹⁴ Significantly, in Steven Spielberg's film, *Hook*, as Griswold points out, Peter Pan has become a middle aged business man forever on his mobile phone and weighted down by responsibility and duty. In Williams Steig's picture book *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*¹⁵ the young protagonist,

¹² Ibid., p. 17.

¹³ Jerry Griswold, *Feeling like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp., 75-102.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁵ William Steig, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks 1987).

Sylvester, is regularly rendered immobile – petrified - as a result of wishing on a magic pebble. Griswold notes how Steig’s writing was inspired by the psychotherapist, Wilhelm Reich, and his preoccupation with how emotional experiences are often expressed through muscular events – stiffening, rigidity, blockedness – and how these accrue as young people grow into adulthood. Griswold observes Reich’s belief that ‘maturation involves the construction of “body armor” as a defense mechanism to perceived threats’.¹⁶ For Reich the solution to this sclerosis is succumbing to “flow” and thereby producing ‘childlike individuals who are fluid mobile and light’.¹⁷

Before leaving Griswold and the part of lightness in children’s literature, the case of Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*¹⁸ offers a less ethereal, more mischievous take on the matter. Whilst Griswold suggests that the opening paragraph of the book with Mole recklessly

If I lift my arm I can feel the movement in my little toe.
Tout participe. Put the pieces together. Who pulls who? My eyelids lead my cheek, my cheek leads my jaw, my neck, my shoulder, my ribcage, my lumbar, my pelvis, my knee ... I
TURN!
(Annabel Arden
paraphrasing Monika
Pagneux, 2008)

abandoning the tedious ‘weight’ of spring cleaning and bursting upwards into the spring sunlight elegantly captures the impulse towards lightness, it is in the character of Toad that we find a more theatrical and transgressive embrace of lightness. Toad could well have been invented by Philippe Gaulier as a role model for that impulsive, being-in-the-moment quality of pleasurable, roguish, rule breaking élan which he (Gaulier not Toad) is seeking to encourage and embody in his students. Whether as cross-dressing washerwoman, rakish scullsmen, dreamy owner of gypsy caravan, reckless motorist or ingenious escapee, Toad’s life personifies lightness in speed

¹⁶ See Griswold, *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kenneth Grahame, *Wind in the Willows* (Dorking: Templar Publishing, 2007).

and flight: 'If Toad is light-hearted youth, Badger is maturity and gravity. If Toad is high-flyer, Badger is his kryptonite'.¹⁹

From Kenneth Grahame to WG Sebald may seem a strange and inexplicable leap. However, Sebald's fictions in both their construction, and through the tone of their voice, propose further angles on lightness which offer associations with the dramaturgies and creative relations of contemporary theatre and performance. I would argue that we may find lightness in Sebald's fictions partly through the way he engages his subject matter and partly through the conventions of digression which he employs to propel his narratives. No-one even slightly acquainted with Sebald's writing would ever consider him "light" in the sense of being superficial or inconsequential, and given the author and his narrators' inclination to a melancholy seriousness, lightness seems a perverse term with which to signal the grain and register of his writing. Nonetheless, there is lightness in the form of attention which Sebald gives to his subject, a quality of touch and texture, an embodied event as well as a metaphysical one. And this quality is in union with circling, arriving from the oblique and to the rhythms of the drift. A disposition to be around rather than *in* or *on* the subject matter.

Lightness lies as both a register of Sebald's writing as well as in its formal structures. In *The Emigrants*²⁰, for example, whilst the subject matter of the four accounts is incontestably tragic, the unfolding narrative, as each life reaches its conclusion through suicide, has an almost casual and dispassionate quality. The text is peppered with comments – 'at that

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁰ W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (London: Vintage 2002).

point, as I recall, or perhaps merely imagine’²¹ or ‘It was early the following year, if I remember correctly’²² – which offer a light and contingent distance to the narrator’s engagement with his subject, paradoxically heightening its poignancy and melancholy.

Notwithstanding this gentle and supple distance, Sebald’s narrator remains ‘witness’ rather than a detached and neutral onlooker. Lightness is given form through what J.J. Long calls, the ‘poetics of digression’ and ‘ambulatory narratives’.²³ It is these deceptively casual tactics of meandering digression which prevent the ‘kind of leaden heaviness (that) weighs the reader down in a way that makes him blind’.²⁴ Avoiding this kind of ‘leaden heaviness’ seems to be a critical impulse in Sebald’s fictions, just, one might say, as it does in the work of Lone Twin which I shall encounter later. For Sebald’s writing is driven by the question of how art can represent and engage with what is unspeakable, and, in his case, the catastrophe of mid twentieth century Europe. Habitually, Sebald would find no obligation to explain or justify this strategy, but occasionally he articulated his position without ambiguity:

To write about the concentration camps is practically impossible. So
you need to convince the reader that this is something on your mind

²¹ Ibid., p. 23.

²² Ibid., p. 158.

²³ J. Long, ‘W.G.Sebald: The Ambulatory Narrative and the Poetics of Digression’ in Fischer, Gerhardt (ed.) *W.G.Sebald: Schreiben ex patria/Expatriate Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009). p. 61.

²⁴ Sven Siedenbergh, ‘Anatomie der Schwermut: Interview mit W.G. Sebald’, in *Porträt: W.G. Sebald*, ed. Franz Loquai. (Eggingen: Isele, 1997), p. 147.

but that you do not necessarily roll out ... on every other page. I think it is sufficient to remind people, because we've all seen images, but these images militate against our capacity for discursive thinking, for reflecting upon these things. And also paralyze as it were, our moral capacity. So the only way in which one can approach these things, in my view, is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation.²⁵

Here, an echo of Calvino finding the Medusa-like weight of the world and its events turning his imagination to stone. His 'solution' is drawn from Perseus' indirect vision as he severs Medusa's head. For Calvino, and by implication for Sebald and the contemporary performance makers considered below, this myth must be a metaphor for the artist's relationship to the world, 'a lesson', as we have already seen, '... to follow when writing'.²⁶ Approaching such matters from the oblique does not remove the *weight* of responsibility from the artist but *lightens* the task by re-directing it, by way of offering multiple angles of incidence into – or rather around – the subject matter. Here, arriving from the oblique is a writing and compositional strategy in response to excessive exposure, to a surfeit of information, and to that sensory overload which dulls and de-sensitizes our ethical and political antennae.

²⁵ W. G. Sebald, *The Emergence of Memory: conversations with WG Sebald*, ed. Lynne Sharon Schwartz (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), p. 80.

²⁶ See Calvino, *ibid.*, p. 4.

Finally, in this prefatory section, I wish to suggest that there are ways in which 'light' and 'lightness' have been attributed to the practices of two contemporary visual artists that are coextensive with the work of certain performance and theatre makers. Here there is neither space nor reason to analyze the legitimacy of the epithet in relation to these practices, rather to identify how the term is being employed, what the conditions of practice are that have given rise to its use and how it exists in partnership with other qualities which in turn help to constitute the circumstances of lightness.

In conversation with artist and film-maker Wendy Kirkup while visiting the British Art Show at the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow (August 2011), she ascribed the condition of 'lightness' to Wolfgang Tillmans' practice as experienced in his work both there, and memorably in a more extensive exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2002). In this context Kirkup noted that Tillmans' lack of framing contributed to a sense of temporality – a fleetingness, of being there for the moment and then gone. Kirkup suggested that as Tillmans' images are rarely framed they therefore blur with and become part of the world around them. Each image is (deliberately) incomplete and therefore sense-making happens across and between the units. For Kirkup, framing demands attention, implies gravity and closes off the world. In Tillmans' practice, notwithstanding a strong political inflection, there is a lack of didacticism, an invitation to openness, to 'glimpses and glances rather than the long stare'.²⁷ So, for Kirkup, the condition of lightness resides relationally between the object

²⁷ Author in conversation with artist and filmmaker, Wendy Kirkup, Glasgow, August 2011.

and its surrounding context, in its association with other objects or images, with the space itself.

Tacita Dean's practice engages particularly with time, often playfully with its elasticity - stretching, quickening, slowing and foreshortening – and with a generous and sometimes elegiac touch and attention. *Film*, Dean's installation in the massive

Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern (London 2011/12) is, she says, 'a call to arms'²⁸, but like all her work is touched by a sense of quietness, slowness and fragility. My attention to Dean in relation to the theme of this essay was first alerted by the experience of her curated exhibition *An Aside* in 2005 – a 'lightness of curatorial touch'²⁹ - and through her engagement with the writings of WG Sebald. Although Dean had made earlier work inspired by this writer she documented the story of a series of chance and coincidental encounters between her own grandfather, the trial of Roger Casement, Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*³⁰ and the aerial

In the dissident performance practice of rebel clowning the oppressive and imposing weight of the policeman's riot shield and the threatening anonymity of his dark helmet are met with the tickle of a soft pink feather, perhaps, or a cheeky kiss, a silly song in a high-pitched voice, or an invitation to join in with a child's playground game. Like a group of mischievous school kids getting one up on the teacher, the strategic lightness of the rebel clowns wrong-foots the authority of the police, rejecting the very terms on which it is predicated, and exposing it momentarily as absurd. And of course, in chase, the cumbersome police van is easily outfoxed by a gaggle of rebel clowns giddily weaving through the city on bicycles.

Kieran Hurley, PhD student, Theatre Studies, University of Glasgow.

bombing of Germany during World War II. This account was one of seven catalogues in

²⁸ Tacita Dean, *Film* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), p. 33.

²⁹ Samantha Lackey, Review of *An Aside* (Papers of Surrealism, Issue 4, Winter 2005), p. 1.

³⁰ W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (London: London: The Harvill Press, 1999)

a boxed set produced for an exhibition of her work at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris (2003). In addition to this catalogue, simply entitled *WG Sebald*, in another – *The Russian Ending* – there are further associations with Sebald's 'melancholic iconography'.³¹ In finding affiliation with Sebald and in her approach to curating *An Aside* Dean lays bare what lies at the heart of her practice, namely a deeply intuitive (non) 'method' which accepts and indeed celebrates indeterminacy and uncertainty in following threads which will later become her narrative. This lightness of association as a tactic for making is clearly co-extensive with Sebald's writing on the one hand and with the dramaturgical schema of many contemporary theatre makers. Moreover, however, Dean's embrace of 'objective chance' is neither mystical nor "theological", 'more the dilettante than the devotee'.³² She adds:

My route has not been linear nor obedient to the rules
of that creed but has sprouted new shoots from
various points along the way and gone off in diverse
and conflicting directions, leaving me many paths to
follow and some I refused to go down. ... Yet I am
happy to see how coherent the fruits of such a process
can be. Nothing is more frightening than not knowing
where you are going, but then again nothing can be

³¹ Jordan Kantor, Review of Tacita Dean exhibition, *The Russian Ending*, Peter Blum Gallery, New York 2001 (Artforum, March 2002).

³² Tacita Dean, *An Aside*, Catalogue of exhibition, Hayward Gallery, 2005 (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2005), p. 4.

more satisfying than finding you've arrived somewhere
without any clear idea of the route.³³

This approach resonates clearly with both the compositional strategies of many contemporary makers of devised performance (see below) and takes us back to the way in which Sebald engages with material in his 'fictions'. He speaks of the productive delights in *circling* a subject or theme rather than approaching it directly, and admits that even his own doctoral research was undertaken in a 'random haphazard manner'.³⁴ And this haphazard mapping for Sebald was not some callow response to the difficulties of writing:

And the more I got on the more I felt that, really, one can find something only in that way, i.e., in the same way in which, say, a dog runs through a field. If you look at a dog following the advice of his nose, he traverses a patch of land in a completely unplotable manner. And he invariably finds what he is looking for.³⁵

In this section, through a focus on children's literature, the writings of Calvino and Sebald and a glance at the work of two contemporary artists, Wolfgang Tillmans and Tacita Dean, I have attempted to trace how lightness and associated qualities have

³³ Ibid. p. 4.

³⁴ See W. G. Sebald in Schwartz, *ibid.*, p. 94.

³⁵ Ibid.

been ascribed to these arts practices. This ascription interests me because of the evident parallels which exist between art beyond theatre/performance and certain modalities of relation, composition and dramaturgy within it.

Lightness in action

The relationship between play and lightness in the pedagogies of Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux has been explored a little in the writings of Simon Murray³⁶ but I want to return to these three figures below and to expand a little on their engagement with lightness in over 50 (combined) years of teaching. I believe that the rise in the West of what we might conditionally call *physical theatres* has both generated *and* been a response to modes of training which foreground and provide focus for the performer's body and its movement. Equally, although the privileging of an actor's physical and gestural articulacy in contemporary training regimes has not vanquished the citadels of Stanislavskian and Method pedagogies it has, arguably, enhanced performers and theatre makers' awareness that theatre communicates itself visually and viscerally as well as through the spoken word and the neural pathways of cognition. The broadening of training opportunities beyond the conservatoire into artist led workshops, laboratories and – most significantly – university drama and theatre departments has encouraged and enabled a focus on corporeal skills, and their decoding in performance which was relatively uncommon three or four decades ago. Beyond

³⁶ Simon Murray, *Jacques Lecoq* (London: Routledge, 2003); Simon Murray and John Keefe, *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007); Simon Murray, 'Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier: Training for Play, Lightness and Disobedience' in Alison Hodge, ed., *Actor Training, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2010).

the hegemony of the psychologically driven training regimes of Stanislavsky and ‘The Method’ – and even within this territory we must acknowledge a diversity of creeds, inflections and practices – the last four decades have witnessed a multiplicity of approaches to training which speak of and engage with the performer’s body as both subject and object of signification in theatre and associated art forms. The ubiquity with which the names and practices of Meyerhold, Grotowski, Barba, Bogart, Brook, Lecoq, Gaulier, Pagneux, Decroux, Zarrilli, Britton, Zaporah, Mnouchkine and Littlewood and many others continue to offer a sense of lineage (and authority) to contemporary training regimes is pronounced and evident in the propositions received for the

In conversation in 1986, Brook described the quality he most admired in one of his actors, Maurice Bénichou, in terms of ‘lightness’. This quality can be understood through Paul Valéry’s suggestion that ‘one should be light as a bird, not light as a feather’. In other words, one must recognise and bear the substantive weight of what it is one enacts, its gravity; one must remain present, engaged and embodied in the doing that takes us into the world – but with a lightness of touch that is buoyant and playful, that enables one not to be encumbered, or consumed, but to take off, to move on, to be ‘free’.

(Marshall and Williams, 2010: 198)

Theatre, Dance and Performance Training (TDPT) journal³⁷. In addition, but overlapping with this iteration, the pedagogical and dramaturgical influence of companies such as Complicite, Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, DV8, David Glass Ensemble, Vincent Dance, Jerome Bel, Kneehigh Theatre and Desperate Optimists all have contributed to and reinforced (albeit through disparate approaches and strategies) the belief that embodiment – action, movement, gesture, stillness – is central to the project of theatre. And, of course, the contemporary predilection for cross art form fertilization has

³⁷ *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* is a new journal first published by Routledge in 2010 and co-edited by Simon Murray and Jonathan Pitches.

brought other corporealities – dance, circus, somatic movement practices (contact improvisation, Feldenkrais and Alexander for example) and live art – into the cosmology of preparation for theatre and performance.

I offer this brief overview so as to provide a sense of context for the various arenas of learning and rehearsal in which lightness of action may, or may not, be invoked, identified, sought and articulated. Arguably, this enlarged arena of training opportunities which consciously attend to the performers' physical preparation offer opportunities for the metaphors and tactics of lightness to be given expression, for its conditions of invention to be explored and experimented with.

Amongst theatre practitioners who speak of lightness there are inevitably in their practice differences of inflection, operation and effect. Between Lecoq, Gaulier and Pagneux we find that:

* Lecoq (like Laban) prefers to talk of inventing the conditions that 'free' the body or which give 'freedom' to the student.

* Pagneux is searching for a very particular quality of physical effort which generates a relational value between – say – the movement of the arm and the shoulder at one level of specificity, and between 15 performers on the other.

* For Gaulier lightness presupposes a physical relation and competence already present, but one which only becomes manifested in the instant of performance through the quality of the bond between performers themselves and with their audiences.

* For Lecoq it is the heuristic tool of the neutral mask which most enables the student to acquire lightness: 'a state of discovery of openness, of freedom to receive'.³⁸

* For Pagneux we find lightness when action, effort and purpose are in a state of equilibrium, of harmony: 'the fun of moving without effort ... when the body is centred'.³⁹

* For Gaulier pleasure and lightness are in symbiosis: pleasure is both a precondition of lightness and its consequence.

* For Lecoq lightness arrives with the agreeable fiction that the weight of accrued knowledge may be shed, 'as if' we can experience nature without preconception, with the pleasure of re-sensitizing the body to the material world.

* For Pagneux lightness is a fragile condition easily sacrificed to ego, ambition and solipsism.

* For Gaulier lightness offers a political critique of the darkness and weight of stamping fascist boots.

³⁸ Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body*, (London: Methuen, 2000), p. 38.

³⁹ Annabel Arden, unpublished interview with the author, 2008.

From these observations and attributions we might identify at least two tropes of lightness here: a texture of corporeal relationships - of movement - *and* a condition only experienced or acquired through subtraction and elimination. The former seems to speak of flow, of the precise but relaxed correlation of effort with purpose and effect, producing a texture of muscular lightness in any movement produced, whether it is the micro engagement – the journey - of finger digits, or of the fully embodied exuberant actions of a thirty-strong ensemble. So, here we are considering the release and contraction of the musculature and the neural traffic which activates such movements. The difficulty, of course, is that as a quality of movement lightness all too easily becomes flattened and ubiquitous: a condition and aspiration – even if not named as such – of most movement training regimes. And in the sense of generating and encouraging mobile, flexible and - above all – *responsive* performer mind-bodies then the lightness appellation is commonplace and hardly worthy of being singled out for attention. However, it is when this register of corporeal qualities are harnessed in association with a series of dispositions around material, composition and dramaturgy that arguably we begin to find a gathering of performative behaviours and ‘techniques’ where a more complex and far-reaching notion of lightness is at hand and which are far less omnipresent across theatre practices.

The other trope of lightness in this context concerns the strategy of removing, emptying or – more aggressively – *stripping* the (performing) body of culturally acquired behaviours, habits and attitudes, both quotidian and more pathological. Here, variations around the training tactics for a corporeal tabula rasa – the extra-daily and

pre-expressive body sought by Eugenio Barba's training methods, or the *empty* body in Butoh and Body Weather, for example – are to be found across the landscape of twentieth century dance and theatre training. Arguably, common to all such regimes is the mantra that rejects acting as an acquired repertoire of technical skills – a “bag of tricks” - learned through drilling and repetition, but which instead privileges diverse and often contradictory ideas about discovering and engaging one's subjective interiority as the driver for all creative expression. Equally, this emptying always seems to presuppose that once drained (of what?) there remains an essential and largely unified self through and upon which the vocabularies of particular performance modalities may be constructed and expressed. As Gretel Taylor argues in relation to Butoh:

This notion of dispensing with the individual subject has been performed in various ways by Butoh dancer, as represented by the literally stripped back aesthetic of shaved heads, nakedness and white painted bodies of 'classic butoh'.⁴⁰ The cultural and – particularly – feminist critiques of the empty and neutral body which reveals an unproblematic, unified and coherent self have been well rehearsed over the last three decades.

However, whilst they are not the subject of this article, there is a complex relationship between the goal of stripping away, of emptying the body, and the sought after quality of lightness. Logically and literally, the emptying of a vessel must make it lighter and so the shedding of apparently unproductive attitudes, cognitive or corporeal habits must - as a metaphor - lighten the performer as s/he journeys towards the zone of pre-

⁴⁰ Gretel Taylor, 'Empty? A critique of the notion of emptiness in Butoh and Body Weather training' in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* (Vol 1, Issue 1 March 2010), 72-87 (p. 77).

The school will change you totally. This change will not come from the knowledge accumulated during different workshops. Rather it is a result of subterranean forces which the teaching unleashes. These undermine and explode received ideas, certainties and inhibitions. At the end of the journey you are lighter and free. (Philippe Gaulier, School website 2010)

expressivity. And for Grotowski and Barba it is by removing the inhibiting and deadening weight of culture and socialization that this creative condition of pre-expressivity is attainable. So, through a certain lens this is a process of 'lightening' the body and its actions, but one which is very different, it

would seem, from the strategies and practices invoked on the one hand by Lecoq, Pagneux and Gaulier, and on the other by many contemporary performance makers whose practices represent an exuberant and socially engaged embrace of "dailiness" rather than a fearful escape from it. This 'annihilation of one's body's resistances',⁴¹ this violent process of elimination, this 'almost unbearable torture of the body by the will, resulting ... in an altered state of mind'⁴² runs counter to the generative tactics of pleasure employed by the French trio. Nonetheless, for Grotowski and Barba these methods of elimination (*via negativa*) and 'annihilation' also aspire to construct the actor who is light and free enough to 'express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality'.⁴³ But not only is the route to this state of lightness fundamentally different from Lecoq, Pagneux and Gaulier so too is the destination. For these French pedagogues lightness is achieved not through a terrifying act of will, and of fearsome purgation, but through an embrace of

⁴¹ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 114.

⁴² P. L. Feldman, 'On Grotowski. A Series of Critiques', *Tulane Drama Review* (T46), p. 192.

⁴³ See Grotowski, *ibid.*, p. 35.

the moment, of openness and of 'disponibilité'. Here, means are ends; the *condition* of lightness is only achieved through the *means* of lightness. As Lecoq said, 'It is essential to have fun and our school is a happy school. Not for us, tortured self questioning about the best way to walk on stage: it is enough that it be done with pleasure'.⁴⁴ And here Lecoq echoes Gaulier's mordant refusal of earnestness: 'the creative play of the actor takes place in the light. It is hopeless to seek refuge in a cave of repentance and remorse'.⁴⁵

It is instructive to compare Lecoq's teaching of the neutral mask, and the assumptions which lay behind it, with Grotowski's drive to eliminate, or the emptying of Butoh and Body Weather. To an extent Lecoq uses similar metaphorical language to, say, Grotowski and Barba in relation to the quest for neutrality, a *tabula rasa* or pre-expressivity. At times, Lecoq seems to position himself firmly within a Modernist and almost primitivist framework which seeks to (re)discover a pre-cultural 'innocence' in his students through the neutral mask and its exercises... an innocence which is corporeal, social, cognitive, psychological and emotional. However, for all its significance to his pedagogy – 'the central point of my teaching method'⁴⁶ – once we place this neutral mask work within Lecoq's overall project and the philosophy that drove it, I am convinced we find a different inflection, or indeed purpose, which proposes a vision for the actor's toil unlike that imagined by a Barba, a Grotowski or through the disciplining strictures of Butoh or Body Weather.

⁴⁴ See Lecoq, *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁵ John Wright, 'Philippe Gaulier: Genius or Egotist', *Total Theatre* (Winter 1990), p. 8.

⁴⁶ See Lecoq, *ibid.*, p 36.

For Lecoq the neutral mask was primarily a heuristic tool of discovery and never one for public performance. The mask serves to destabilize, or possibly *re-stabilize*, the wearer and to signal the fiction – the productive and pleasurable pretence – that the world of nature and of object can be discovered and experienced afresh without the weight of knowledge and of preconception. As a teaching tool we must place the neutral mask within Lecoq’s overall project of almost 50 years teaching and research. One the one hand this was his unending quest to understand how and why the body moved, a point made firmly to me by David Bradby, translator of Lecoq’s writing and scholar of French theatre:

He was really interested in the body and how it moved, and that was the centre of everything. To ask if he was more influenced by Copeau or Artaud is missing the point: missing the centre of his own natural passion and the way he developed his own teaching.⁴⁷

On 22nd April 1959, elevated wastrels ordained that school masters should no longer teach how to write with broad and thin strokes of the pen, as they had always done before in France. The ministerial edict announced joyfully that this was out of date. From then on pupils would use ball point pens ... The merits of this are touching indeed. Do listen. The broadness of the stroke of an ascending ball-point pen is exactly the same as that of a descending ball-point pen. This aids the legibility of the text, the comprehensibility of the thought, the intelligibility of the phrase. Not bad. Is it? The ball-point pen offers other, far from negligible, advantages. It does not squirt indecorous little ink blots at the bottom of every page. The ball-point pen goes straight to the point. It illuminates the meaning of writing because it removes the flourishes. (Philippe Gaulier in *Lettre ou pas Lettre*, Editions Filmiko, Paris 2008)

On the other, was Lecoq’s articulate (but untheorised) conviction that theatre’s post war (Western) renewal had to be constructed around visual and corporeal signifiers; a

theatre where the spoken word was but one of the languages of performance. As pedagogical means to this end Lecoq's commitment to learning somatically and haptically was a critical strategy, but never one which fetishised movement at the expense of the spoken word. Taken alongside his pleasure in the uncertainties entailed in composition and devising - 'error is interesting'⁴⁸ – enabled through the iconic 'auto-cours'⁴⁹ and his protestation that his school was a space to allow artists to develop and understand their practice rather than an institution to "train" actors – more Bauhaus than boot camp - we can begin to see neutrality as a tactic for discovery, risk-taking and for an embodied *disponibilité*. My point here is that while Lecoq's school enabled, through a range of teaching strategies, a corporeal lightness, it was as much through an openness of purpose, outcome and - to paraphrase Calvino - a nimbleness of thoughtfulness⁵⁰ that he, Gaulier and Pagneux sought to create the conditions of invention for achieving lightness.

Lightness as disposition, as dramaturgical 'structure of feeling'⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Lecoq, *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Lecoq invented the *Auto-cours* session in the School's curriculum following student demands for a degree of self determination during *Les Evenements* of 1968 in Paris and elsewhere (which he supported). *Auto-cours* became a central part of the School's work where students devised and wrote short pieces of theatre on a given theme which were performed as work in progress at the end of each week. The Lecoq School's reputation for encouraging and enabling devising skills is rooted in the *auto-cours*.

⁵⁰ See Calvino, *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹ 'Structure of feeling' is a key term in Raymond Williams' analysis of culture and hegemony. Identified first in *A Preface to Film* (1954) Williams developed and extended the term throughout his work. 'Structure of feeling' suggests a commonly held set of values, dispositions and perceptions shared by a particular class, or fraction of a class, at a certain historical moment. Each generation produces its own structure of feeling which is rooted (fluidly) in the social and economic circumstances of the time. I use

Unsurprisingly, in thinking and researching this essay, the quality of lightness constantly eluded being tethered firmly into a lexicon of conditions, strategies and

On Complicité's *Street of Crocodiles*.

'This production, first seen at the Cottesloe in 1992 and since globally acclaimed, has gained enormously on its travels: it now has a lightness of texture that perfectly counterpoints the underlying gravity of the Bruno Schulz stories on which it is based'.

Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, January, 1999.

instructions for making theatre.

More a disposition quietly felt

and spoken in process, possibly

even a 'structure of feeling'

though less all-embracing than

Raymond Williams' designation of the term. In the final section of this essay I note a number of instances in which lightness is identified as an affirmative quality to be found in the relational dimensions of performance practice. Relations between performers, between actors and spectators and between makers and the material they find, compose and order for performance. Most importantly, perhaps, lightness as a framing poetics for practice.

Following, for example, Sebald and (Tacita) Dean's avowal of association as a generative strategy for guiding composition and dramaturgy in theatre making, I shall note a number of productive – but unexpected - connections in the practices of certain contemporary theatre makers in relation to lightness and the traits of which it might speak.

the term very loosely here, but suggest that the quest for, or disposition towards, lightness might constitute an element of a contemporary structure of feeling.

In a recently published collection of essays and documents on the work of Lone Twin - *Good Luck Everyone*⁵² - various writers seek to identify characteristic qualities residing in Lone Twin's practice. Whilst these writers are unconcerned to claim that Lone Twin occupies some unique space in the cosmology of contemporary performance there is a strong sense that the company's work embodies a collection of qualities which speak repeatedly of what this essay understands as a lightness of practice. Indeed, in an essay to which I shall return, Carl Lavery writes of the 'construction of lightness'⁵³ in their processes of making and performing. Echoing Sebald, these writings, Alan Read suggests,⁵⁴ operate *alongside* the work of Lone Twin rather than *on* it, or at a claimed critical distance *from* it. Various, writers note qualities such as kindness, humour, generosity, optimism, enthusiasm, inclusiveness and openness which pervade their range of disparate performance modes. Whilst it is relatively unusual to credit contemporary theatre with such behaviours and dispositions, without knowing Lone Twin's work one might easily read these as offering that negligible and inconsequential lightness which Ann Daley alludes to above. However, contributors and editors to this collection are also saying that for Lone Twin these qualities (kindness etc) operate in a range of ways beyond the most literal or obvious. Firstly, they are deeply inflected by a politics that celebrates performance as an embracing 'social practice'⁵⁵; a mode of collaboration and comradeship with spectators and between performers that gently – and often humorously - proposes an alternative set of quotidian relations to

⁵² *Good Luck Everyone*. Lone Twin: Journeys, Performances, Conversations, Eds.: David Williams and Carl Lavery (Aberystwyth: Performance Research Books, 2011a).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the atomized and commodified contracts of life under corporate and global capitalism. Secondly, what I believe is being suggested time and again in this volume is that Lone Twin's work – in all its various appearances – offers a strategy for the seriousness of the times which is deeply thoughtful beneath a variety of disguises such as popular song, rituals of civility, exhausting task based activities and other playful behaviours. Above all, these are practices which understand the counter-productive nature of finger-wagging earnestness, whether it is manifested through the apparent emotional authenticity of social and psychological realism, or the apocalyptic provocations of 'in-yer-face' theatre. Williams and Lavery put it like this:

True seriousness admits and is contoured by laughter, lightness and folly; whereas earnestness is monotonal and monolithic, and gravity inevitably 'wins'. For all that's at stake, for all of the real effort required and expended, perhaps there is liberation in conceiving of such with both an immersive blooded relief and the pleasure of letting-go-lightly that is in the most affirmative and radical sense 'child-like'.⁵⁶

And here we are taken back to Philippe Gaulier; an association all the more potent because, as far as I know, Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters (who are Lone Twin) have no training legacy in the pedagogies of either Gaulier or Lecoq. For Gaulier,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13-14.

lightness, play and pleasure are a trilogy of mutually interdependent qualities⁵⁷ without which acting and the theatre that it serves will remain 'deadly'⁵⁸, lifeless and ever unable to engage an audience. Whilst play, lightness and pleasure may, of course, be understood and analyzed in isolation from one another, as performative dispositions each cannot exist without the other in Gaulier's pedagogy and theatre making. Perplexingly and frustratingly, they are qualities which are at best undermined and, at worst, destroyed by 'trying too hard' and 'knowing too much'. For Gaulier these are not simply the vices of an over-conscientious student, but are rooted in the atomizing and excluding traits of the ego and its excesses. There is a productive association here with Lone Twin's insistence that, fundamentally, working collaboratively in theatre is a *social* act⁵⁹, an act always of looking and moving outwards. Gregg Whelan says that:

Generosity is at the core of everything we do ... but we don't make an effort to be generous, or, at least, it's not an ambition ... we've never discussed generosity as something to get into a project. But I like it very much that we've spent the last fourteen years making things that some people perceive to offer 'an open hand'.⁶⁰

'Generosity' does not explicitly feature much in Gaulier's vocabulary, yet it is but a small leap to identify this as the productive and relational spirit he is seeking, and

⁵⁷ See Murray in Hodge *ibid.*, pp. 221 – 331.

⁵⁸ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Pelican, 1968) pp. 11-46.

⁵⁹ Carl Lavery and David Williams, 'Practising Participation: A Conversation with Lone Twin', *Performance Research* 16(4) 2011(b), p. 12.

⁶⁰ See Lavery and Williams 2011(b), *ibid.*, p. 13.

which he believes will be an outcome of the lightness-pleasure-play trinity. The (deceptively) casual features of a Lone Twin performance – even when carrying an anvil or telegraph pole – seem to resonate with Gaulier’s frustration on the one hand over the anxious student who ‘tries too hard’, and, on the other, a rarely concealed irritation with the brash thespian who ‘knows too much’. Both Lone Twin and Gaulier are wrestling with the paradox of simplicity and its attendant lightness. A shared refusal in Gregg Whelan’s words ‘to art things up’⁶¹ knowing at once that the achievement of simplicity is far from simple and never casual. And so, via the troublesome behaviours of will and ego, we return to lightness and weight through Gaulier’s words:

Desiring to be a clown is a heresy. The will is tiresome. It distorts the purity of the game and makes it heavy. Weight and humour do not make a good team. What more do you need? An immense desire to play the fool. Is that all? No, you must love playing all your sensitivity on the outside and let the feeling of ridicule put wind in your sails.⁶²

Central to Gaulier’s tactics of teaching and of rehearsal is the indirect vision, an arrival from the oblique or – in his own words – exploring the ‘angle of aberrations’⁶³. In practice these are manifested in a constant destabilization of the student actor in the belief that out of such perturbation dynamic dramaturgical solutions will be found which

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Philip Gaulier, *The Tormentor* (Paris: Éditions Filmiko, 2007) p. 295.

⁶³ See Murray in Hodge, *ibid.*, p. 225.

would be elusive or impossible through a more straightforward approach. In partnership with destabilization Gaulier uses the art of deflection to redirect the student's attention away from the weight of the text and its signification towards "answers" unimagined through more conventionally direct routes of discovery. Such deflections often invite the student to play fast and loose with the apparent gravity of the task by, for example, playing (often absurdly banal) games, speaking the text in a genre far removed from its original form, joke telling, singing and other musical activities. During a course on Tragedy in which we wrestled with *King Lear*, *Antigone* and *Macbeth* Gaulier required small groups to hold hands, skipping in a circle whilst reciting nursery rhymes – 'Ring o' Roses' for example. As the rhythms, pleasure and lightness of this tactic began to take hold the group slid without pause into the texts of Shakespeare or Sophocles. Behind such a tactic is Gaulier's insistence of a playful and elastic distance between performer and character or text – again removing, or at least reducing, the burden of ego, the weight of 'received associations and traces of "normalizing" assumptions and judgments'.⁶⁴

The qualities of playful and optimistic lightness which suffuse Lone Twin's work and which are acknowledged throughout *Good Luck Everybody* find, for the purposes of this essay, particularly relevant attention in Carl Lavery's essay " 'Defying the spirit of gravity': *The Festival* and Everyday tragedy".⁶⁵ Here Lavery braids Lone Twin's preoccupation with the stuff of daily life into a reconfiguration of tragedy, at the centre

⁶⁴ Barry Laing, *Rapture: Excursions in little Tyrannies and Bigger Lies* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Melbourne: Victoria University, 2002), p. 171.

⁶⁵ See Williams and Lavery (2011a), *ibid.*, pp 333-340.

of which lies the relational texture of lightness. *The Festival* was the third part of Lone Twin Theatre's⁶⁶ *Catastrophe Trilogy* first launched with *Alice Bell* in 2005. What Lavery elegantly reveals in his reflections on *The Festival* is Lone Twin's seriousness behind, beneath and around the attested qualities of generosity, civility and laughter already documented in this and other essays within the *Good Luck Everyone* collection. Lavery proposes that Lone Twin's unflagging engagement with the everyday and the apparently unheroic offers a model of dramatic tragedy which places lightness at its centre. He sharply distances *The Festival* from a theatre of gravity and high seriousness which attaches '... too great a price to loss and failure; it magnifies disaster and asks the audience to identify with a world that defines itself uniquely in relation to this solemn event'.⁶⁷ Then crucially:

In the *The Festival* the point is not so much to lighten tragedy as it is to infuse lightness with tragic sense, to defy what Nietzsche's narrator Zarathustra called the 'spirit of gravity'⁶⁸ ... *The Festival* de-dramatises tragedy, thematically and formally by basing its tragic vision not on an exceptional individual undergoing purification through violence, but on what Maeterlinck terms, in

⁶⁶ Lone Twin *Theatre* emerged out of Lone Twin in 2006 when Whelan and Winters took on five new collaborators whom they directed in the *Catastrophe Trilogy* (*Alice Bell* [2006]; *Daniel Hit by a Train* [2008] and *The Festival* [2010]). Meanwhile Whelan and Winters continue to make and perform work as a duo.

⁶⁷ See Williams and Lavery (2011a) *ibid*, p. 338.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing, (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 68.

a beautiful phrase 'someone approaching or retreating from his own truth'^{69 70}

The point I believe that Lavery is making in this instance – and it resonates strongly with Gaulier (and Lecoq's) teaching and theatre making strategies – is that tragedy is not diminished or trivialized by exposing it to the melancholies of quotidian life and behaviours. Furthermore, neither is it sharpened nor made more significant by weighing it down with Nietzsche's 'spirit of gravity'. In *The Festival* music, song and laughter offer a bittersweet quality to Jennifer and Oliver's story of failure and loneliness. As with Gaulier, Lone Twin's embrace of lightness as the defining textural grain of their practice is not an escape from the world and its sorrows, but is rather an engagement with what Whelan calls the 'ambiguity of tragic fun'.⁷¹ Lightness, one suspects, for Whelan and Winter receives validity and affirmation, as it does time and again for Gaulier, as answer to the weight and darkness of stamping – Fascist – boots.

After words

This writing is predicated upon a hunch. A sense that across various art forms the ascription of – or claim to - lightness has become over the last decade or so, if not ubiquitous, a significant coin in the currency of understanding, analysis and description. In this essay I have attempted to assemble examples of the ways in which the term has

⁶⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck, 'The Tragical in Daily Life', in George W. Brand (ed.), *Modern Theories of Drama: A Selection of writings on Drama and Theatre, 1840 - 1990*, (Oxford: Clarendon), p. 116.

⁷⁰ See Williams and Lavery (2011a) *ibid*, p. 334.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

been used to identify – and affirm - dispositions and qualities in the making and ‘performing’ not only of theatre, but of selected instances within literature and contemporary visual art practices. I have found it useful to trace ways of thinking and seeing concerning lightness as a texture of relations across different arts’ practices. Between Philippe Gaulier, WG Sebald, Lone Twin, Wolfgang Tillmans and children’s literature, for example, there seems little in common, yet in their radically different practices these figures embrace lightness as a quality to be celebrated and reclaimed from its dismissal as frothy triviality and inconsequentiality. I have suggested, for example, that by looking at how WG Sebald constructs his fictions and how Wolfgang Tillmans takes and presents his photographic images we can detect parallels with what Philippe Gaulier is trying to achieve in his theatre teaching and with the generous, participatory and optimistic dramaturgies of Lone Twin’s performance work. Moreover, I have proposed that an embrace of lightness in the creative practices of these figures is far from being an escape from the world, or a retreat from the often ugly – and weighty - exigencies of daily life. Rather, however, to infuse an approach to fundamentally serious material with lightness is to offer a hint of generative prefigurative behaviours and strategies which deal with the world differently

Questioning appeared to Heidegger as ‘piety of thinking,’ because it opened up new horizons ... The meaning of this question was non other than this keeping open, this moving forward into a clearing where the matter of course suddenly finds the miracle of its ‘Here’ returned to it, where man experiences himself as a location where something gapes open ... Hidden in the question about Being is readiness for jubilation. The question about Being in Heidegger’s sense, means to lighten things, the way one weighs anchor to sail out into the open sea. (Rudiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998 [1994], pp. 428-429).

and present, through the tactics of humour, indirect vision and openness a more optimistic form of agency over the direction our lives might take.
