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The Art of Theatre in Nineteenth-Century America: George L. Fox, Pantomime and Artaud.

The Theatre is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction. It invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies [...] impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world. (Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and Its Double*)

‘Legitimate Drama is Very Often a Bore.’ “The Ravel Family” *Boston Courier* 63 (15 March 1858).

Critical evaluations of American theatre have consistently drawn a distinction between the ‘best’ of American theatre and what are often referred to as ‘popular’ entertainments. Post-Independence American society followed the mandate of their Puritan forebears in regarding certain types of popular theatre with suspicion, a contagion with the potential to spread plague-like throughout the populace, winning hearts and minds to the degenerate art. Even William Dunlap, agent of American theatre spoke of the ‘worm in the bark’ that threatened the ‘root’ of American theatre (p. 405). Antonin Artaud, famously, also invoked the image of theatre’s invidious spread: conversely, though, his figurative ‘plague’ was a promise, a renovation of humanity, an epiphany, a bringing into stark understanding and knowledge.

Susan Harris Smith’s famous claim ‘think of American drama as America’s unwanted bastard child,’ in her essay of 1989, was seminal in articulating the dearth of

critical material relating to America's dramatic output (p.112). Not only theatre, then, but a rigorous theorising of theatre has been subordinated in American literary studies.

Anthony Kubiak's *Agitated States: Performance in the American Theater of Cruelty* argues that America is, in effect, a nation predicated on theatricality; but that theatricality is latent and remains untheorised. Kubiak declares: 'there is no viable theatre tradition that stands in contradistinction to, questions, critiques, the blatant theatricalities of culture in the manner of Brecht, Beckett, or Pirandello, or more pointedly in terms of theatre's foreclosure, Artaud' (p.13). The anti-theatricality at the core of America's Puritan identity, according to Kubiak, intervenes in the national consciousness of its own theatricality.

I would suggest, though, that we might look to the disaffection for American theatre expressed by critics as an alternative way of considering the apparent lack of a consciously theorised theatre in America's critical milieu. A dismissive attitude towards American theatre, demonstrable throughout most of the twentieth century, is an inheritance of the opinions expressed by critics of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who were sometimes prudish, more generally comical, but ultimately disdainful about what they witnessed in theatres. Writing his Jonathan Oldstyle letters for the *Morning Chronicle*, for example, Washington Irving regularly entertained readers with accounts of the amateurism of public theatre. Not until the latter decades of the twentieth century has American theatre begun to achieve the critical attention that had been so sadly lacking. Whilst recent studies have begun to address American theatre's theory gap, however, attention has been focused very specifically at twentieth century playwrights and productions. Indeed theatrical theorising seems to bypass the nineteenth century

altogether, looking back to ‘ancient’ forms as a way to revalidate a theatre seen as passive and pallid. In an article discussing the work of Absurdist productions, written in 1960,

Martin Esslin asks:

What is the tradition with which the Theatre of the Absurd-at first sight the most revolutionary and radically new movement-is trying to link itself? It is in fact a very ancient and a very rich tradition, nourished from many and varied sources: the verbal exuberance and extravagant inventions of Rabelais, the age-old clowning of the Roman mimes and the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, the knock-about humour of circus clowns. (p.7)

To Esslin, the Theatre of the Absurd was a process of revelation, within which we would become aware that the ‘absurd’ on stage was ‘recognisable as somehow related to real life with its absurdity,’ so that the audience would eventually come ‘face to face with the irrational side of their existence’ (p.5). Antonin Artaud, a significant influence on absurdist theatre, produced a study of theatrical practice that has become a staple in studies of twentieth century theatre. In the preface to *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), Artaud argues that debates about ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ have stagnated expressive arts. The ‘fixation of the theatre in one language – written words, music, lights, noises,’ Artaud claims, ‘betokens its imminent ruin’ (p.12). To make ‘true’ theatre, we must ‘break through language,’ to find a theatre ‘not confined to a fixed language and form’ (p.12). Antonin Artaud’s work on *The Theatre and Its Double* is essential to assessing theatre’s response to theatricality, specifically in its awareness of non-verbal strategies but his theories, linking total theatre with eastern mysticism are not without problems: comparing them to popular productions on the American stage of the nineteenth century also involves a degree of theoretical flexibility. But his fascination with nonverbal performance requires analysis, and this article sets out to perform that task.

In his assessment of one of the most absurdist of theatrical practices, the theatre of cruelty, Artaud proclaims, most notably: ‘The language of gesture and mine, this wordless pantomime’ is ‘everything I consider theatrical about the theatre’ (p.40). Artaud was not alone in his focus on gestural ‘language’ as a revalidation of and for theatre within the theorising of theatre shaped in the twentieth century; however, as Esslin points out,, his work was pivotal in speaking for and shaping this form of practice, that urged the actor to ‘show’ they were acting, rather than ‘live’ or ‘be’ the character.

Thus, for Artaud, as for mime artists Marcel Marceau, Etienne Decroux and Jean Barrault, the work of mime was to reinvigorate creativity, and explore the body as art, a body rendered invisible by the scenic sensations that characterised nineteenth-century spectacles. Nevertheless, amongst those nineteenth-century scenic displays, the body of the pantomime artist was a special event, a popular event, one that raised curtains again and again. Yet, the work of nineteenth-century gestural actors, pantomimists, melodramatists, is unexplored within the remit of this performative theory. To engage fully with the entirety of that body of work falls to a longer study than this can be; therefore, I focus on a study of one of the most famous gestural performers of his time, George Washington Lafayette Fox.

I argue, therefore, that through specific stagings orchestrated in the pantomimist’s art, George Lafayette Fox demonstrates a consciousness of staging and of theatricality that offers us insights into ways of reading the ‘blatant theatricalities’ of theatre theory that were formed in the early decades of the twentieth century. George L Fox was a significant member of the cast who performed in America’s most critically and financially successful melodrama – George Aiken’s adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* –

and has maintained his place in theatre history as the most notable nineteenth-century American pantomimist, in the bestselling *Humpty Dumpty*, which still maintains a reputation as the longest running pantomime in America's theatre history.

Artaud was unlikely to have been familiar with Fox, or his *Humpty-Dumpty*, and his delight in the art of mime is certainly directed to the Avant Garde performances of Jean Barrault – but his claims about the genre are compellingly presaged in Fox's pantomimic, silent, clowning. *Humpty-Dumpty* performed a version of Artaud's theatre of a 'physical language,' whereby 'everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind in the language of words' (p.38). Fox's pantomime demonstrated that concept of the concrete language in the body, the gestural language and non-verbal acrobatics of its white-face clown, exhibiting the possibilities of dramatic dimensions of the theatre of cruelty, with performances that mocked the crazy chaos of corruption that marked mid nineteenth-century New York.

New York theatres, in the 1840s, were involved in a process of segmentation that Peter Buckley refers to as the 'stratification of performance' ('Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainment,' p.456), which was closely associated with the development of class. 'Culture' and 'civilisation' were staged in legitimate theatre, but non-legitimate venues presented entertainments considered purely vulgar and non-edifying – 'commercial' spectacles of cheap thrills and extravaganzas. The *Spirit of the Times* mentions a division whereby 'the "Corinthian" patronizes the opera, the literary, the legitimate, and the million go for national, the horrible, and the funny' (quoted in Dudden, p.107). Bruce McConachie refers to New York's theatrical geography as

organized specifically along a ‘class line’ (p.174); indeed, like many major cities, New York’s topography was ‘classified,’ with the East side regions of the Bowery marking the boundaries of working-class populations. In mid-nineteenth-century New York, this theatrical division was mapped geographically as well as culturally, with venues catering for the elite centered around Broadway whilst the *hoi polloi* headed down to the Bowery Theatre.

It is within such a stratified New York that the performances of George Lafayette Fox can be situated. The legitimate theatre had their American actor in the figure of Edwin Booth; the Bowery B’hoys found a replacement for Edwin Forrest (who was still performing, but ‘tainted’ by a messy divorce, which had left his romantic ‘heroism’ somewhat tarnished and his star waning) in Fox’s infamous pantomime performances in *Humpty-Dumpty*.

Despite the implicit hierarchy and elitism of the distinction between legitimate and non-legitimate venues, a focus on the non-legitimate theatre has emerged as a site of fruitful enquiry into considerations of the relationship between verbal and non-verbal performance and also a disrupter of the myth of nineteenth-century cultural poverty. Non-legitimate theatre, the theatre of popular appeal, produced a vast array of styles and performance types that resound throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Whereas the depression of 1837-1844 financially ruined operations for formal, legitimate theatre, the smaller locations, sites of cheaper entertainments, managed to propagate their performance manifestos and maintain a regular, if shifting, landscape of dramatic productions.

At the same time, however, closer examination of the theatrical mix of New York reveals a diverse and dynamic scene. Whilst the economics of pricing systems attempted to enforce distinct boundaries between the Park and the Bowery, these were not altogether successful. The Ravels, an acrobatic troupe and as such more associated, in New York's theatrical imagination, with circus acts of non-legitimate venues, appeared at the Park and Niblo's Garden rather than at the Bowery, and were rapidly accepted by the elite audience. Another key example, though, of that blurring of boundaries can be seen through an account of Fox's performance career, which was to be punctuated throughout by his association with that major pantomime, *Humpty Dumpty*.

Whilst captivating the traditional audience of non-legitimate theatre, *Humpty Dumpty* also appealed across the spectrum, not just with the Bowery Bhoys; the New York *Clipper* of 29th March 1868 reported *Humpty Dumpty's* move to the prestigious Olympic:

Manager Tayleure may congratulate himself on having a theatre that is not only doing the best business in town, but is the fashionable place of amusement of the city, his patrons being those who used to visits Wallacks before it commenced playing such a class of pieces as it has the present season' (cited in Senelick, p.145)

Humpty Dumpty was not the first pantomime to be performed in New York; but it was certainly the most popular and attracted audiences from across those 'stratified' geographic, cultural and class signifiers. The 'upper' echelons of New York, generally assumed to be seeking edification, were lured by the silent, violent clown.

Pantomime had become, by the 1850s, one of the most popular of shows, after a somewhat chequered heritage. E.J. Parsloe had brought his English tour group to the Bowery theatre to perform a pantomime version of *Mother Goose*, but the audience

response was a silence ‘broken only by the cracking of peanuts’ (cited in Wagner, p.51). However, the French Ravels, whose pantomime owed more to mime than the verbal punning of Parsloe’s Anglicised performance, were greeted enthusiastically.

Critics of mime and pantomime have argued persuasively that the origins of gestural, non-verbal performance should be located in rituals and symbolic religious and spiritual cultural events. Indeed, the ‘language of gestures’ argues Annette Lust, ‘is as ancient as the human race’ (p.2) The term pantomime itself is derived apparently from the single masked dancer known as *Pantomimus* that featured in Ancient Roman performances, which fed into the Renaissance *commedia dell’arte* that circulated from Italy across Europe and England. In English pantomime, Grimaldi emphasised the role of the clown – the buffoon of the *commedia dell’arte*, and became very popular to English and French audiences of the nineteenth century. American pantomime borrowed variously from European forms, cherry-picking Grimaldi’s clowning and slapstick alongside the French urge towards acrobats and tumblers. Fox’s successful pantomime repertoire owed as much to the French-trained Ravels as it did to Grimaldi. Where English versions of the genre more and more sought to incorporate verbal codes within its structure, the American version, particularly the version promulgated by Fox, remained more in touch with non-verbal performance.

Fox’s early career in New York, at the Bowery, was a hotch-potch of performance types; in addition to his roles as a clown, he also performed in popular melodramas – he played the role of Phineas Fletcher in Aiken’s version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. He also played on the sensibilities of audiences, and would frequently adlib for comic effect. Such awareness of audience expectations and requirements made him the most popular

performer at the ‘low’ theatre houses of the National and the Bowery throughout the 1840s and 50s. When he departed from the National, the theatre soon afterwards went broke, whilst his New Bowery operation attracted mass audiences.

Fox’s move to the rebuilt Olympic on Broadway consolidated his commercial appeal and *Humpty Dumpty*, premiered in 1867, was performed over 1,000 times. The production has become mythologised as the most famous pantomime in America’s theatre history.

Its success was mainly due to its relevance to its audience. Laurence Senelick, Fox’s biographer claims:

Humpty Dumpty was the culmination of all that led to the sophistication or, rather, the naturalization of pantomime in the United States. A popular entertainment, hitherto regarded as low and auxiliary no matter how funny, gained social, artistic, and commercial respectability. (p.138)

The play was seemingly patriotic. The opening prologue, one of the few spoken elements of the play, was followed by an orchestral rendition of ‘Independence Day has Come,’ and the newly annexed state of Alaska was characterised on stage by a baby, nurtured by the new parent, the United States. Such patriotism was a conventional feature of Bowery productions – as I mentioned earlier, the Bowery had used nationhood as an excuse to riot at Astor Place.

Humpty Dumpty’s humour was satiric, however, and aimed at highlighting the shortcomings of a corrupt New York. But not in dialogue – verbal performance was minimal, the language of gesture was the principal code of communication, a nonverbal code that offers a structural, if not political or symbolic, prototype of Artaud’s thesis for a ‘theatrical language’ that does not capitulate to the spoken word. Artaud states:

I do not mean an idiom we fail to catch at first hearing, but precisely that kind of theatrical language foreign to every spoken language, where it seems a tremendous stage experience is recaptured, besides which our exclusively dialogue productions seem like so much stammering. (p.39)

Artaud's concept of theatre was informed by his attendance at a performance of Balinese dancing in Paris in 1931, describes thus: 'those angular, sudden, jerky postures, those syncopated inflexions found at the back of the throat, those musical phrases cut short, the sharded flights, rustling branches, hollow drum sounds, robot creaking.' Performing mix of movement, music and non-linguistic codes, the dancers produced 'a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs' (p.153). Such an amalgam of coding systems, music, dance, movement, and gesture, all also participate in the codification of the pantomime.

By the time of Artaud's experimental dramaturgy in the twentieth century, conceptions of mute performances had been critically and intellectually split between pantomime and mime. Pantomime, according to Barrault, was 'objective illusion mime that expresses anecdotal action and conventional characters through the movements of the body's extremities,' where mime, or at least modern mime, was 'a subjective form that communicates the state of the soul through the movements of the body as a whole' (cited in Lust, p.79). Pantomime, in Barrault's analysis, has become located as a mute coding system that coats action, and that coding system generates and indicates comic or light action, whereas in mime, the mute performance is the action, and that action can be noble, can be tragic. Pantomime, within this paradigm, lacks the strategic link to the soul-state required of 'total' theatre.

Similarly, Artaud has argued that there are generic distinctions between types of mute performance. He contends that pantomime should be divided between

‘unperverted,’ or ‘direct Pantomime,’ where gestures ‘instead of representing words or sentences [...] represent ideas, attitudes of mind, aspects of nature, all in an effective concrete manner,’ and what he refers to as ‘our European Pantomime (a mere fifty years old!) which is merely a distortion of the mute roles of Italian comedy’ (*Theatre* p.39/40). Artaud promotes a concept of ‘good’ theatre as promulgated within an organic framework, where ‘nature’ can be represented, can be rendered concrete by the theatrical gesture. Pantomime is a corruption, a modern and distorted product.

Artaud’s conceptualisation of a perverted pantomime is a product of the modernist urge to redefine the ‘popular’, a means to demark regions of passive performances of pantomime and a gestural theatre of cruelty that would render ‘nature, all in an affective concrete manner.’ But, we should note that the division articulated by both Artaud and Barrault, between mime, or ‘unperverted pantomime’ and pantomime, which is by implication to be regarded as a ‘perverted’ version of the mimic’s art, smacks of the type of rhetorical elitism that structured cultural and geographic theatrical boundaries in New York, between the Bowery and Broadway. And, critically, that boundary between types of mime and pantomime are not so easy to police. Fox’s pantomime constituted a mix of panto clowning with skilled mime: whilst not *consciously* a concrete rendition of nature, Fox’s mimicry nevertheless probed representations of reality to great effect, creating, according to Senelick argues that ‘an original species of entertainment that incorporated a crucial quantum of social reality’ (p.131). Falling somewhere between that critical distinction between mime and pantomime articulated by Artaud, Fox’s performances constituted more than a ‘mere’

entertainment, and indeed offered an insight into the particularities of New York's institutionally corrupt, if lively and dynamic, scene.

The complacent, carefree acts of cruelty, the commonplaceness of knockabout, and aesthetically choreographed violence of Fox's pantomime generally appealed the house with hoots of laughter: but this was an appeal laced with tension. *Humpty Dumpty*, produced in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, was a show about violence and crime and madness. The scenery included a pastiche of the infamously over budget courthouse in City Hall Park, which had taken over six years to build and whose costs had soared, mainly due to institutional corruption. This was the time of Boss Tweed and eleven million dollars has been suggested as the approximate amounts that had been pilfered by corrupt officialdom during construction (Lynch, p.89). A billboard, in front of the pasteboard courthouse of Fox's production, announced that the building would open in 1960 (Senelick, p.141). Political madness, bureaucratic corruption and institutionally sanctioned violence define the era. America had been wrecked by civil and was being further drained by corruption. Artaud defined his theatre in the burning brutality of Europe's mass of war and death, and of rhetorical insolvency. In its mode of pantomimic performance, *Humpty Dumpty* made manifest, explicitly and overtly, the shape of New York's institutionalised crime and corruption.

Humpty Dumpty, in his white face mask, wreaked havoc on all; amongst his criminal acts of violence he kidnaps babies, burns Pantaloon with a red hot poker, steals and damages property. He finally retires, carried by a bed bug, unpunished and unconcerned by his activities, his countenance as serene at the end as it has been throughout. Social structures are not only challenged, but brick-batted away. Rather than

a carnivalesque response to power, however, with its implications of a return to order and control, *Humpty Dumpty* glories in corruption, decay and the absence of order. Indeed, in New York of the 1840s, the world outside the theatre was scarcely any less violent and criminal and mad than the chaotic scenes of the lavish pantomime. Mary Henderson has argued that, at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, ‘New York’s streets were the dirtiest, its crime the vilest, its mansions the most vulgar, its poor the most exploited, its disease the most virulent, its death rate the highest,’ and its police ‘the worst in the world’ (p.93). Leaving the theatre following a performance of *Humpty Dumpty* did not bring about a cathartic return to normative, legitimate authorities and functions; these categories had become specious and devoid of meaning. The reality of leaving the pantomime was that, in many ways, the pantomime merely continued.

Wearing a stolen police officer’s uniform, Humpty Dumpty accosts old One Two with his baton and then, according to Senelick, he:

Indiscriminately beat characters about the head with a night-stick [...] a brazen but recognizable portrait of police brutality. When he encountered a blazing tenement and vandalized the furniture [...] or turned the hose on the bystanders, he was living out every fire-wagon-chasing urchin’s dream. (p.143)

A pastiche New York police corruption, Humpty Dumpty, the rampant, happy criminal, was also the embodiment of what ‘high’ New York feared, and chose to veil, the street urchin with power, a configuration of Boss Tweed and his control of New York authorities. That such a performance could be billed at the rather well-to-do Olympic is significant. Fuelling middle-class fears of the spread of violence across New York from the perilous regions of the Bowery, *Humpty Dumpty* itself became a symbol of contagion:

with the success, the unrivalled success of Fox's clowning, Bowery had indeed made it to Broadway.

According to Artaud, the theatre like the plague, impels 'us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness and [...] two-facedness' (*Theatre* p.19): the theatre purifies, or symbolically 'kills' its audience. To Artaud, the audience that remains immune to total theatre's revelation of the world's state, as the mask falls, are 'dead to experience' (Leach p.172). Artaud's comments draw on his experiences lecturing at the Sorbonne in 1933, during which he was jeered. He argued that the lecture was not a failure: but the audience was 'dead.' On stage, George L. Fox, masked in white face, deadpan in expression, both exemplified that 'dead' audience, and challenged them back to 'life.'

Slapstick comedy, pantomime humour, improvised action, chaotic sequences, and chases – all these features of pantomime tend to suggest a looseness of form and a lack of plotting. But, in common with dialogue-based performances, there would be a prompter, scene changes, lighting shifts, and technological requirements, as detailed on the playbill, including the *commedia dell'arte* transformation of the characters into the clown, Pantaloon, Harlequin and Columbine. Jacques Derrida asserts that 'all the pictorial, musical and even gesticular forms introduced into Western theatre can only, in the best of cases, illustrate, accompany, serve, or decorate a text, a verbal fabric, a logos which is *said* in the beginning' (p.236). Indeed, *Humpty-Dumpty* was a meticulously planned non-verbal performance. Whilst scripted dialogue is minimal, gestural language is specifically planned and plotted. This is an excerpt from John Denier's script, published in 1872, in

which an upper class fop – a satiric target for Bowery performances – enters just as Humpty Dumpty has emerged from his shell and is sat on a wall:

Humpty fires a stuffed brick from the wall and hits him (the fop) bang on the head. Fop stops singing, runs down to the footlights, takes off his hat, and feels his head with his hand – looks at his hand – don't see any blood – shakes his fist, and expresses "he will sing or die" – goes down in front of the cottage and commences again –

"Oh, let me like soldier fall –"

As he says 'fall,' Humpty throws a second stuffed brick, which hits him in the head and he does a [...] half-forward somersault, and lands sitting. He gets up quick, looks towards the pig-pen, sees Humpty laughing, and shakes his fist at him. Humpty fires a third stuffed brick. Fop dodges it and runs off 5 E.L. (entrance left), just as Old One Two comes out of the cottage and catches brick in the face, which knocks him down flat in front of the cottage. Humpty laughs, and One Two gets up, apparently stunned – picks up brick, looks at it, rubs his head, studies a moment, puts his finger aside his nose, and walks with a circulating motion, the brick in hand, to front of the pig-pen and looks behind it, supposing some one to be there hiding, when Humpty takes all the bricks and lets them fall on One Two, who falls flat on his face from the weights of the bricks – he gets up, takes three bricks, and circles around stage cautiously to R. corner. Humpty jumps down, takes three bricks and follows very cautiously – when One Two gets to extreme R. he turns quickly and meets Humpty face to face. They both stand still in a picture, each with a brick raised to throw. (*Music chord*). Humpty makes three big steps backward to L. corner – One Two follows, but makes big steps forwards in time with Humpty – at the end of the third step, picture as before. Repeat back to first position. Humpty fires brick at One Two who dodges – One Two fires brick at Humpty who dodges in turn. This is repeated until each has thrown three bricks, when Humpty hits One Two with a fourth brick in the head. (from Denier's *Humpty Dumpty*, cited in Senelick p.142/3)

Such strict choreography, beautifully rhetoricised by Senelick as a 'ballet of assault,' (p.143) belies the image of pantomime chaos. Although seemingly anti-text, then, this pantomime was in fact, carefully crafted with the gestural violence, the language of pantomime, preformed in words. That non-verbal performance, that gestural language can be regarded as controlled by the authority of the written script, like the spoken dialogue of legitimate theatre.

‘Popular,’ as a prefix to theatre, has come to signify cultural poverty. Hierarchies of aesthetic theatrical types thus are consistently reinvented and reiterated. The image of American theatre in the nineteenth century as a marker of cultural poverty should be readjusted to be seen as an articulation of anxieties shaped by rapidly shifting social landscapes. With every moment of revelry in the chaos of pantomime comes a fear of the chaos that pantomime exposes as the social norm. Every moment of slapstick violence instigated by the sombre clown is doubled by its cogency as a manifestation of the very real violence perpetrated through institutional brutality. As a theatre of cruelty, the pantomime, did indeed invite, in Artaud’s words, ‘the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies [...] impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world’ (p.19).

George Fox enjoyed a long performance career, appealing generally across America, participating in productions that interrogated institutional practices and rhetorical inconsistencies. Pantomime, with its glory in excess, its incipient display of anti-establishmentarianism, its fluidity and emphasis on show, contributed to the development of American theatre as a dynamic form. Providing a concrete space with its ‘concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech,’ (Artaud, p.37) the pantomimic language of George Lafayette Fox goes some way to performing aspects of cruelty. Critical engagements with American theatre, and its ‘dearth’ of theorists, should, perhaps, pay some attention to the figures, such as George L Fox that occupy its ‘non-legitimate’ stages.

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