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## THOMAS SHADWELL'S *THE VIRTUOSO* AS AN ASSEMBLAGE LABORATORY. A VIEW FROM INSTALLATION ART

**Summary.** The contemporary landscape of performing arts becomes more and more populated by hybrid genres or “artistic installations” (Rebentisch) which fuse traditional artistic, theatrical and performance practices with scientific procedures, political activism and designing new technologies (e.g. bioart, technoart, digital art and site-specific performance). In this context, theatre texts can no longer be perceived as autopoietic means of solely artistic expression but become part of an assemblage of different discourses and practices. As contemporary assemblage theory contends (DeLanda), assemblages are relational entities which change dramatically depending on relations between its different human and nonhuman elements and various contexts in which they function.

Taking the contemporary installation art as a vantage point, this paper aims to analyse a Restoration comedy *The Virtuoso* (1676) by Thomas Shadwell in an assemblage of theatrical, scientific and political discourses and practices of Early Modern England. Staged in Dorset Gardens theatre in London, the play mobilised a plethora of discourses of science (the status of experimental philosophy institutionalized in 1660 as the Royal Society), politics (Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II) and gender (the infamous *heac vir* or effeminate man). Drawing on contemporary new materialism, the paper focuses predominantly on Shadwell's use of the laboratory as a site of emerging assemblages rather than objective matters of fact. In this context, the play itself becomes an assemblage laboratory where new ways of thinking and being are being forged and constantly negotiated.

**Keywords:** installation art, assemblage, experience, laboratory, Restoration comedy.

Alluding to Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*, it could be argued that contemporary culture “allows for the expanded proliferation of the hybrids whose very existence it denies.”<sup>1</sup> Although cultural institutions and various academic discourses in humanities discriminate between different artistic genres which should be analysed using disparate methodologies, they are more and more populated by hybrid forms of performative arts flaunting hitherto accepted classifications. Rather unsatisfactorily labelled as ‘artistic installations’, such forms not only employ traditional artistic, theatrical and performative media and practices but fuse them with scientific procedures, political activism and designing new technologies. Moreover, the work of such artists as German collective Rimini Protokoll, British theatre company Punchdrunk or Canadian artist Janet Cardiff, among others, implicate the spectator in the artistic event, both intellectually and physically, to such an extent that it becomes virtually

impossible to differentiate between the subject and object of an aesthetic experience. Paradoxically, the proliferation of such hybrids has not lead academics and critics to formulate new languages of analysing performative arts. Even the discourse of intermediality in visual arts<sup>2</sup>, for instance, still upholds the Modernist notion of artistic autonomy based on proper competences specific to each art. However, formulating the new language should not be limited to most recent examples of installation art. They should rather invite us to revisit seemingly autopoietic in Niklas Luhman's sense<sup>3</sup> historical artistic forms in order to reveal their performative potential to stage assemblages of artistic, scientific and social discourses and practices as well as assemblages of humans and nonhumans.

My aim in this article is to take contemporary installation art as a vantage point to scrutinize the Restoration comedy *The Virtuoso* (1676) by Thomas Shadwell. The choice of the play has been motivated

by the fact that it directly engages with the Early Modern scientific and socio-cultural realities. Its eponymous character is Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, an ardent yet somewhat hapless experimental philosopher rejected by the Royal Society due to his impressive but rather unconventional experiments. Parodying well-known experimental practices of Early Modern natural philosophers, Shadwell depicts Gimcrack as an eccentric learning how to swim by imitating a frog, transfusing the blood of a sheep into a man or collecting samples of the air from different parts of England bottled in his cellar. However, the lack of recognition within the experimental community is not Gimcrack's only concern. His promiscuous wife cuckolds him, the two nieces in his custody Clarinda and Miranda disrespect him and plan to break free while his uncle Snarl is rather undecided as to bequeath Gimcrack his fortune. All problems come together in the central plot of the play which is an intrigue schemed by two men about town Longvil and Bruce, in love with Clarinda and Miranda respectively. In order to spend some time with their mistresses carefully guarded by their uncle interested in their dowries, they arrive at Gimcrack's residence in the guise of experimental philosophers interested in witnessing his experiments. In the course of the play, replete with frivolous tête-à-têtes and sexual innuendoes, Gimcrack gradually becomes a lonely, destitute and detested man pursued by furious ribbon-weavers who find themselves out of job due to one of his inventions.

In the face of the hybrid installation art of today, the *The Virtuoso* seems rather traditional as it may be interpreted as a perfect exponent of Restoration comedy as distinct dramatic form. Characterised by sexual frankness and frivolity, it clearly aimed to revive English theatre culture after the anti-theatrical regime of Oliver Cromwell. As the American literary scholar Jean I. Marsden writes, "[e]ven while praising the works of Renaissance playwrights ... Restoration writers sought to separate themselves from the previous generation."<sup>4</sup> Restoration playwrights intended to create a distinct mode of artistic expression that would be refined enough to suit the tastes of the public. However, seen in a wider context of the Early Modern England, Restoration

comedy emerges in a historical moment in which "the Modern Constitution"<sup>5</sup> separating sciences, culture and society was still in the making.

Although since 1980s critical science studies have indicated deep interrelations between science art and politics, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse separating experimental philosophy and art in Restoration England permeates the critical reception of Shadwell's play in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Literary scholars have analysed *The Virtuoso* in a mimetic key as a satiric representation of experimental practices of the period, focusing mainly on the relation between experimental philosophy and its satiric representation on stage<sup>6</sup> investigating whether Shadwell was writing against<sup>7</sup> or in favour<sup>8</sup> of the *virtuosi's* programme. Only recently did literary and theatre scholars shift their attention to investigating *The Virtuoso* at the interplay of practices, discourses and different human and nonhuman actors. In the context of such interpretations it is crucial to revisit the play in order to theorise performative aspects of the intersections.

In an attempt to route around representationalist readings of *The Virtuoso*, what I propose in the following is a kind of diffractive reading of Shadwell's play in order to re-situate it in the dynamically changing landscape of Early Modern assemblages of art, science, technology and politics. I am explicitly referring to the findings of the American philosopher and physicist Karen Barad whose new materialist diffractive methodology is "attuned to the entanglement of the apparatuses of production [and which] enables genealogical analyses of how boundaries are produced rather than presuming sets of well-worn binaries in advance."<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, *The Virtuoso* cannot be analysed as merely a theatrical representation of a pre-existing reality, but rather as a site where new ways of thinking about and being in the world are forged and negotiated. Drawing on contemporary new materialist philosophies, I will refer to this site as an assemblage laboratory fusing different artistic, scientific practices, cultural, social and political discourses as well as lifeways of humans and nonhumans.

The starting point for my analysis is my particular experience as a participant in a contemporary

artistic installation which fuses different sensory and intellectual experiences. Only from this perspective am I able to introduce a definition of 'installation art' which does not entail the autonomy of art but posits the theatricality as a space of possibilities for different relations between humans and nonhumans to emerge. I take this conceptual framework to engage with Shadwell's play in order to scrutinize its use of the laboratory as a way to mobilise Early Modern assemblages. Instead of focusing on Shadwell's performative strategies, I access three types of assemblages from the perspective of three different human and nonhuman participants of the play. Firstly, King Charles II's presence at its premiere in 1676 allows me to analyse art/science/politics assemblages mobilised by the play. Secondly, Robert Hooke's participation in the play enables us to inspect the emergence of art/science/gender assemblages, catalysed by the Early Modern discussion about male sexuality. Finally, I look at the *The Virtuoso* from the perspective of animals that populate the play in order to show the assemblages of humans and nonhumans in the Early Modern period.

#### INSTALLATION ART AND THEATRICALITY

In 2016, I took part in an exhibition *Temptation of Immortality* organised by Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw. The underlying theme of the exhibition was social and cultural consequences of technological advancement aiming to extend human life. Among different bio art, digital art and multimedia installations there was *Circumventive Organs* (2013), an installation by an Australian designer Agi Haines. The installation comprises three objects created using bioprinting, a cutting edge technology that enables combining different types of cells. In this case the bioprints are designed to help patients with severe health conditions. *Cerebrothrombal dilutus* is a hybrid of human tissue and a salivary gland from a leech which is supposed to thin the blood and prevent a stroke. *Tremomucosa expulsum* is an organ designed to dispel mucus from the breathing tract of a person suffering from cystic fibrosis using parts from a rattlesnake. *Electrostabilis cardium* is a defibrillating organ combining human cells and those of electric eel. The latter can discharge to

release an electric current to the heart when it recognizes it going into heart attack. The organ consists of a suction pad that attaches to the heart and then a tube, which has walls lined with cilia cells similar to that in the human ear. These cells can recognize vibrations, and if the heart goes into fibrillation (a heart attack) they will cause the muscular wall at the base of the organ to contract.

Although my description of *Circumventive Organs* is quite accurate, it is completely false. As I neared the installation I read the curator's commentary to installation explaining that the objects were a work of speculative design. They were made of synthetic materials as life-size models of non-existent organs in order to show the gradual collapse of traditional human/animal dichotomy in contemporary technoscientific practices. However, my experience of Agi Haines's installation was heavily influenced by the institutional context of Copernicus Science Centre as a site predominantly concerned with the popularisation of sciences. As I circled around the glass cabinet in which the organs were laid on a steel tray with captions describing their parts I was constantly wondering whether I was watching actual scientific exhibits or artistic artefacts. On the one hand, my uncertainty was reinforced by mockumentary strategies employed by the artist to create a film accompanying the organs. It showed a surgical theatre in which *Electrostabilis cardium* was being implanted into the human heart, which aimed to lend credibility to the bioprints. On the other hand, the objects themselves were created using naturalist techniques which triggered a particular kind of synesthetic experience. My visual perception of the organs induced the tactile sensation of the slimy organs. In other words, I could 'see' the moist which covered the bioprints. Subsequently an intense affective experience arose whereby I perceived *Circumventive organs* as extremely human and extremely nonhuman at the same time. The most approximate description of my spectatorial experience is what cultural historians Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park call "wonder". Writing about the Early Modern period, they claim that "wonder was a cognitive passion, as much about knowing as about feeling. To register wonder was to register a breached

boundary, a classification subverted.”<sup>10</sup> The effect of my wonder-like experience was a strong conviction/feeling that contemporary science is finally capable of creating symbiotic co-existence between humans and nonhumans.

My situated experience as a participant in *Circumventive organs* instigates radical revisions of the traditional conception of art as an autopoietic system of solely aesthetic expression. In order to grasp the performative aspects of contemporary installation art, let me refer to the theoretical findings of the German art theoretician Juliane Rebentisch. In her *Aesthetics of Installation Art* she convincingly argues that the umbrella term ‘installation’ is not so much works but models of the possibility of works; not so much examples of a new genres but ever new genres. Installation art offers a resistance to an objectivist concept of the work also by transgressing the boundaries that separate the traditional, the organic work of art from the space that surrounds it and/or its institutional, economic, cultural, or social contexts.<sup>11</sup>

In Rebentisch’s understanding, installation art is not merely another genre of contemporary art but rather a concept aiming to compromise the hermetic model of the autonomous work of art. Thus, she invites researchers and critics to investigate dynamic relations between the installations, their participants and various discourses and practices they mobilise. In this model of art, the object of study is not only the artistic event, limited by its beginning and end but also the process of creation and reception. As my experience of Agi Haines’s installation demonstrates, the institutional context in which it was exhibited was equally, or at times even more important for establishing the ontological status of the bioprints which oscillated between human/nonhuman hybrids and artistic artefacts.

Rebentisch goes even further to claim that this kind of spectatorial experience is constitutive of art itself. What is important for the analysis of Shadwell’s play, to support her argument she directly refers to the notion of “theatricality”. She subversively engages with Michael Fried’s famous attack on the concept in order to claim that installation art is “incurably theatrical.”<sup>12</sup> For Fried theatricality was explicitly a

negative feature of contemporary art which makes a work of art exposed to and thus dependent on the spectator’s gaze. In his view theatricality installs the modern Cartesian subject/object binary into the space of artistic experience. Arguing against Fried’s concept of the theatricality of art, she claims that

‘[t]heatricality’ [is] the name not so much of the establishment of a hierarchical subject-object relations, but rather the title of an open space of possibilities – which one might also call the space of the aesthetic experience – in which the subject maintains an experimental, or, at any rate, precisely non-commanding, relations to the object.<sup>13</sup>

Rebentisch evidently departs from the conception of theatricality as a category linked to a single artistic medium in order to theorize theatricality as an experience. She rather posits a theatricality as the potential of an installation to create ever changing spectatorial experiences which thwart traditional binary oppositions. In this context, let us return to *The Virtuoso* in order to scrutinise its theatrical potential.

Rebentisch’s model of installation art invites us to notice that the theatricality of Shadwell’s play resides in its capacity to blur the boundaries between art, science and social criticism to generate a space of possibilities for relations between different, human and nonhuman participants to emerge. For instance, at one point Gimcrack talks about a transfusion of sheep blood to a madman he lately conducted in his laboratory, offering a detailed and vivid description of the experiment. The American drama scholar Marjorie Hope Nicolson rightly points out that in this scene Shadwell makes a direct reference to experimentalists who performed various blood transfusions in the late 1660s.<sup>14</sup> However, considering that the majority of Shadwell’s audience was not natural philosophers and other people in the know, the effect of the passage cannot be restricted to mere reference. From the perspective of my experience of *Circumventive organs* we can see that Gimcrack’s interspecies blood transfusion might have generated a sense of uncertainty among the members of the audience as to whether the experiment was actually possible or it was just



Shadwell's imagination. In Rebentisch's terms, this experience opens up a space of possibility for the emergence of non-commanding relations between human participants of the play and nonhumans (in this case: animals). If Gimcrack's account were true, this would mean that there is no hierarchy but rather a continuum between humans and animals on which different hybrids are possible. In this context, references to actual experiments of the Royal Society may be interpreted as an authenticating strategy used by Shadwell to coerce his audience to consider such unorthodox potentiality, even for a short moment, to be reality. In order to scrutinize the performative aspects of such laboratory strategies in Shadwell's play let us situate it in the wider context of Early Modern 'lab history'.

In his essay *Lab History: Reflections* the American science scholar Robert E. Kohler contends that it is crucial to be period-specific when talking about historical laboratory sites and experimental practices<sup>15</sup> (see Kohler 2008). Thus, it is important to note that Gimcrack's laboratory is neither the secret laboratory of Goethe's Faust where an alchemist pursues his overreaching experiments. Nor is it the Enlightenment laboratory as a sterile place separated from other domains of life where so-called objective knowledge is produced. Typically of the Early Modern laboratories, Gimcrack's laboratory is in no way disconnected from or prioritised over the rest of the virtuoso's residence as the play moves freely between the laboratory, bedchambers and the garden. Thus, the play stages a spatial continuum between the domestic and the scientific, where – as Donald L. Opitz, Staffan Bergwik and Brigitte Van Tiggelen contend – “public and private, professional and amateur, civic and domestic, in fact intermingled.”<sup>16</sup>

*The Virtuoso* steps outside the confines of Gimcrack's residence in order to perform the laboratory as an integral part of the Early Modern public sphere. We can see that in the masquerade scene where Gimcrack performs yet another experiment. He disguises himself as one of the masqueraders in order to ultimately prove his wife's infidelity. Although the experiment has nothing to do with natural philosophy it is crucial for the play's rhetorical trajectory which valorises a close link between natural philosophy and society.

It may be interpreted as the belated attempt to study “Mankind instead of Spiders and Insects”<sup>17</sup> which comes directly before the last scene of the play which leaves Gimcrack destitute and lonely. Thus, in Shadwell's play the masquerade room joins such places as coffee-houses and gentlemen clubs that in Early Modern England were “important complement[s] to the laboratory as a public space where experimental facts could be discussed and debated.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, Gimcrack's laboratory, similarly to artistic installation defined by Rebentisch is not a hermetic space of autopoietic scientific practices in the modern sense. The play effectively challenges the spatial dichotomies of interior/exterior and private/public creating a space for fusing different discourses and practices within experimental practice. Thus, I would argue that Gimcrack's laboratory which challenges then accepted boundaries, also transforms the play itself in a particular kind of laboratory as site of mutual relations between art, science and society whereby different assemblages emerge subsequently transforming all the participants of the artistic event. In order to theorise the play as an assemblage laboratory, let me first refer to contemporary assemblage theory.

#### SHADWELL'S ASSEMBLAGE LABORATORY

Usually the concept of 'assemblage' is attributed to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who are said to have introduced it to contemporary humanities. However, the genealogy of the term is more complicated as one cannot find it in any work by Deleuze and Guattari. It only pops up in the English translation of their *Mille Plateaux* by the Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi. In this context 'assemblage' is the English equivalent of the French *agencement* which denotes an arrangement of elements of different type which can easily be reconfigured. This definition of assemblage triggers yet another set of associations different from hitherto reconstructed meanings in art history and in the sciences. Moreover, the ambivalent genealogy of the term suggests that instead of treating Deleuze and Guattari as the fathers of assemblage theory, we should rather identify elements of their philosophy influenced Massumi's understanding of assemblage.

The answer to this question may be found in another work by the French philosophers. In their *What is Philosophy?* they write:

We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero.<sup>19</sup>

In this fragment we can recognize a way of thinking similar to that of Barad. Within this framework the human is not a stable being with predetermined qualities, but rather emerges as a different entity depending on the changes in his or her environment. However, both Barad and Deleuze and Guattari do not conjure a new model of subjectivity which opposes the earlier individualist subjects. In their theories subjectivity is replaced by the concept of an assemblage. As Manuel DeLanda explains in his *A New Philosophy of Society*, assemblages are “wholes characterized by relations of exteriority.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, contemporary assemblage theory dismantles the fundamental subject/object binary replacing it by different relational entities.

The relationality of assemblages, however, is not tantamount to the Aristotelian relationality whereby each being is always related to other beings and its own substance. In what is to follow, I call an assemblage a relational entity which emerges from interactions between its elements, both human and non-human. What is especially important in the context of contemporary installation art, assemblages emerge transversally, fusing elements belonging to different micro and macro levels of reality or even to different scientific, cultural and political discourses. However, depending on the level on which we apply the part-to-whole relation, assemblages change their properties. It is therefore important not to essentialize assemblages but rather describe the trajectories of their subsequent changes. Taking into consideration such definition of an assemblage, let me return to Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* in order to scrutinize the ways in which the play mobilises the emergence of different assemblages situated in socio-cultural, political and scientific contexts of the period. Let me therefore read diffractively one of the scenes from

*The Virtuoso* alongside contemporaneous practices of experimental philosophers.

The case in point here is act 2 scene 2. Together with Bruce and Longvil the spectators enter Gimcrack's laboratory where the virtuoso, accompanied by his servant Sir Formal and a Swimming-Master, learns how to swim. Let me quote *in extenso*:

*SCENE opens,*

*And discovers Sir Nicholas learning to swim upon a Table, Sir Formal and the Swimming-Master standing by.*

Sir Form.

In earnest this is very fine: I doubt not, Sir, but in a short space of time, you will arrive at that curiosity in this watery Science, that not a Frog breathing will exceed you. Though, I confess, it is the most curious of all amphibious Animals (in the Art, shall I say, or rather Nature of Swimming.)

Swim. Mast.

Ah! well struck, Sir Nicholas ; that was admirable, that was as well swom as any man in England can. Observe the Frog. Draw up your Arms a little nearer, and then thrust 'em out strongly---Gather up your Legs a little more--- So, very well---Incomparable---

*Enter Bruce, Longvil, and L. Gimcrack.*

Bruce.

Let's not interrupt them, Madam, yet, but observe a little this great Curiosity.

Longv.

'Tis a noble Invention.

L. Gim.

'Tis a thing the Colledge never thought of.<sup>21</sup>

The scene is usually interpreted as Shadwell's parody of the Royal Society which, in its early days, was criticised for conducting unnecessary, futile and unproductive experiments. The criticism often came from within the society, as, for instance, Christopher Wren worried that experiments aimed “to produce knacks only, and things to raise wonder... will scarce become the gravity of the occasion.”<sup>22</sup> In this context the term *virtuoso* acquired derogatory overtones referring less to a serious philosopher than to

an entertainer who aims at bewildering his audiences. Thus, the comic potential of the scene arose from the fact that Gimcrack does not produce any new knowledge about reality but merely conducts but also indulges in a ridiculous experiment which aims merely at satisfying sir Formal's and Swimming Master's curiosity.

Such interpretation, however, is based upon a rather problematic premise that it is solely the experimental philosopher that produces knowledge in his laboratory. As Shapin and Schaffer explain in their *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, the very process of knowledge production relied on natural philosopher's performative strategies as "[e]xperimental performances and their products had to be attested by the testimony of eye witnesses."<sup>23</sup> In other words, experimental performances *for* an audience, be it in private laboratories or in the public, allowed natural philosophers to lend credibility to their findings and inventions and enabled the spectators (usually, but not exclusively, natural philosophers themselves) to recreate the experiments in their own performative space of laboratory. As Shapin and Schaffer contend, experimental performances were not limited to the confines of a single laboratory's 'here and now' as they encompassed material, literary and social technologies employed by *virtuosi* which enabled the (re)production of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

In this context, the swimming scene from *The Virtuoso* might be read against the grain not as a critique of the experimental programme but rather as a re-staging of a natural philosopher's laboratory experiment in which matters-of-fact are not simply produced by the experimenter but rather emerge performatively from relations between experimenter's technologies, the object of study and spectatorial experience. In his interpretation of the scene, the American performance scholar Al Coppola convincingly argues that Shadwell's staging of the rarity that is Sir Nicholas Gimcrack only follows the logic of – and offers pleasures strikingly analogous to – the performance of what the Royal Society's records consistently refer to as natural philosophic "entertainments."<sup>25</sup>

From this perspective, Gimcrack's experiment turns out to resemble natural philosophers' experiments

that it stimulates new imaginings by different spectators present on stage. For Shadwell does not construct the scene as the experimenter lecturing the others about the biology of frogs or the mechanics of swimming. He gives voice solely to witnesses/spectators of the experiment who react to his performance. Such construction of the scene staged the emergence of a particular assemblage of culture and nature, characteristic of the Early Modern period. The assemblage crystallises in Sir Formal's parenthetical remark "in the Art, shall I say, or rather Nature of Swimming."<sup>26</sup> Sir Formal's undecidedness also rhymes with my own wonder-like experience of participating in *Circumventive organs* and the Early Modern experience in which the artistic and the natural were not binary oppositions.

As we can see, the assemblage laboratory staged by Shadwell's play is not merely a site of heterogeneous elements manipulated by experimental philosophers. As in the case of contemporary artistic installations, the assemblages emerge from interactions between different human and nonhuman participants of experimental performances. Let me now extend the concept of an assemblage laboratory outside Gimcrack's lab in order to inspect the emergence of other assemblages mobilised by the play, both on stage and on the page.

#### PARTICIPANTS AND EARLY MODERN ASSEMBLAGES

There are no records of Charles II's reactions to *The Virtuoso* as he attended its premiere on 25 May 1676 at the Dorset Gardens Theatre in London. However, his very participation in the event enables us to notice the emergence of a theatre/science/politics assemblage. For the royal presence may be read diffractively in order to see that both theatre and experimental philosophy were deeply interrelated with the politics of the Restoration court. On the one hand, as the literary scholar Jessica Munns points out, "[t]he stage and the glittering world of the court were made for each other: they reflected back on each other and confirmed each other's validity."<sup>27</sup> Suffice it to refer to the lavish pageants organised to welcome the restored king on May, 29<sup>th</sup> 1660 or such plays as Dryden's *Tyrannick Love*

or Settle's *The Conquest of China by the Tartars* which problematized the status of the monarch and the condition of the restored monarchy. Although playwrights of the time were not necessarily approving of Charles II, brutally pointing out to his promiscuous lifestyle, among other royal vices, they contributed to the theatre becoming a site where potential social unrest could be sublimated. Not only would that establish the king's position as a ruler but also it prevented the country from falling into another civil war. On the other hand, the experimental programme of the Royal Society, working under the patronage of the king, was predicated on a similar tendency to sustain social order in the face of anti-royalist and sectarian movements, still active in the Restoration England.

In such theatre/science/politics assemblage, Gimcrack's eccentric experiments cease to be merely futile and unproductive performances aimed to spark off curiosity. They become a potential threat to the "Restoration settlement"<sup>28</sup>, as Shapin and Schaffer put it. This may be exemplified by act 5 scene 2, in which furious ribbon-weavers appear at the gate of Gimcrack's residence, protesting against one of his inventions. From the perspective of the king, the scene becomes a warning that losing control of the experimental philosophy might lead to social upheaval. However, as the scene must have evoked the 1675 uprising of silk-weavers protesting against the introduction of the automatic loom, Shadwell's play does not take the settlement for granted but rather reinforces its performative character. The play does not resolve the conflict and the threat of the ribbon-weavers is looming over the rest of the play and potentially continues after the curtain drops. Thus, by mobilising the theatre/science/politics assemblage, *The Virtuoso* did not unambiguously aim to maintain the social order of the Restoration court. It rather reinforced the constant potential of conflict, which, speculatively speaking, might have resulted in the king feeling uncomfortable about the play. Let me now turn to another assemblage mobilised by Shadwell's play which indeed resulted in actual intensive affective reaction.

In contrast to Charles II, Robert Hooke could not attend *The Virtuoso's* premiere. He got to know about

it from his friends and saw it only a week after. However, he left behind a record of an intensive spectatorial experience. After having seen the play he wrote in his diary: "Damned doggs. Vindica me Deus. People almost pointed."<sup>29</sup> The fierceness of Hooke's entry reveals a sort of affective performance which took place in the audience of the Dorset Gardens Theatre. The performance was inextricably linked with the blurred boundaries between the private and the public in Early Modern period. In this context, it would be imprecise to claim that Hooke merely recognised the play as a personal attack. *The Virtuoso* rather made painfully clear that his work as an experimental philosopher had never been and could not be distinguished from his rather unusual private life. Remaining a bachelor all his life, he only enjoyed casual sex. He also lodged with two young relatives: Tom Giles, a son of a cousin, and Grace, a niece with whom he kept somewhat too affectionate relationship. From the perspective of such morally ambivalent sexual entanglements, we can see that Shadwell's play, replete with promiscuity and extramarital intercourse stages an assemblage of theatre, science and gender, which generates huge affective potential.

In order to elucidate the consequences of the emergence of such assemblage in *The Virtuoso*, let me turn to Donna Haraway's interpretation of the Early Modern experimental programme. In her *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan®\_Meets\_OncoMouse™* she evidences a close inter-relation between experimental practices and dominant gender preoccupations of the time<sup>30</sup>. On the one hand, the idea of a modest witness was to prevent the pollution of the body in most literal sense. For in Puritan England experiments conducted by alchemists in secluded laboratories were morally suspicious as they could potentially involve autoerotic practices. Thus, Royal Society's experiments performed in front of modest witnesses ensured an ideal of a natural philosopher as a pure (noble)man controlled by other pure (noble)men. On the other hand, the experimental way of life was also clearly a heterosexual way of life. Haraway situates experimental practices in the context of cross-dressing practices in late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries which came under the names *haec vir* and *hic mulier* i.e. effeminate man



and masculine woman respectively. The practices, often staged in the theatre (see Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*), clearly threatened the established binary gender relations approved both by the state and by the Anglican church. As Haraway concludes "Boyle could not risk his modest witness's being a *haec vir*. God forbid the experimental way of life have queer foundations"<sup>31</sup>. Thus, although women were excluded from the Royal Society, Boyle's diaries testify to the fact that they also witnessed the experiments in order to appreciate the virtuosi's performance of heterosexual masculinity.

In the context of sexual and gender debates of the period, Hooke's participation in *The Virtuoso* enacts a particular theatre/science/gender assemblage whereby experimental philosophers no longer pose a threat to the Restoration settlement but their dubious conduct threatens the ideal of pure and heterosexual modest witness. This manifests itself in the two main virtuosi of the play. As for Sir Nicholas, he is not only an inveterate fornicator but also he does not "trouble himself with men and manners."<sup>32</sup> This makes him unable to notice his wife's infidelities. When finally in one of the bedchamber scenes they mutually discover their extramarital relations it is too late for him to regain his position of a virtuous man. Instead, as Tita Chico convincingly argues, the play shows "the personal repercussions of experimental philosophy, namely Sir Nicholas's sexual and financial abandonment."<sup>33</sup> In other words, the character is punished for his misbehaviour, which becomes a clear didactic message for the audience.

However, as the character of Sir Formal demonstrates, the ideal of masculinity was never fixed in the Restoration period. At one point in the play he manifests rather ambiguous sexual desires. In act 4 scene 2, he finds himself in a vault together with Sir Samuel Hearty, a man of town employed by Bruce and Longvil to help them with their intrigue. To get into Gimcrack's residence he dresses as a woman. Taking advantage of the closed space of the vault, Sir Formal attempts, rather brutally, to "enjoy thy lovely body."<sup>34</sup> However, the scene is not merely a depiction of Sir Formal unquenched (hetero)sexual appetite. It rather testifies to Haraway's assertion that [g]ender was *at stake* in the experimental way

of life ... not predetermined."<sup>35</sup> As the characters are in darkness, the spectators could only hear male voices. Thus, from the perspective of the audience, the scene might have been interpreted as both a rape and a homosexual act. Although the gender roles in the scene are not undecided, similarly to Sir Nicholas, Sir Formal gets punished for his inappropriate behaviour by being kicked and hit by Sir Samuel.

Finally, I depart from human participants of *The Virtuoso* in order to notice the nonhuman ones, namely numerous animals which populate the play both on stage and on the page. One group of nonhumans encompasses creatures which belong to the diegetic realm of the play. Although there is no clear evidence, the theatrical technology of the period suggests that they might have been represented on stage in some material form or another. For instance, this could be the case of Nick, a spider tamed by Sir Nicholas. As the virtuoso contends, "he knew his name so well, he would follow me all over the house."<sup>36</sup> One could easily imagine an automaton moving around the stage simulating the behaviour of a spider. The other group comprises animals that appear figuratively in the very language of the play, usually as derogatory terms such as "damnd Cockatrices", "you Crockadills"<sup>37</sup> and "the Emittent Ass"<sup>38</sup> Considering the potential of the two groups of nonhumans to generate intensive affects, both in terms of emotional reactions and 'zones of indiscernibility'<sup>39</sup>, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it would be inadequate to treat them as mere props of Restoration theatre or conventional similes of the Early Modern English. As the cultural scholar Lucinda Cole succinctly observes Shadwell's play establishes "a satirical space for more nuanced, less theologically univocal perceptions of human-animal connections."<sup>40</sup> In other words, *The Virtuoso* mobilises the emergence of different human/non-human assemblages. To elucidate the effects created by the assemblages let us scrutinize Cole's findings in more detail.

Reading Shadwell's play in the context of seventeenth century neuroanatomy, Cole evidences that both Restoration theatre and experimental philosophy rejected the Cartesian human-animal binary. For example in his *Cerebri Anatome*, published in

1664, Thomas Willis indicated that there are striking similarities between brains of humans and four-footed quadrupeds. By comparing dissected cortices, he distinguished the “twin species” as he called them, from lower, imperfect creatures such as insects. As his studies clearly challenged the human exceptionalism inherent in the dominant philosophical and theological discourses of the time, he searched for a new way of conceptualizing the human. In other words, in experimental philosophy the human’s privileged position as the crown of being was not considered to be its essentialist feature but rather an effect of relations between humans and other animal species. The mobilisation of such human/non-human assemblages by Shadwell’s play instigates another set of transformations.

From the perspective of nonhuman participants, *The Virtuoso* is no longer a threat to Restoration social order or an assault on the heterosexual ideal of the modest witness. It rather stages a drama of human beings trying, rather unsuccessfully, to defend their special status among other creatures. In this context, Gimcrack’s failed career as a natural philosopher is a result of his inability to protect men against the growing agency of nonhumans. This sheds a new light on Gimcrack’s already quoted remark that he wished he had “studi’d Mankind instead of Spiders and Insects.”<sup>41</sup> Usually taken as a satire on experimental philosophy, this comment suggests, in fact, that by taming spiders, transfusing sheep blood into madmen and observing social behaviour of ants, the virtuoso only reinforced their agency. Although the satirical logic of the play aims to diminish such posthumanist interpretation of natural philosophy, *The Virtuoso* leaves its human participants with a potential sense of unease. We can see that in the ribbon-weavers scene where Sir Formal, trying to defend himself against the brutality of the protesters, exclaims “I say, Gentlemen, I am a person”, to which they answer “Pox on you---we’ll use you like a Dog--- Sir.”<sup>42</sup> What in the theatre/science/politics assemblage was a potential attack on the Restoration settlement, here reveals its affective potential to destabilise the essentialist vision of a human being.

To conclude, a view from contemporary installation art on traditional forms of theatre and drama offers

a perspective routing around the hermetic conception art as an autopoietic system of techniques and strategies. Instead, it posits a performative model of an artistic event as a site of emerging assemblages of different practices and discourses as well as humans and nonhumans. However, the three distinct assemblages mobilised by Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* clearly demonstrated that in assemblages there are no invariants but they are rather in a constant state of becoming. Following different participants of the play not only allowed me to inspect intricate relations between theatre, science, politics and gender but also to show a trajectory performative transformations undergone by each of the human and nonhuman participants of the play.

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- Notes**
- <sup>1</sup> Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 34.
  - <sup>2</sup> see Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).
  - <sup>3</sup> see Niklas Luhman, *Art as Social System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
  - <sup>4</sup> Jean I. Marsden, "Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama" in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owens (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 229.
  - <sup>5</sup> Latour, 12.
  - <sup>6</sup> Marjorie H. Nicolson, "Introduction" in Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, ed. Marjorie H. Nicolson and David S. Rodes (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 6–26.
  - <sup>7</sup> Lloyd, Claude, "Shadwell and the Virtuosi", *PMLA* 44, (1929) 472–494.
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  - <sup>9</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham and London: Durham University Press, 2007), 29–30.
  - <sup>10</sup> Lorraine Daston, Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, (New York: Zone Book, 1998), 14.
  - <sup>11</sup> Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press 2012), 14–15.
  - <sup>12</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood. Essays and Reviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157.
  - <sup>13</sup> Rebentisch, 54.
  - <sup>14</sup> See Nicolson, 19–26.
  - <sup>15</sup> see Robert E. Kohler, "Lab History: Reflections," *Isis* 44 (2008), 761–768.
  - <sup>16</sup> Donald L. Opitz, Staffan Bergwik, and Brigitte Van Tiggelen, "Introduction: Domesticity and the Historiography of Science" in *Domesticity in the Making of Modern Science*, eds. Donald L. Opitz, Staffan Bergwik, and Brigitte Van Tiggelen (London and New York: Palgrave, 2016), 2.
  - <sup>17</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1997), 99.
  - <sup>18</sup> Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New York: Yale University Press, 2005), 106.
  - <sup>19</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 169.
  - <sup>20</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 10.
  - <sup>21</sup> Shadwell, 28.
  - <sup>22</sup> Wren to Brouncker in Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 31.
  - <sup>23</sup> Shapin and Schaffer, 56.
  - <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25–26.
  - <sup>25</sup> Al Coppola, *The Theatre of Experiment. Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 45.
  - <sup>26</sup> Shadwell, 28.
  - <sup>27</sup> Jessica Munns, "Images of Monarchy on the Restoration Stage" in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owens (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2008), 109.
  - <sup>28</sup> Shapin and Schaffer, 321.
  - <sup>29</sup> Hooke in John Shanahan, "Theatrical Space and Scientific Space in Thomas Shadwell's 'Virtuoso'", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*. 49 (2009), 549.
  - <sup>30</sup> Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness@SecondMillenium. FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse. Feminism and Technoscience* (New York/London: Routledge, 1997).
  - <sup>31</sup> Haraway, 30.
  - <sup>32</sup> Shadwell, 49.
  - <sup>33</sup> Tita Chico, "Gimcrack's Legacy: Sex, Wealth, and the Theater of Experimental Philosophy," *Comparative Drama* 42 (2008), 36.
  - <sup>34</sup> Shadwell, 58.
  - <sup>35</sup> Haraway, 29.
  - <sup>36</sup> Shadwell, 48.
  - <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 16.
  - <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 31.
  - <sup>39</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 29.
  - <sup>40</sup> Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures. Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600–1740*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 84.
  - <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 99.
  - <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 84.

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## **TOMO SHADWELL'O VIRTUOZAS KAIP ASAMBLIAŽO LABORATORIJA. POŽIŪRIS IŠ INSTALIACIJOS MENO PERSPEKTYVOS**

### **Santrauka**

Šiuolaikinis meno kūrimo peizažas vis labiau ir labiau prisipildo hibridiniais žanrais arba „meninėmis instaliacijomis“ (Rebentischas), kurios tradicines menines, vaidybos praktikas sujungia su mokslu, politiniu aktyvumu ir naujų technologijų kūrimu (pvz., biomenu, technomenu, skaitmeniniu menu ir specifinės vietos (en. *site-specific*) performansais). Šiame kontekste teatrinį tekstą nebegalima suvokti kaip autopoetiškos vien meninės raiškos priemonės, nes jie tampa įvairių diskursų bei praktikų montažo (angl. *assemblage*) dalimi.

Kaip teigia šiuolaikinė montažo (angl. *assemblage*) teorija (DeLanda), montažai yra santykiniai subjektai, kurie dramatiškai keičiasi priklausomai nuo santykių tarp skirtingų žmogiškųjų ir nežmogiškųjų elementų ir įvairių subjektų, kontekstų, kuriuose jie veikia.

Šiuolaikinį performatyvių menų vaizdą imant išeities tašku, šiame tekste nagrinėjama Restauracijos periodo komedija *Virtuozas*, kurią Thom'as Shadwell'as sukūrė 1676 m. sujungdamas į vieną ankstyvosios moderniosios Anglijos teatro, mokslo ir politinius diskursus. Pastatyta *Dorset Gardens* teatre Londone pjesė paskatino daugybę mokslinių (buvusi eksperimentine Karališkoji draugija 1660 m. buvo institucionalizuota), politinių (Monarchijos atkūrimas valdant Čarliui II), lytiškumo (negarbingasis *heac vir*, arba sumoteriškėjęs vyras) diskursų. Remiantis šiuolaikiniu naujuoju materializmu, straipsnyje išryškinama ne objektyvūs faktai, bet Shadwell'o laboratorija kaip besiformuojančių montažų (angl. *assemblage*) vieta. Šiame kontekste pati pjesė tampa *asamblijažo* laboratorija, kurioje atsiranda ir aptarinėjama nauja būtis ir nauja mąstysena.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** instaliacijos menas, patyrimas, laboratorija, Restauracijos periodo komedija.

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