

# Bestätigung der Autoren-Metadaten/ Author Metadata Approval Sheet

Sehr geehrte Autoren,

Bitte prüfen Sie die unten aufgeführten Autoren-Metadaten sorgfältig und ergänzen bzw. korrigieren Sie diese ggf. in der beschreibbaren rechten Spalte.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Mitarbeit, De Gruyter

Dear author,

Please check and complete carefully the author metadata listed below by using the editable fields in the right column.

Thanks for your kind cooperation, De Gruyter

**Journal-Name:** Journal of Contemporary Drama in English

**Article-DOI:** 10.1515/jcde-2022-0005

**Article-Title:** An Art Like Nature: Theatre Environment as Territory in Tim Spooner Performances

Bitte vervollständigen/ Please complete	Author Meta Data	Bitte ändern/To be changed
	<b>Author 1</b>	
	<b>Surname</b>	Bowes
	<b>First Name</b>	Simon
	<b>E-Mail</b>	S.Bowes@greenwich.ac.uk
	<b>Corresponding</b>	yes
	<b>Affiliation 1</b>	University of Greenwich
	<b>Institution 1</b>	University
	<b>Department 1</b>	
	<b>City 1</b>	Greenwich
	<b>Country 1</b>	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Data checked and receipted



Date:

09-03-2022

Simon Bowes\*

# An Art Like Nature: Theatre Environment as Territory in Tim Spooner Performances

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jcde-2022-0005>

**Abstract:** Tim Spooner has described his practice as “an increasingly complex series of live performances centred on the revelation of life in material.”<sup>1</sup> In this article, I consider this revelation as the precondition of a theatre ecology. Spooner stages a theatrical encounter between bodies and environments, in which distinctions between *person-thing*, *subject-object*, *self-other* no longer hold. Whilst there are evident parallels between this practice and *posthumanist*, or *new-materialist* philosophy, I shall describe Spooner’s theatre as *artlike*.

This article responds to two thematics outlined in the original call for papers for CDE 2021: “eco-spaces” and “eco-aesthetics.” The argument runs: 1) an ecological space is the result of an ecological aesthetics; theatre is considered fundamentally social, political in significance; art is fundamentally ecological in significance; 2) ecocritical theatre and theatre ecology are categorically distinct: in ecocriticism, political, social, and cultural concerns mediate a concern for nature; in a theatre ecology nature is reconstructed virtually; 3) ecocriticism stages a recognition of an ecological crisis in social terms; theatre ecology stages a revelation of an environment; 4) against theatre, there is legislation; 5) a theatre ecology extends a juxtapositional logic of *political ecology*: this is a false start and ill-timed.

The argument leads to a reconstruction of three gestures drawn from three of Spooner’s performances. In these gestures, theatre is rendered *artlike*. The exposition describes Spooner’s practice in terms of *embodiment* and *occupation*, before considering how the ecological implications of an artlike theatre are, firstly and finally, ethical.

**Keywords:** Tim Spooner, Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, occupation, territory

---

<sup>1</sup> This description featured on the ArtsAdmin website circa 2019–2021. In the final stages of preparing this article, I note that Spooner’s description has changed! It now reads: “Tim Spooner works in performance, collage, painting and sculpture. His work uses materials and objects in ways that reveal unexpected properties, aiming to open up perspectives beyond the human scale.” I prefer the previous description.

---

\*Corresponding author: Simon Bowes, University of Greenwich,  
E-Mail: S.Bowes@greenwich.ac.uk

## Part One: The Argument

### 1.1 What Is Fundamental

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari observe: “if nature is like art, this is always because it combines these two living elements in every way; between house and universe, *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, territory and deterritorialization” (186). Elizabeth Grosz extrapolates: the “first gesture of art, its metaphysical condition and universal expression, is the construction or fabrication of the frame” (10), which “liberates the qualities of objects or events that come to constitute the substance, the matter, of the art-work” (11).

Jacques Rancière takes as primary an aesthetics at the core of politics, a “system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience,” a “delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible” (13). For Rancière, aesthetics is a distribution of the sensible, revealing not only the *place* of politics, but also the *stakes* of politics “as a form of experience” (13).

From these references we can begin to propose an *artlike* theatre. This article refers to a *more primary* aesthetics, emerging from a gesture which is fundamentally ecological: the framing of the Earth, the partition of space, reveals the *oikos* within the *cosmos*. This architectural gesture produces the theatre as, precisely, a plane of composition in which a relationship between *oikos* and *cosmos*, house and universe, might yet be staged.

This plane of composition is what separates us from nature: the point of distinction opens terms of relation. Whilst the theatre is certainly a material plane, theatrical becomings emerge from and return to the virtual. I retain the term *nature* – not as the *product* of culture but as its *precondition*. Nature, here, refers to the organic and inorganic, to the otherwise unnameable movement, growth, and decay of all that is – to life itself – the becomings, of the Earth, in which our own becomings are implicated. Tim Spooner’s art effects relationships which appear firstly material, and yet whatever is experienced materially, actualised, is derived from the immaterial, incorporeal, ideal – the virtual. Art emerges from sensation, and from sensation, affect. Affects, whilst certainly material forces (force-relations), have to *become* material, since every actuality emerges from the virtual.

### 1.2 A Distinction

Ecocritical theatre would seem to emerge from a concern for nature, for environments, for the Earth. Here, I treat ecocriticism as a derivation of political theatre, a thematic concern belonging to a tradition of social critique emerging from the

political left. This mode derives from a prophetic Marxist tradition: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men” (Marx qtd. in Berman 89). Its exemplar remains Bertolt Brecht, and its impetus remains, primarily, pedagogical (Rancière 62).

The taxonomy for this extension of political theatre includes climate-change theatre and eco-drama.<sup>2</sup> This field is well established. At CDE 2021, Carl Lavery outlined an extensive theorisation of theatre ecology comprising a forthcoming monograph, but this theorisation is distinct, too, from any concrete examples, which will, he says, shape a projected second volume.

The argument requires a distinction between the ecocritical and ecological proper. Ecocriticism is derivative of realism. Theatre ecology is nascent, speculative, and largely idealist – in an important sense. If theatre ecology is ever to emerge, the work to establish it is not only conceptual but practical. Yet its practicalities cannot emerge from a pure materialism. A theatre ecology may yet be possible, but its condition of possibility is – will remain – virtuality.

I intend the virtual, here in Brian Massumi’s sense, as “a pressing crowd of incipencies,” a *potential* where “futuraity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded and sadness is happy (happy because the press to action and expression is life)” (30); a “lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt – albeit reduced and contained” (30). The theatre is, like all architectures, a material plane, but it is profoundly immaterial, ideal, idealist. The *profundity* of the theatre is not that it *forces sober recognition* of material conditions, which are understood as ecological, but that it *produces an ecological relationship* which is *at once – necessarily – actual, material, immaterial, virtual*.

### 1.3 A Recognition

My contention is that ecocritical theatre stages a moment of recognition. Protracting the moment of recognition, we experience a temporal delay, as though we live in an interregnum between regimes. Ecocritical theatre extends a Marxist prophecy: the audience is like Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History, faces turned

---

<sup>2</sup> At the CDE 2021 conference, this mode was exemplified in Helen Gilbert’s talk on “Climate Change Theatre and the Conundrum of Time” as well as in Theresa J. May’s keynote on “Kinship and Community in Climate Change Theatre: Ecodramaturgy in Practice,” and in Leila Michelle Vaziri’s contribution on “Alienation, Abjection, and Disgust: The Capitalocene in Contemporary Eco-Drama.”

towards the past, perceiving a single catastrophe, backs turned upon a storm called progress (Benjamin 257). The problem is not that this temporal delay makes practicable action ever more remote. We have activism for that and, indeed, instances of legislation.

In director Katie Mitchell's *Ten Billion* (2010), climate scientist Stephen Emmott describes a probable future and his intention to teach his son to use a gun (Trueman), before concluding: "I think we're fucked" (qtd. in Billington). In an interview, Mitchell reflected: "At the end of that process, I stopped flying, I've now stopped buying any new clothes – the level of recycling in my house is unbelievable" (qtd. in Merritt). After *Ten Billion*, Mitchell resolved to write one play a year dealing with the climate crisis (Merritt). What lesson does this pedagogical theatre offer? Do as I do? Stop flying. Stop buying new clothes. Teach your son how to use a gun. This is not a theatre ecology. It is the extension of a political theatre whose time has long passed.

*I do go to the  
theatre for lessons  
in the already apparent  
or the clearly foreseen*

*If we can recognise a world  
in which we compete  
for resources, it is  
because we  
already  
live it*

## 1.4 Legislation

Ecocritical theatre can do little more than stage a recognition of the life we already live. Beyond the theatre, there is a press to ecological action which is entirely concrete. Citizens of Toledo recently won rights for Lake Erie akin to personhood (Macfarlane). A legislative precedent emerges from Christopher D. Stone: "We are inclined to suppose the rightlessness of rightless 'things' to be a decree of Nature, not a legal convention acting in support of some status quo" (454). Stone argues for legal recognition of the *wants* of "rivers, trees, and land" (471). Establishing legislative precedent, we might "come to regard the earth, as some have suggested, as one organism" (499). Legislation **is instrument** of politics, *ecology politicised*.

In the context of philosophy, Roberto Esposito proposes **we** reexamine the relationship between persons and things "from the point of view of the body"

since this is the “sentient place” wherein “things seem to interact with people” (3). Crucially, this relationship is not only “material” but “symbolic” (3) (we may also say, “virtual”). Things already represent themselves: some works of art or objects of technology “seem to be endowed with *a life of their own*” (3; emphasis added). This vitality is lost to us wherever we exclude things in their bodily dimension (4). The premise of Spooner’s practice is that the theatre becomes a place in which to recover this vitality through an expanded perception of embodiment. However, in imagining theatre ecology, we should not suppose ourselves at the forefront.

### 1.5 A False Start, Ill-timed

In critiquing political ecology, Bruno Latour argues that the die is cast, concepts identified, positions known, that in recognising the necessity of a political ecology, we are “showing up too late for a debate whose terms are already set in concrete. The time for reflection is past. You should have spoken up ten years ago” (*Nature* 2) – the case for political ecology has already been made. And yet the false promises of political ecology propose a series of finalities: finally, public life will take nature into account; finally, systems of product will adapt to nature’s demand; finally, a sustainable politics will preserve nature (2). As the examples of legislation suggest, we can no longer deny: “concern for nature has already been introduced into political life” (2).

It may be necessary to imagine a different purpose for theatre ecology, to imagine it *beyond* the purposive, insofar as the narrative, dramatic, critical functions of ecocriticism are conceived as purposive. It seems necessary, too, to imagine something beyond the juxtaposition of two terms without a thorough conceptual grounding (3). Latour affirms that ecology, as a scientific discipline, has no direct access to nature (4). He furthermore proposes we rid ourselves of nature as a concept, in order to focus upon science as productive, rather than as a representational practice (4).

Imagining a theatre ecology, I retain the term *nature*. It is not the product of culture, but rather a name that we give to the movement and growth which surrounds us, and which is, profoundly, within us. This is where art begins, between house and universe, and where evolution is first rendered perceptible, not as *progress* but as *profusion*, *elaboration*, as a process of differentiation – of absolute difference. In affirming the likeness between art and nature, we affirm a common structure. For Grosz, this structure is one of “excessive and useless production – production for its own sake, production for the sake of profusion and differentiation” (9). In this differentiation “bodies and their bodily supports, furnishings, coexist to make of our bodies an abundance of sensations and actions” (16).

## Part Two: Three Gestures

### 2.1 Reach

In the middle, he reaches with infinite hesitancy and deliberation towards a small object which he intends to pick up. I cannot remember the object, but I remember the reach. The performance is *Cuteness Forensics* (2019). Spooner shares the stage space with musician Tom Richards, who is absorbed in the dials and faders of multiple electronic devices: sound cuts, refrains interrupting other refrains, no distinction between music and noise. The stage is shared with objects, too – things, machines, contraptions – the purpose of each seems unclear. Amongst them, there is the model of a house. And certainly, the stage is occupied but seems barely habitable. And yet what we see is a process of habitation. In the middle of this reach, Spooner is trying not to disturb – leave traces – be caught, but if he succeeds in grasping this object, his fingerprints will be all over it. His every gesture reflects a mode of living, a way of life, whether animating a puppet, or running an oversize swab along a surface, placing it in a correspondingly large sealy bag. He has his back to us until the closing moments. His red sweatshirt has a cut-out section, clear plastic, square across his shoulder blades. In this frame, an infinitesimal juncture between human and animal, the animal as the precondition of the human. What is revealed is life, implicated, compromised, his physicality opening to an *ethology*, his mode of occupation to an *ecology*, through the inflections of gesture, slippages of time, curvatures of space.

### 2.2 Throw

I turn to a beginning, in an anterior darkness. The performance is *The Voice of Nature* (2016). Against the black floor, walls, curtains of the theatre, the stage is a tangle of cables; spindly metal rods balancing together precariously, sometimes toppling over; scores of little fuzzy balls moving in fits and starts, their movement checked by sensors, and high above, a bright pink sheet, and another, white, for text projection. There is already much activity before Spooner enters, dressed in black, hands concealed within an oversize muff. He slowly circumnavigates the stage over the course of 45 minutes, never stepping into the middle. Partway around, pulling one hand out of this muff, he reveals the head and neck of a bird; the attempt to stage the voice of nature lapses into ventriloquism. Arriving downstage, Spooner takes a pink fuzzy ball from a pocket, throws it high in the air. It sticks to the front of the pink sheet. If magic, it is the banal magic of a material – velcro! The sticking of the ball elicits a cheer from the audience. We cheer the will

that inheres in all things. Within the frame of the stage, this revelation becomes artlike, artful. The collapse of scale reveals an intimacy of perception beyond measure, the material and immaterial, the real and ideal, can no longer be opposed, nor reconciled. If, here, something like a voice of “nature” emerges, it does so prior to its naming as such, before its separation from, and opposition to, culture.

## 2.3 Blur, Focus, Blur

I turn to another beginning. Again, the space is shared with another musician, Enrico Aurigemma. There are guitars, amplifiers. Here, Spooner stands at a table, stage within a stage, operating a microscopic camera. The performance is *Dead Nature* (2019), all blur, focus, blur, the contraction and dilation of an artificial iris. He appears as a scientist, perhaps pathologist, performing an autopsy. Nature, though, if dead, is hardly inert. The gesture of magnification reveals the territory and not the map, the surface of stone, fungi, the grain of a photograph, somewhere a human face. And revelation is not within the order of extensity, measurement, quantification, which is spatial, but of an intensity which is temporal. Like the tripods in the previous performances, scale collapses. And momentarily all of these surfaces are porous, and the tiny little holes are leading somewhere, if only here to where we always already are, where evolution is suspended, time stops, turns inward. And this, here, is involution, and we attend to a question that is never answered, never foreclosed, of volition, of will, desire, and the fungi and the stone and the grain of the photograph are becoming willful subjects. And I am, we are, all of us, becoming a little more thingly, a little more earthly, a little more worldly. It is not only scale that has collapsed, but, momentarily, the possibility of distinction between persons and things, this sense of thingliness is only staged in becoming phenomena, there is no being at all, only becoming.

## Part Three: The Exposition

### 3.1 Embodiment, Occupation

Described in these three gestures is not a theatre ecology, but its precondition. The gestures are physical; their precondition is gesture of another kind: as Grosz considers, art does not first of all consist in the exteriorisation of bodily forces, but in a “more primary gesture that requires a body’s prior separation from the earth, from nature, from its world” (10). In this separation, the revelation of life in mate-



rial becomes possible, and the implications of Spooner's art, its resonances with theories of *vitalism*, or *animism*, become apparent. Yet we ought to resist describing this as a *posthumanist* or a *materialist* theatre: a fundamental philosophical context is derived from Baruch Spinoza's philosophy of immanence. In an immanentist view, the world entire is substance – one, whole, continuous – divided into mode: here a swab, here a pink fuzzy ball, here metal rods, here a human body. Yet I also resist describing Spooner's art as a *theatre of immanence*. Let us insist – for the joy of it – on an *artlike* theatre.

Art and nature converge in desire. Spooner's art emerges from desire. Desire, here, is emancipatory, liberating the *qualities* of objects or events – revealing *things as events*, *spatiotemporal coordinates* – or, *bodies*, *desiring*, the elaborations and becomings of human bodies bound up with those of other nonhuman bodies. Spinoza defines all bodies of whatever kind in two ways, latitude and longitude: speeds, slownesses, motion, rest, the capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 123). Here we have it: desire and emancipation, a distribution of the sensible working at the level of sensation and perception. In attending to sensation, we might redress dualistic concepts organising social life, politics, and its instrumentation through legislative practices.

As Esposito writes: “If there is one assumption that seems to have organized human experience from its very beginnings, it is that of a division between persons and things” (1). “No other principle,” he continues, “is so deeply rooted in our perception and in our moral conscience as the conviction that we are not things – because things are the opposite of persons” (1). This assumption is “the outcome of a long disciplining process that ran through ancient and modern history” (1).

A single gesture undoes it all: in that gesture of throwing, we observe nothing more, nor less, than a man loosing a ball, a ball sticking to a sheet. Yet what is revealed is the division of the world into modes, bodies, all bodies striving, free. We cheer. What are we applauding? Not *his* will, but *the will of each mode*. The revelation implies the derivation of all modes from the one, whole, continuous substance of the universe. Every *mode* is a *body*, every body is *conative*. As Jane Bennett observes: “conatus names a power in every body” (2); “Each thing [*res*], as far as it can by its own power, strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its own being” (Spinoza qtd. in Bennett 2).

Another gesture counts, here. In perceiving Spooner's striving body, I experience my own embodiment as part of a collective, moving body – as milieu, territory, environment. In the middle of that gesture of reaching, I crane my neck. In craning my neck, I recall a passage from psychologist James J. Gibson, describing an ecological approach to ecological perception. This ecological approach is first of all an embodied approach. Gibson writes: “We human observers take it for

granted that one sees the environment with one's eyes" (194), yet the facts of our visual perception are that

each eye is positioned in a head that is in turn positioned on a trunk that is positioned on legs that maintain the posture of the trunk, head, and eyes relative to the surface of support. Vision is a whole perceptual system, not a channel of sense. (195)

Gibson affirms that we see the environment "not with the eyes but with the eyes-in-the-head-on-the-body-resting-on-the-ground" (195). Gibson's perceiving body is a moving body. It moves within an environment, or *niche*, which is defined by its features, which are in turn defined by their affordances. Gibson remarks that while the verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary: "the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does" (119). The term re-emerges in Ben Spatz's recent treatment of embodiment studies, distinct from performance studies. For Spatz, whose research proceeds from Spinoza's question of what a body can do (*Body 1*), "Embodiment is first affordance," as it emerges "at the fragile junction of ecology and technology" ("Embodiment" 258).

Between the shoulder blades, framed in clear plastic cut from a red sweat-shirt, this fragile junction is revealed, and felt affectively, as I crane my neck to observe him. In reading Gibson, I recognise my own animality. Spooner, in his animality, confirms it like a new fact.

When I, amongst the other human members of this collective, applaud, I declare my ignorance, as we accept a provocation: "We do not know what a body can do" (Spinoza qtd. in Deleuze, *Spinoza* 17). It also affirms an emerging consciousness, a sensibility. As Sara Ahmed observes, freedom requires "consciousness of being determined" (188). Spooner, reaching, is reluctant to grasp, his will in sympathy with the will that inheres in all things. For Ahmed, "will becomes something everything has: another kind of kinship, a stone kinship" (188). What does Spooner reach for, but a *more earthly, earthy – less fleshy* – consciousness, "a consciousness that movement comes from what we are not" (Ahmed 187)? And consciousness, will, returns us – in every case – to desire, in Hannah Stark's phrase, a "pre-personal, nonhuman force which is everywhere" (50).

The theatre is certainly a way of living, a way of life. It is a place that we occupy. Rick Dolphijn develops a Deleuzian concept of occupation. Occupation is a way of redressing an inability to perceive our environment. This redress is particularly needed, he says, in our time, "in which the economic and ecological crisis, once again confirm our inability to see and hear our environment (185). Art, Dolphijn suggests, is not *about* something, it *is* something: an event, occurrence, an occupation (189). The importance of occupation for a consideration of theatre is that "contrary to current political ideology, to occupy is not about critiquing

that which is being occupied (it is not about recognising an occupation), but, rather, about *fully affirming it*” (191). Rather than a response to repression, or even a form of resistance, occupation is “an intense love,” an “unbound desire” (191). In occupying “that which is loved so dearly,” art is capable of revealing a world “that is completely new and yet always already there” (185). Here, art becomes affirmative. An art of occupation affirms nature, and not simply by mirroring “the beauty of nature” (189). It is always already an occupation *of* nature, *with* nature, for art is not human, it “does not wait for man to begin” (197). Occupation thus affirms nature and, moreover, a relationship between art and nature, one fundamentally different from the still-dominant dualisms of the Enlightenment (197). Occupation is fundamentally a way of life and living, one in which nature is like art to the extent that each has an ecological foundation and an evolutionary potential.

Occupation is not mimesis but poiesis; and poiesis is not the work of the artist, but the *work of art*, nonhuman forces composing body and environment in material terms, and something more, an opening *to art*, to what is not there (yet) – to the *yet-unseen*, the *yet-unheard* (190), to the virtual as condition of all actual, perceptible phenomena. Occupation is not conceptual, not primarily “imaginary or idealist” – it is *at once* mental and physical, producing a “new material assemblage and the idea that belongs to it” (190). Thus things – or *phenomena* – reveal themselves.

### 3.2 Theatre Environment as Territory

Spooner’s art emerges through a separation from nature, a likeness to nature, a common structure, if not equivalency. This founding consists in a territorialising movement, which might shape preliminary imaginings of a theatre ecology. This treatment emerges, as Spooner’s practice emerges, from desire, desire for theatre, for a renewed understanding of its potentials.

Spooner’s performances return us to an ecological origin, to an aesthetics more primary than an aesthetics of politics, to a modality of collective life more fundamental than democracy, but no less a redistribution of the sensible which emerges from sensation, perception, affect, a perceptual shift which renders the environment sensible and which may render collective life, and a theatre ecology, practicable. Collectivity, here, proposes something more than a “perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art” (Ranci re 13). In theorising it, we must suppose it equally perverse to commandeer art by a will to politics, or art by a will to ecology. The implication of the revelation of life in material is the revelation of a collective life, differently embodied, perceived, and conceptualised.

This mode of collectivity is affective *before* it is conceptual, ecological *before* political. This collectivity in no way resembles democracy, not even Latour's "parliament" wherein scientists are intermediaries, speaking "all by themselves in the name of things" (*Modern* 142). These representatives would say: "Nothing but what the things would have said on their own, had they only been able to speak" (142). In Esposito's terms, a political body is an enunciative body: "we the people" is defined by a performative character, "creating what is declared" (146). But this mode of performativity requires a throat and a mouth. In Spooner's theatre, collective life is no longer defined by who has the "ability to see and the talent to speak," although, certainly, it is determined by "properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 13).

The possibilities of space emerge from the possibilities of time – or timing – rhythm. A Deleuzian conception of territory is not geographical, not political, but artistic. It consists in movement. Movement produces rhythm, and rhythm produces a refrain. The refrain produces the plane of immanence, the field of composition, which isolates materials and extracts qualities to produce sensation and from sensation affect.

Movement produces the refrain produces the territory. It emerges from a compositional gesture. We are all, Dolphijn suggests, "composers by nature" (197). Occupation is only possible through rhythm, rhythmic movement – or, more precisely, repetition. Occupation demands repetition, in repetition, a turning inward. What is opened, in the territorialising, deterritorialising movement, is not firstly space in its extensity, but time, or, duration, in its depth.

The revelation of life in material emerges from a territorialising, deterritorialising, movement. Much, if not all ecocritical theatre is eschatological. In certain examples, like Mitchell's *Ten Billion*, the effects are certainly temporal. I have described this temporality as a moment of recognition, a delay, an interregnum. The future, we are encouraged to imagine there, is not worth living. If we persist, endure, it is because we are striving, desiring bodies. Territory, territorialisation, deterritorialisation is precisely the work of striving, affective – affectionate – bodies. Spooner's art opens to a different time, a different temporality. In this time, crisis is barely acknowledged, and no claim is made to resolve it. Yet the effects of this art are temporal. He reveals a different quality of time, a different depth of perception, from a depth of sensation. In this, the ecological foundation of the theatre is affirmed.

Deleuze conceives of theatre in philosophical terms, imagining, after Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, "an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy" (*Repetition* 8). This theatre is:

capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. (8)

Perhaps a reversal of these terms, an incredible equivalent of philosophy within theatre is also possible. Deleuze describes theatre as “*real movement*,” which “extract[s] real movement from all the arts it employs” (10). Deleuze contrasts theatres of representation with theatres of repetition, theatres of multiplicities. Spooner’s theatre is of this latter – superior – kind, a theatre where we experience “pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organised bodies” (10). In this theatre, the “work of art leaves the domain of representation in order to become ‘experience’” (56). Spooner’s theatre is artlike: it makes no argument, offers no exposition, it does not represent the world but reveals it, separating and rejoining *oikos* and *cosmos*, between the small and the large refrain.

## On Revelation (Spooner, Spinoza, and Us)

Deleuze finds himself always in the middle of Spinoza, where philosophy remains practical, ethics remains open. We have been thinking of ethics all along. Ethics has nothing to do with morality. Spinoza’s ethics is an *ethology*, a study of bodies. Its implications may yet extend to ecology, as the study of bodies and environments. As practicable, it has implications for all bodies, all environments. Its implication for theatre is that the engagement between body and environment emerges from *potentia*, from *potentia* come *capacities*, from *capacities* come *affections*, *passions*, the *good*, *bad*, the *sad*, the *happy*.

The continuing influence of Spinoza is evident in much contemporary philosophy. One recent elaboration comes from Rosi Braidotti. Braidotti, in describing a posthuman knowledge, develops a conception of affirmative ethics. She is explicit in modelling affirmative ethics on Spinoza’s ethics of joy. Braidotti describes an ethical ideal: “to mobilize the active powers of life in the affirmative mode of *potentia*” (158). This implies a “commitment to duration, both in the temporal sense of continuity and the spatial one of endurance” (169). She observes: “An ethically empowering mode of relation increases one’s *potentia* and creates one’s ability to make in and on the world,” which is, she insists, “the common nature, or rather the common ground, for all living entities” (169).

Braidotti, like Bennett, Isabelle Stengers, and Ahmed is also in the middle of Spinoza. As Deleuze observes, to be in the middle of Spinoza “implies a mode of

living, a way of life” (*Spinoza* 122). Spooner leads there, too, or somewhere like it, a plane of immanence, milieu, territory, where substance divides into mode. In this conception of territory, the sad passions and unhappy powers of politics can seem, briefly, but deeply, historical.

All artists are stage-makers. Spooner is an artist in the most complete sense, it is because the theatre is revealed as a total art. All art constructs a plane, all art produces territory, but not all art attains towards life, affirmatively, ethically. This art is not an activist art, it is not even – necessarily –, practicable. It is first of all an art of attention. We attend to what can be seen and what can be said about it, but also to what is yet to come, come-what-may.

I return to the middle, the middle of that reach. I crane my neck, now recalling Emmanuel Levinas, perhaps the last humanist philosopher of ethics:

The comedy begins with our simplest gestures. They all entail an inevitable awkwardness. Reaching out my hand to pull a chair toward me, I have folded the arm of my jacket, scratched the floor, and dropped my cigarette ash. In doing what I willed to do, I did a thousand and one things I hadn't willed to do. (3)

We are “responsible beyond our intentions” (3). Levinas continues: “we get caught up in things; things turn against us,” so that a conscious “mastery of consciousness” cannot “exhaust our relationship with reality, in which we are present with all the density of our being” (3).

Spooner reaches, but he never grasps, and never hides anything, except to reveal it, to share in revelation. I love his art dearly – because it affirms that although things certainly can turn again against us, they sometimes turn towards us, too. In process, as much as in performance, Spooner is restrained, meticulous, taking the utmost care so we might derive the greatest satisfaction in attentiveness. His is an art of attentiveness; attentiveness is the precondition of intentionality and every commitment we can make.

Spooner's gestures are not representations but revelations, modes of life and ways of living, ontologically prior to human embodiment but not prior to nature, only prior to its naming as such. Spooner reveals a world that was always already there and reveals what we always already knew: “art does not wait for man to begin” (*Dolphijn* 197). Art emerges from a sentient world, from desiring bodies, in all their affections, conscious of being determined. Art is nonhuman in origin. It consists in nonhuman becomings. Ethics, ethology, ecology, are nonhuman becomings, ways of overcoming the human. The revelation of nonhuman origin proposes a nonhuman destiny. In the theatre, Spooner constructs it from the ground up: from an aesthetics, a territory, a milieu, a refrain, a rhythm, a movement. No politics. And no ecological *space* without an ecological *aesthetics*. Returning to our opening themes, we find that neither term can be abbreviated, or hyphenated, only turned inward:

*Revelation is always  
inward, for we are  
within it, this  
world, laid  
bare*

## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Willful Subjects*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Print.
- Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Penguin, 1982. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. Print.
- Billington, Michael. "Ten Billion: Review. Royal Court, London." *The Guardian*, 19 July 2012. Web. 7 Oct. 2021. <<https://theguardian.com/stage/2012/jul/19/ten-billion-review-royal-court>>.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity, 2019. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1988. Print.
- . *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print.
- Dolphijn, Rick. "The Revelation of a World That Was Always Already There: The Creative Act as an Occupation." *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life*. Ed. Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn. Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2014. 185–205. Print.
- Esposito, Roberto. *Persons and Things: From the Body's Point of View*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015. Print.
- Gibson, James J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. London: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008. Print.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.
- . *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004. Print.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Entre-nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*. Trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. Print.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.
- Macfarlane, Robert. "Should This Tree Have the Same Rights as You?" *The Guardian*, 2 Nov. 2019. Web. 7 Oct. 2021. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/nov/02/trees-have-rights-too-robert-macfarlane-on-the-new-laws-of-nature>>.
- Merritt, Stephanie. "Climate Change Play 2071 Aims to Make Data Dramatic." *The Guardian*, 5 Nov. 2014. Web. 7 Oct. 2021. <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/nov/05/climate-change-theatre-2071-katie-mitchell-duncan-macmillan>>.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.
- Spatz, Ben. *What a Body Can Do*. London: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- . "Embodiment as First Affordance: Tinkering, Tracking, Tuning." *Performance Philosophy* 2.2 (2017): 257–271. Print.
- Stark, Hannah. *Feminist Theory after Deleuze*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Print.

Stone, Christopher D. "Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects." *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972): 450–501. Print.

Trueman, Matt. "Katie Mitchell and Duncan Macmillan on 2071." *Matt Trueman*, 23 Nov. 2014. Web. 7 Oct. 2021. <<https://mattrueman.co.uk/2014/11/katie-mitchell-and-duncan-macmillan-on-2071.html>>.

## Bionote

### Simon Bowes

is a Lecturer in Drama and Contemporary Performance at University of Greenwich, London. His research interests focus on theatricality, performativity, ecology, and ethics. He has published with *Performance Research* (24.4 *On Theatricality*; 24.6 *On Animism*) and has forthcoming chapters in *Diffracting New Materialisms* and *From Heidegger to Performance*. He is also sketching a monograph entitled *How to Do Things with Things: Ethics after Performance*.