THEATRE RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL · VOL. 46 | NO. 3 | PP285–302
 · doi:10.1017/S0307883321000274

'Burn the Witch': Decadence and the Occult in Contemporary Feminist Performance[1]

ADAM ALSTON

This article introduces and theorizes 'decadence' as a key feature of Lauren Barri Holstein's performance Notorious *(2017). The decadence of Holstein's work is approached in light of two main considerations: the spectacular presentation of witchcraft as an occult practice, and what Holstein 'does' with the staging of witches and witchcraft. Situated in light of performances associated with the neo-occult revival (Ivy Monteiro and Jex Blackmore), and a recent strand of feminist performance that revels in an aesthetics of trash, mess and excess (Ann Liv Young and Lucy McCormick), the article offers a close critical analysis of* Notorious *as a work that addresses and seeks to subvert gendered inequalities and forms of productivity in twenty-first-century capitalism. I argue that Holstein's overidentification with exertion and exhaustion as much as the subversive potentialities of witchcraft results in a decadent aesthetic, that her staging of the witch as a persecuted but powerful emblem of the occult sheds valuable light on the aesthetics and politics of decadence in performance, and that the subversive qualities of decadence emerge particularly strongly in its 'doing' as an embodied and enacted practice.*

alors que le matérialisme sévit, la magie se lève
(while materialism rages, magic rises)

Joris-Karl Huysmans[2]

7 November 2017: the Famous Lauren Barri Holstein is executed for witchcraft in the London premiere of *Notorious* (2017). She hangs between two other witches from the rafters of London's Barbican Centre Pit Theatre, their faces and bodies shrouded in an unruly mass of long grey hair. The sound of a fire pops and crackles. In the scenes that follow, familiar representations of the witch fall foul of overidentification: the crone, with the power to animate and control the world around her; the maiden, whose sexual emancipation breeds a cartoonish lust; and the mother, who births a gelatinous eyeball only to gobble it up and chew it to pieces. These weird sisters fluctuate between moments of intense activity and inertia: gyrating to trashy pop music in an exhausting dance routine, for instance, or hanging suspended in the air, as if stopped mid-flight on a Hollywood film set.

Lauren Barri Holstein's *Notorious* premiered at Birmingham's Fierce Festival in the United Kingdom in October 2017, and has since toured to Brighton, London (where I

saw it at the Barbican Centre), Glasgow, Hamburg and Reykjavík. It was made in collaboration with Krista Vuori and Brogan Davison (who also perform in the show alongside Holstein), and extends her ongoing engagement with mess and monstrousness as means for exploring the gendering of work, consumerism and popular culture. This article dwells on two of the performance's most striking features: its spectacular presentation of the witch as a nemesis of patriarchal capitalism, and its oscillation between periods of intense activity and inertia – for instance, in the staging of highly gendered and physically demanding dance routines that are repeated *ad nauseam*, and the collapsing of bodies overcome with exhaustion or ennui. I argue that the ruinous mess that results from Holstein's overidentification with witchcraft and the gendering of patriarchal capitalism is constitutive of a *decadent aesthetic*, and that Holstein's staging of the witch both as a persecuted emblem of the occult and as the antithesis of capitalistic 'rationalism' offers a useful way into understanding both the aesthetic and the political potentialities of decadence in performance, as well as their wider significances.

Decadence might conjure associations with indulgence and luxury, but its histories and meanings are much richer, and more complex. Decadence cuts across numerous practices and discourses – artistic, literary, critical and quotidian – and is most frequently associated with the work of European writers at the turn of the twentieth century in studies of decadence, although Russian, North American and Japanese writers were also experimenting with decadent themes and styles at this time and throughout the twentieth century. Notable examples include Joris-Karl Huysmans, Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery), Gabriele D'Annunzio, Oscar Wilde, George Egerton (Mary Bright), Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Zinaida Gippius, Valery Bryusov, Edgar Saltus, Djuna Barnes and (later on in the twentieth century) Sakaguchi Ango and Mishima Yukio. In the work of these writers, as well as their critics, decadence is frequently associated with the twilight of a nation at the cusp of a new century or epoch, the shredded nerves of a population beleaguered by the transformative impact of modernity, and/or subversive opposition to the policing of taste, appearance, gender, sexuality, desire and behaviour.

At its heart, and regardless (or *because*) of its association with 'art for art's sake', decadence serves as a platform for the expression and exploration of cultural politics. It has been harnessed as political capital in the condemnation of social nonconformists deemed to threaten a nation's moral fibre,[3] just as it has been reclaimed by artists and writers as a badge of honour, using their ostracization to stage the contingencies of sociocultural values, and an alternative set of relationships, desires and grounds for fulfilment that 'fall away' from reified traditions and societal expectations. Decadence revels in the subversion of infrastructures, institutions and processes that produce and perpetuate normativity, especially as they relate to the standardization of environments for living and working; the positioning of exploited labour as a social good and as a site of self-realization; the conservative marshalling of pleasure; the homogenizing of appearance and behaviour; and the privileging of patriarchal, heteronormative and monogamous family units. What unites the various practices and discourses associated with decadence is a concern with the

appropriation and shaping of bodies, ideas, actions and relationships in the name of enlightened or industrial 'progress', and what it might mean to envisage or enact the ruination of its forward march.

When I use the terms 'decadence' and 'decadent' to describe the work of Holstein – which are not terms that she herself uses – I am not using them to ridicule. Rather, I have in mind ways of thinking, perceiving and doing that reject the reduction of bodies, ideas, actions and relationships to their instrumental value. I also have in mind how Holstein embodies and enacts the ruination of these ways of thinking, perceiving and doing. I am concerned with what decadence can tell us about the kinds of thinking, perceiving and doing that capitalism encourages, how they end up producing and rationalizing gendered forms of dispossession and oppression, and how performance – as an embodied art of precarious action – lends itself to their critique. I am also mindful of what it means to consider the relevance of decadence to the work of a feminist performance maker given its thwart gender-political history. As literary critic Elaine Showalter observes, decadence in the nineteenth century was frequently defined 'against the feminine and biological creativity of women … [who] appear as objects of value only when they are aestheticized as corpses or pallicised as *femmes fatales*'.[4] The bifurcation of female types that Showalter outlines certainly underpins misogynistic writing and pictorial representation of the period; however, the research and editorial work of several feminist scholars in recent years, including Showalter, has done much to challenge conceptualizations of decadence as an exclusively male or male-oriented domain.[5] Furthermore, as this article addresses, *Notorious* sends up and retools the aestheticization of women as corpses and *femmes fatales* in ways that suggest an embrace of decadent aesthetics and politics – not least as a consequence of its playful occultism.

In the next section, I will be situating Holstein's *Notorious* in the context of other recent performances and events that resonate with its aesthetic qualities and thematic concerns. Where performances associated with the neo-occult revival help with elucidating Holstein's staging of the witch in *Notorious*, especially in relation to the subversion of gendered inequalities, a more playful strand of contemporary performance associated with the work of Ann Liv Young and Lucy McCormick sheds instructive light on the 'decadence' of her trashy, messy aesthetic, and what it is that makes this aesthetic politically compelling. The section after that offers a close critical analysis of *Notorious* in light of these examples, dwelling on the fetishism of objects that evoke the supernatural as much as the erotic and reified. I am particularly interested in representations of deadness and decay, and what these representations can tell us about the gendered politics of an economistic productivity that 'eats up' lives, to borrow from the feminist Marxist Silvia Federici, 'for the sake of the accumulation of wealth'.[6] While mindful of Marxist critiques that identify and ridicule the 'decadence' of capitalism,[7] my goal is to introduce a critical theorization of decadence in performance that can inform how we understand it as a politically compelling practice.

Decadent aesthetics and the neo-occult revival

There are two main considerations that inform the decadence of Holstein's *Notorious*: its spectacular presentation of witchcraft as a practice at odds with patriarchal capitalism, and what Holstein 'does' with the staging of witchcraft in performance. It is the 'doing' of decadence as an embodied and enacted practice that interests me most, which is why this section will be contextualizing Holstein's work in light of other performances that embrace an aesthetics of mess, trash and excess. However, to begin with I will be situating Holstein's engagement with witchcraft in the context of the neo-occult revival, where a comparable interest in the intersections between capitalism and patriarchy has been driving creative and critical explorations of witchcraft and the occult in ways that inform and resonate with the subversive ambitions of *Notorious*. Where the staging of mess, trash and excess underpins the work's aesthetic qualities, the neo-occult revival helps with explaining why Holstein may have been drawn to witchcraft in the first place.

The neo-occult revival – neatly dubbed (but not coined) 'occulture' by Christopher Partridge[8] – refers to a resurgent interest in occult practices and beliefs in areas ranging from the commercial arena and the wellness industries, to subcultural nightlife, cultural production and activism. Neo-occult activism has been particularly prominent on social media. For instance, feminist covens such as the Yerbamala Collective have used social media as a platform for hexing Donald Trump – the self-confessed target of the 'single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history' after being accused of collusion with Russia[9] – reclaiming Trump's appropriation of gender violence in witty acts of resistance, much to the chagrin of right-wing religious groups who charged Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez with belonging to 'a coven of witches that casts spells on Trump 24 hours a day'.[10] Kristen J. Sollée is one of the more prominent commentators associated with neo-occult activism. In *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (2017), Sollée revisits and celebrates subversive readings of the witch by activist collectives in the 1960s and 1970s, including W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), as the basis for exploring and experimenting with self-empowerment.[11] She offers a clarion call for women to queer pejorative framings of the witch by embracing occulture as the basis of intense friendships, liberated sexual practices, and activism (an approach that will be familiar to readers of the neo-pagan activist Miriam Simos, also known as Starhawk). However, Sollée does little to challenge the commercialization of occulture, and accommodates what we might call 'disenchanted enchantment', or *oc-couture*. The commercialization of witch-related cosmetics (e.g. Sephora), clothing (e.g. Hot Topic) and the self-care and wellness industries (e.g. Goop) are indicative of the binding of neo-occultism to lucrative commercialization – often to the annoyance of practising wiccans – in ways that threaten to diminish the subversive qualities of the witch as an enchantress.

There have been numerous neo-occult performances that directly stem from – and honour – occult rituals and performances of the *fin de siècle*,[12] but the most relevant examples for the purposes of this article bear a more haphazard relation to esoteric knowledge and ritualistic practice, favouring the occult's anti-establishment potentialities

over and above its orthodoxies. For instance, Ivy Monteiro, who is a Latinx live artist, has been exploring witchcraft in work throughout the 2010s. In one notable example, *Tituba.2Point.OH!* (2017), Monteiro addresses the mythologization of Tituba as the first person to be accused of practising witchcraft in the 1692–3 Salem witch trials, and draws a parallel between witch hunts and the ostracization of black womxn (Tituba's racial identity remains a topic of some debate, but there is no doubt that she was a slave, with an emerging consensus that she was an indigenous Barbadian). In work such as this, Monteiro seeks to unravel narratives of victimhood by staging enchanting acts of vengeance on a world that perpetuates systemic racism, transphobia and misogyny. Other notable examples include the London-based occult- and witchcraft-themed club night, C O V E N (which gave a home to numerous live artists associated with occult aesthetics and queer goth culture between 2016 and 2018, including FoxGlove, Elegance and Violence, Rodent DeCay and Venus Raven); the annual 'exhibition-cum-performance-club-night' Deep Trash, which regularly stages rituals inspired by occult practices;[13] and the 'carnal theatre' of FemmeDaemonium, which is a female-led collective of sex workers and allies who have been staging erotic summoning rituals rooted in folklore and mythology since their formation in 2017. These latter examples are also suggestive of the ways in which the neo-occult revival has intersected with the fetish scene in terms of its anti-establishment politics, subversion of straight appearance and behaviour, and resistance to the dominance of monogamous heteronormative relationships. In this, they accord with the binding together of decadence and the occult 'as defiant strategies against normativity that celebrate darkness, transgression, and "otherness"', to borrow from the editors of a 2018 issue of the decadence studies journal *Volupté* on 'Decadence, Magic(k) and the Occult'.[14] Moreover, as Per Faxneld sets out in *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2017), they participate in a lineage of aesthetic experimentation and activism that embraces the occult – especially witchcraft – as a 'subversive tactic of choice' for undermining the oppression of women.[15]

Where many of these practitioners deliberately avoid commercial orientation for reasons ranging from safety and solidarity to political integrity, the Detroit-based activist and performance maker Jex Blackmore courts media visibility in staging anti-establishment performances and protests. For instance, *Subversive Autonomous Satanic Ritual* (2018), parts of which feature in Penny Lane's Netflix documentary *Hail Satan?* (2019), finds Blackmore imploring her audience to '[b]ring down powerful men … [and] execute the President' as a masked butcher impales pig heads – 'effigies of rapacious institutional and political autocrats' – on spikes protruding from the top of an altar.[16] These remarks led to her membership of the Satanic Temple, which is a non-violent organization, being revoked,[17] but in the broader context of the ritual they also capture the provocative sincerity of a notable branch of neo-occult performance. The work is sincere not because it demonstrates belief in the anti-Christ (Blackmore is a non-theistic satanist), nor is it sincere in calling for the president to be executed; rather, it is sincere in its staging of the occult as a tool to 'disrupt, distort, destroy, reclaim, resist and rebuild' a society that perpetuates inequality and gender violence.[18]

Where performances associated with the neo-occult revival contextualize and illuminate the layered connections that Holstein draws between witchcraft and patriarchal capitalism, this does not go far enough in elucidating her aesthetic choices, especially their decadent qualities. The look and feel of Holstein's work are much more closely aligned with a number of feminist performance makers who make a riotous spectacle of the values, traditions and institutions that produce or perpetuate gendered inequalities. For instance, Lucy McCormick's widely praised performance *Triple Threat* (2016) finds McCormick and her campy co-performers, Sam Kennedy and Ted Rogers, re-enacting the New Testament via a punk mash-up of power ballads, dance routines and spectacularly messy manipulation of condiments and sex toys. It is deliciously irreverent in its trashing of a belief structure that serves male domination and heteronormativity, but with none of the earnestness that tends to characterize Blackmore's critiques of capitalist patriarchy and religious zealotry. McCormick finds joy in pop-cultural detritus – the songs she sings, the branded clothes that she and her co-performers wear – in ways that find space for fun and subversive silliness in the calling out of religious master narratives that rationalize male rule and heteronormative proprieties.[19]

One of the most notable examples of an artist working in this vein is Ann Liv Young, who has been presenting work in New York and internationally since 2005. Young comes from a background in dance, although her work challenges representation of the virtuosic. She makes a spectacle of gendered denigration; she frequently orients her work around ridiculously vulnerable and 'enchanted' archetypes culled from Disney, myth and legend (Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, a mermaid); and, like McCormick, she nearly always incorporates karaoke-style singing. As visual-cultures scholar Anna Watkins Fisher suggests, Young's work resembles a kind of 'adolescent drag'. 'Rather than *actually* being or behaving like adolescent girls', she writes, 'these artists appropriate and *stage* the adolescent as a serviceable figure for articulating a more loosely ordered and multifarious contemporary feminism'.[20] The lines separating Young's adolescent drag and a mature critique of gendered inequalities and systemic violence are often blurred in an idiosyncratic reformulation of feminist mimesis,[21] but the notion still hits upon a kind of anarchy that inspires and reviles in equal measure.

For example, Young's 2010 work *Cinderella*, presented in Malmö, Sweden, begins with the artist lying on the floor encompassed by a circle of knives, propping herself upright with her forearms in a pose reminiscent of the exploited soon-to-be princess from the eponymous Disney movie (1950). The performance flits between karaoke-style singalongs and awkward direct address, and culminates in a witchy ritual with Young urinating into a bowl, mixing the urine with soap and using it to wash her face and wig, and attempting to sell her own faeces to audiences in plastic bags sprinkled with glitter. In examples like this, Young makes space to revel in the undoing of gendered stereotypes and their implication in the consumption of popular culture. Equally, though, she unsettles 'the problem of female identity being inextricably associated with the body', to borrow from theatre scholar Sarah Gorman, by emphasizing the staginess of even the most visceral acts on *her* terms.[22] These acts are another component of Young's

'adolescent drag', evoking the recalcitrance of the adolescent in ways that are informed by, and set against, the legitimating authority of patriarchal capitalism.

Interventions such as these are especially pertinent once read in the context of 'post-feminist' tendencies in culture, work and government that undermine feminism by accommodating superficial forms of girl power at the cost of actual egalitarianism. Women might have 'breached the power structure' in gaining access to work outside the domestic sphere, as Naomi Wolf suggests, but working and consuming as a material girl in a material world has – for several decades now – been systematically used to undermine the project of feminism in a culture in which eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, consumer spending and violent pornography have all grown exponentially.[23] Young and McCormick overidentify with this terrain in ways that invite parallels to be drawn with José Esteban Muñoz's notion of 'disidentification', which refers to the citing and scrambling of a cultural text in ways that expose its exclusions and prejudices;[24] however, *over*identification places additional emphasis on excessively exaggerating or augmenting a normative cultural logic. Young and McCormick overidentify with just such a logic by spectacularly exaggerating and augmenting – and, ultimately, trashing – images and behaviours associated with post-feminist and highly capitalistic forms of girl power. This, I argue, is what lends their work an appealingly decadent quality.

Decadence and the occult in Lauren Barri Holstein's *Notorious*

Like Young and McCormick, Holstein's work is often structured around dance routines set to pop songs that pastiche how virtuosic and beautiful bodies appear onstage. She frequently references 'enchanted' female types, not least as they appear in Disney, and she usually employs nudity, urination, mess, explicit references to the performance's complicity in commercialism, and the adoption of a persona: 'the Famous'. Her work is collaborative, and she will appear onstage with two or sometimes several or many other performers whom she orders to carry out various duties (McCormick is a former collaborator). These orders will never be barked; instead, Holstein performs meekness in an adolescent drag that marks a striking contrast with the messy and frequently humorous images she creates onstage: for instance, melting a popsicle clasped in her vagina with a hair dryer in *How to Become a Cupcake* (2010), or 'birthing' a small Bambi figurine from a 1989 McDonald's Happy Meal in *Splat!* (2013) (Fig. 1).

In *Notorious*, models of femininity identified by cultural theorist Angela McRobbie as post-feminist types are both worn and cast off, from adherence to the feminist masquerade derived from fashion and beauty in a lucrative commercial sphere, to the hyper-sexualized phallic girl who must perform at once demurely and in ways that attach emancipation to gendered forms of expression. She overidentifies with these types, stretching them to points of messy excess, and strips bare post-feminism's movement of women into what McRobbie calls 'a spotlight of visibility, into a luminosity which has the effect of a dramatization of the individual, a kind of spectacularization of feminine subjectivity'.[25] In this, she extends a form of what Julia

FIG. 1 **Lauren Barri Holstein appearing in 'adolescent drag' in *Notorious*, by Lauren Barri Holstein. Fierce Festival, Birmingham, 2017. Photograph by Manuel Vason. Image courtesy of Lauren Barri Holstein.**

Skelly has described elsewhere as 'radical decadence', transposing the augmentation of gendered excess in twenty-first-century textiles and craft, which is Skelly's focus, to the stage. Much as the notion of 'radicalism' and the essentialism it indexes has fallen out of fashion recently, Skelly's feminist analysis is helpful as an example of scholarship that reclaims decadence from the misogynistic grasp of some of its nineteenth-century interlocutors. As with her analysis of work by artists like Shary Boyle, Mickalene Thomas and Allyson Mitchell, the 'decadence' in Holstein's feminism is of a kind that moves away 'from the moralizing, pathologizing perception of decadence that was popular at the *fin de siècle*', instead working with forms of gendered excess that 'are inherently founded on a rejection, or refusal, of ideal femininity'.[26]

Marketing copy describes *Notorious* as a 'witch-bitch ritual' that looks at the ways 'social media and consumerism have redefined how we relate to the female body, one's "true self" and public shaming'.[27] Holstein explains what she means by this in an interview for the Barbican: 'A witch-bitch ritual is an act of pleasurable repulsion, of intentional delinquency, of unapologetically creating problems. It's being the feminist killjoy in the room, unrepentantly'.[28] The idea of being 'the feminist killjoy in the room, unrepentantly', borrows from Sara Ahmed's introduction of the feminist killjoy as someone who refuses to remain indifferent to structural and day-to-day experiences of misogyny and sexism. Unlike venues known more for their staging of live art and subcultural events, the institutional context of the Barbican enables Holstein to reach a relatively mainstream audience who may not be used to the staging of female bodies that

publicly and spectacularly leak and dance to a point of exhaustion. This makes it an ideal venue for tackling the assumed agreeableness of gendered types and discourses, which Ahmed highlights as a commitment of the feminist killjoy.[29]

The performance is episodic, progressing through a series of loosely connected tableaux and routines: from the haunting image of three hanging witches that opens the performance, to the narration of grotesque fairy tales, infantilized pastiches of lesbian fantasies, physically demanding dance routines, and flagellation with the tentacles of an octopus. I will be looking closely at four examples in what remains of this article, each of which bears relevance to the occult, and serves to illustrate how decadence might be embodied or enacted as a 'subversive tactic of choice', to recall Faxneld: corpse-like commodities, fetishized corpses, artificial hair, and the birthing and consuming of an eye.

After the hair curtain closes on the three hanging witches at the beginning of *Notorious*, a close-up live video feed of the Famous is projected onto it, complete with Halloween-style makeup. She muses on what it is like to be ostracized as a witch, with both intonation and language bearing the hallmarks of an adolescent drag: 'I feel like at night when I sleep outside, I kind of disappear and disintegrate and kind of decompose throughout the night. My body just kind of decays, and I'm covered in these putrid bubbles of, like, festering flesh. And I sink into the soil and rot'. She is describing a perverse mythos surrounding the female body that resonates with Showalter's commentary on decadence and misogyny cited in this article's opening pages: at once hostile and enchanting, condemned to a state of perpetual decay that must as a result be artificially beautified (the word 'glamour' is derived from the Scots *gramarye*, which means 'spell' or 'enchantment': hence, beautification by magic). However, even after the 'life' of the body-as-commodity is 'eaten up', there remains a tenacious capacity to produce gestures of defiance – for instance in a somewhat obtuse referencing of the Medusa myth.

Medusa was frequently represented in nineteenth-century art and literature associated with decadence. Jean Delville's picture *L'idole de la perversité* (*The Idol of Perversity*) (1891) is among the most striking depictions, which art and literary critic Bram Dijkstra describes as a 'livid-eyed, snake-encircled, medusa-headed flower of evil' who 'could only be expected to mother hordes of degenerative temptresses, treacherous sea creatures, predatory cats, snakelike lamias, harpies, vampires, sphinxes, and countless other terrible, man-eating creatures'.[30] In the Famous's hands, this 'flower of evil' is weaponized in a grotesque recapitulation of the myth's violence (Medusa wielded terrible power, but she was also raped by Poseidon, turned into a monster by jealous Athena, and then brutally murdered by the 'heroic' Perseus). Her tentacular snake hair, which became synonymous with the *vagina dentata* in the European *fin de siècle*,[31] is resurrected as a dead octopus worn on the Famous's head: a weirdly comedic image that ends up being savaged in a dance to the beat of Nicki Minaj's 'Starships' (2012), swinging the octopus in large arcs that repeatedly smack it against the floor to the point of rupture.

Understanding this moment as a site of consumption is crucial to understanding this moment as a site of excess. It is predicated on an excessive waste of life in the

service of art, which in its own way echoes the nineteenth-century decadents' distaste for utility. 'Life' is reduced to an expendable resource, and while the wasting of numerous octopuses' lives over the course of the run of *Notorious* is questionable, to say the least (despite the fact that they were not killed by Holstein), it can nonetheless tell us something about how capitalism 'sees' and understands the value of things, animals and people. The flow of production and consumption may have drawn life from purchase – taking on what cultural critic Tom Holert refers to as 'the paradoxical *animus* of a living corpse'[32] – but movement beyond this point also marks the 'deadening' of the product for the vendor. According to this logic, the octopus dies a second death. Not only is it killed once fished; its 'life' as a commodity is also harvested at the point of sale unless it is sold on to another, whereupon it might receive a third or fourth death. Because commodities accrue value through circulation, the octopus's deaths as a commodity are more akin to a protracted process of decay as its body is trafficked from the sea to the mouth of a consumer – or, in this case, a stage.

Holstein's destruction of the octopus is a difficult moment in the performance, the ethics of which Holstein is demonstrably cognizant of in a moment that marks a temporary interruption in its destruction. After smashing the octopus on the floor, she kisses it and says 'I'm sorry … This is not a democratic space', before she gently, almost tenderly, rips what is left of the creature in two, saying 'I love you. Thank you for your performance. You are beautiful. Better than on [the audience's] dinner plate'. She then kisses it again several times, and gently casts the two parts of the octopus to either side of the stage, saying, 'I know, you guys. The whole show is tragic. What can I say?' The response is typical of Holstein: 'Let's do that again!' This time, though, as Minaj's 'Starships' is replayed, she is hoisted into the air and pushed from side to side by her co-performers as they whip her with what's left of the octopus in a kind of penance. Drawing attention to the 'tragedy' of the octopus's deaths whilst tearing it to pieces is hypocritical, but there is still something to learn from this wanton brutality. Holstein theatricalizes the decadence of capitalist markets, understood here as an attitudinal position that regards living things not on the basis of their own vibrancy, but on the basis of a gradual extraction of value *and life*. Holstein's witch refuses to accept capitalist exchange as a self-sustaining process of growth and renewal, instead encouraging her audiences to view this process as one of perpetual decay, introducing a typically decadent motif to the work's engagement with capitalism.

Holstein's preoccupation with deadness and decay also plays into the presentation of another material that is abundantly present throughout *Notorious*: long, artificial grey hair. Holstein has been experimenting with artificial hair in her work for some time, which frequently makes use of artificial-looking wigs, but what emerges most strikingly in *Notorious* is its sheer excess. It forms a gigantic curtain that traverses the stage, and tumbles from head to foot. It is abundant but lifeless, draining life from those smothered beneath its weight (Fig. 2).

Holstein exposes hair as a fetish, in several senses of the word: as a fetishized commodity, as an object charged with eroticism, and as an object worshipped as a magical entity, which might hold some kind of supernatural power. If the image of

FIG. 2 **Lauren Barri Holstein, Krista Vuori and Brogan Davison collapsed beneath the weight of their wigs in *Notorious*, by Lauren Barri Holstein. Fierce Festival, Birmingham, 2017. Photograph by Manuel Vason. Image courtesy of Lauren Barri Holstein.**

woman, as Peggy Phelan observes, 'displays not the subjectivity of the woman who is seen, but rather the constituent forces of desire of the man who wants to see her',[33] then what the abundance of hair in *Notorious* stages is a form of necrophilia, lusting after a part of the body that is to all intents and purposes 'dead'. This 'deadness' is not to deny the vibrancy of hair as an autonomous material; rather, it is suggestive of transition into vibrancy of a different kind that bears no essential connection to the 'life' of a human, who is encouraged to view it, with notable exceptions (for instance, Kesh in Sikhism), as an expendable extension of the body that is regularly severed in the pursuit of stylized appearance, or as an 'unfeminine' growth demanding removal from the neck down.

Artificial hair is usually made to appear as natural and as lifelike as possible, *performing* vitality in order to draw attention away from its synthetic composition. In Holstein's work, the fetishism of synthetic hair is made to appear as precisely that: a fetish. The labour of production is reified in a spectacular object, a fetishized object – a decadent object – that stands in place of the conditions of its own production, but there is something in this decadence that encourages reflection on the 'deadness' of commodities. Manipulation of the synthetic hair to make it look sufficiently lifeless requires a substantial amount of time, work and investment (materials alone cost £3,000),[34] which draws to light the decadence not just of perfecting artifice, but of refining decay as an art in itself. The wig is also inanimate *as a commodity* – a far cry, in other words, from the vibrant aliveness of hair as it appears in shampoo adverts,

and likewise from traditional models of commodity fetishism that dwell on the transference of life from people to the objects that their fetishized labour is supposed to animate. If one can speak of the 'animism' of commodities in Holstein's work, it is akin not to human life *per se*, but to the reanimated corpse.

Holstein's body also becomes a kind of corpse-like relic in this performance, reanimated by the commodities that surround her. For instance, at the very end of *Notorious*, Holstein lies prostrate on the floor atop a pile of popping candy. Only moments beforehand she was squatting between the shoulders of her co-performers, suspended in a harness, pissing on the candy. Now, fire-like, the candy crackles into life. This is a striking expression of contempt for a violent history of persecution, but 'waste' also animates the environment she inhabits. After a pause long enough to make the 'burning' of Holstein's body unmistakable, she asks for the last track of the performance to be played – Britney Spears's 'Work Bitch' (2013). The lyrics are well known, but for indulgence's sake:

> You want a hot body? You want a Bugatti?
> You want a Maserati? You better work bitch
> You want a Lamborghini? Sip martinis?
> Look hot in a bikini? You better work bitch
> You wanna live fancy? Live in a big mansion?
> Party in France?
> You better work bitch, you better work bitch
> You better work bitch, you better work bitch
> Now get to work bitch!
> Now get to work bitch![35]

Holstein's witchy rendering of Spears's 'Work Bitch' might make an ironic spectacle of faith in a corrupted and banal beauty myth, but it is still situated within the terrain of post-feminism. Holstein's witch–bitch responds to Spears's importunity by stretching desire for seductive appearance to a point of excess, overidentifying with the expectations of gendered, economistic productivity. She is an extension of Spears's working woman, her superlative, having pushed the laboured dance routines that lead up to this moment just past the edge of exhaustion. She also presents audiences with a deep-set boredom. She is bored of the injunction to 'work bitch'. She has gone through the motions of each action, step and routine – repeating 'completed' sections for no apparent purpose – until productivity itself is exhausted. Such is the flip side that accompanies intensified productivity – ruined within ruins, dazed, worn out – but Holstein's witch is no mere victim. She is not dead yet, more autonomous than automaton, and ready to rise again as the nightmare of her oppressors (Fig. 3).

The playfully nightmarish qualities of Holstein's witch are reflective of a common criticism levelled against the work of feminist performance makers who embrace trash and ruination: that it is 'too angry', or confrontational (a senior male colleague raised just such a point after I delivered a paper on Holstein's *Splat!* in 2017). There is a long history of critiquing feminist performance along these lines; however, for Sara Ahmed,

FIG. 3 **Lauren Barri Holstein rising as the nightmare of her oppressors in *Notorious*, by Lauren Barri Holstein. Fierce Festival, Birmingham, 2017. Photograph by Manuel Vason. Image courtesy of Lauren Barri Holstein.**

> [t]he experience of being a feminist is often an experience of being out of tune with others … We need to ruin what ruins. We could think of ruining not only as an activity that leads to something collapsing or falling down but as how we learn about things when we dismantle things.[36]

Holstein deliberately attempts to ruin what ruins, and her conjoining of a ruinous aesthetic with a ruinous politics offers an important key to understanding the appeal of her work's decadence. At the same time, as theatre scholar Kim Solga puts it, 'Holstein "does" contemporary populist feminism as a confusing mess, a suite of intractable paradoxes and physically degrading actions, generating for her audiences a fierce parody of "what (neoliberal) women want" that is also a raucous demonstration of how much cheesy, seductive fun the spectacle of that "want" can be'.[37] There are gendered implications in how Solga and I read this fun, but alongside Holstein's 'anger' at the persistence of day-to-day misogyny and structural oppression it is also important to recognize an uncompromising humour, which ultimately pokes fun *at me* as much as at the culture in which I am embedded.

Holstein's 'winking' approach to feminism takes a decadently literal form. In a particularly memorable scene – the last that I want to consider in this article – the giant hair curtains close to facilitate projection directly onto the hair as one of the co-performers, Krista Vuori, positions a camera beneath Holstein's legs. Holstein is

naked save for the octopus headdress (soon to be destroyed), some heavy metallic necklaces, and a girdle with a few long tufts of hair that reach down to her ankles, reminiscent of Maud Allan or Mata Hari dancing as Salomé. After a long, awkward silence, the camera picks up something that seems, very slowly, to be protruding from her vagina – something akin to what Georges Bataille describes at the end of his decadent novella *Story of the Eye* (1928). Whereas in Bataille's text the eye is that of a murdered priest that transfigures into the eye of a lost lover, in Holstein's performance it is a garishly green gelatinous organ that is slowly squeezed out of her vagina only to end up between Holstein's teeth. The camera zooms up close to her mouth as she chews this 'cannibal delicacy',[38] with the masticated eye dripping from her lips or being spat to the floor in gloopy droplets.

It is significant that this eye is *birthed*. As Federici addresses in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2014), acceptable forms of productivity for women in the early modern period were increasingly tied to regenerating the labour force as capitalism started to take root as a mode of socio-economic organization, with 'heretical' deviations from normative social and sexual relationships often resulting in persecution as 'witches'. This is important, as it explains why so many women who were accused of witchcraft were elders, people who chose to live alone, who engaged in non-procreative sex, or who experimented with early forms of birth control.[39] What piques Federici's interest is the challenge that witches pose to capitalism's instrumentalization of productivity, as well as the pitching of reproduction as a social and moral responsibility, and something of this challenge is what the eye-birthing scene taps into. It makes a mockery of the supposedly 'disenchanted' rationalism of capitalism, famously described by Max Weber as the '*the control* [*of*] *everything by means of calculation*',[40] just as it makes a mockery of the instrumentalizing of productive and reproductive capacities.

For Bataille, the eye inspires both attraction and repulsion, eroticism and horror; it is at once a seductive anatomical feature and an 'object of such anxiety that we will never bite into it'.[41] Holstein's engagement with this eye seems to be dealing with Bataille's work on a number of levels. There is an explicit confrontation of an innate fear of an eye's violation reminiscent of its slicing in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929). Here, though, the eye is both birthed and consumed, calling to mind the ways in which eyes and eggs are used as 'substitute objects' in Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (much as eyes and the moon are in *Un chien andalou*).[42] This is an amusing, but nonetheless captivating, vision of excess, recognizing that which is both at home and out of place, both gazed at and gazing. The birthed commodity finds itself cast into the mouth of the witch, who chews it up and in the process destroys it as 'eye'. She turns decadent expression – as trashy, messy excess and overidentification – against the 'gaze' of patriarchal capitalism, as well as its gendered injunctions, and in doing so invites us to engage with decadence not just as a style or aesthetic mode; she invites us to consider decadence as a practice well suited to ruining that which ruins.

The emphasis being placed here on the *practice* of decadence is important. In this section, I have been dwelling on Holstein's spectacular presentation of the witch as a nemesis of patriarchal capitalism, at once threatened by and threatening to the

systemic production of gendered inequalities. The aesthetic that Holstein works with in *Notorious* takes on a decadent quality, with corpse-like commodities, fetishized corpses, artificial hair and an edible eye all *tending* toward dissolution, decomposition or exhaustion in the staging of intensely physical or visceral routines, or enervating periods of inertia. Moreover, this decadent quality plays out in the politics at stake in the work, provided decadence is read as a mode of playfully subversive ruination at odds with disenchantment and the instrumentalizing of productive and reproductive capacities. The political sympathies and intentions of Monteiro, Blackmore and other neo-occult performance makers explored in the previous section have just as important a role to play in addressing the decadence of *Notorious* as McCormick's irreverent trashing of religious conservatism and Young's adolescent drag. Taken together, their performances invite consideration of the aesthetics and politics of decadence in processual terms, approaching decadence not simply as a state, but as a practice. It is a practice that invites us to consider how bodies and behaviours are marked and marginalized as threatening or deviant, be they witches or witchcraft, performance makers or their adolescent drag; however, as the examples explored above illustrate, the staging of decadence and the occult might also be turned against the traditions, institutions, types and societal expectations that shore up and perpetuate patriarchal capitalism and the gendered inequalities it produces, giving us a glimpse of its contingencies and inadequacies by revelling in its embodied and enacted ruination.

Conclusion

On 7 November 2017, the same day that I went to see *Notorious* at the Barbican, an effigy of Judith Butler was burned in São Paulo. It came off the back of a petition that gained over 370,000 signatories, many of whom were evangelical Christians outraged by Butler's co-convening of a conference that they mistakenly assumed to be celebrating gender fluidity. In one of several videos available on YouTube, a male demonstrator holds a crucifix over the effigy's burning body as if to exorcize some demonic spirit, while another beats it with a stick amid cries of 'Queimem a bruxa!' ('Burn the witch!'). All around are placards that vilify and stigmatize. 'Her goal is to destroy our children', reads one written in English. In the centre of another, Butler is pilloried as 'destruir identidade sexual dos seus filhos' ('destroyer of our children's sexual identity'). The words are scrawled between overtly twee cartoons of boy-ish boys and girl-ish girls on the left, and on the right the scene of destruction: a boy playing with a doll, a girl with a toy train.[43]

A protest led by evangelical protestors and a feminist performance may seem unlikely bedfellows, but the coinciding of these events speaks volumes about the conjunction of decadence and the occult, particularly their subversive connotations. In both cases, those producing the events are clearly invested in the metaphorical potency of the witch as an embodiment of decay and decline, which, as I hope to have shown in this article, is also a key feature of decadence. In the protest, Butler is vilified as a harbinger of civic degeneration. In *Notorious*, Holstein's witch presents a compelling challenge to the values that shape misogynistic and patriarchal world

views. What makes Holstein's work especially compelling is the methods she uses to reflect the supposed monstrousness of the witch back on those who oppress her – methods that have much to tell us about the kinds of thinking, perceiving and doing that patriarchal capitalism encourages as a mode of socio-economic organization, as well as grounds for enacting their ruination. This is a decadent as much as an occult 'tactic of choice'. Rather than consigning herself to the realism of capitalism and post-feminism, or revising her work in light of criticism that derides it as 'too angry', or 'adolescent', she embraces these qualities; she overidentifies with them either by exhausting their injunctions or by making a riotous spectacle of their contingencies.

All of the performance makers explored in this article – the neo-occult revivalists, the performance makers revelling in trash aesthetics, and Holstein as an artist who bridges these strands of contemporary performance – work to pull post-feminism's 'luminosities' and limited freedoms into the foreground. Their scenographic choices, evident most literally in Holstein's birthing and consumption of a gelatinous eye, stare back at the ways in which capitalism 'sees' and 'deadens' things, animals and people. McCormick, Young and Holstein, especially, work with and within the terrain of capitalism and post-feminism, but by exploring myth, history and highly commercial forms of popular culture in tandem they carve out a space of encounter with capitalism and post-feminism that refuses to take for granted its mechanics and pressures. They approach decadence as a messy, trashy overidentification with the ossifying gaze of a reified social praxis: decadence as both a stare that ossifies and deadens what it sees within patriarchal capitalism, and a repurposed tool that seeks to ruin what ruins.

The issues discussed in this article have not gone away as I write this conclusion during a global pandemic, which is bringing the inequitable distribution of exertion and inertia into sharp relief. But the time is also ripe to be thinking differently about the roles played by productivity in our lives, who benefits from the valorization of particular forms of productivity, and the impact of these forms on sociality and self-realization. Holstein's work invites her audiences to challenge the taken-for-granted-ness of capitalist patriarchy. She invites them to query a supposedly objective rationalism that seeks to control and fix the ontology of materials and people, just as she invites them to reconsider capitalism's techniques of mastery. This is not to dismiss the value of being productive; rather, such moments prompt reflection on the contexts that shape sociality and guide processes of self-realization, as well as the extent to which injunctions to be more productive and resilient have been getting us nowhere fast.

NOTES

1 The completion of this article was made possible thanks to the generous support of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Fellowship (AH/T006994/1). Shane Boyle, Elyssa Livergant and Fintan Walsh also offered valuable feedback. I am also grateful to Lauren Barri Holstein for sharing insights and resources.

2 This quotation is taken from Joris-Karl Huysmans's *Là-bas* (1891), trans. Matthew Rickard, in Rickard, '"Vers le Sabbat": Occult Initiation and Non-normative Masculinity in Jean Lorrain's *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901)', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1, 2 (Winter 2018), pp. 1–16, here p. 2.

3 See especially Morris B. Kaplan, 'Literature in the Dock: The Trials of Oscar Wilde', *Journal of Law and Society*, 31, 1 (March 2004), pp. 113–30, here p. 119.

4 Elaine Showalter (ed.), *Daughters of Decadence: Stories by Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2016; first published 1993), p. x.

5 Katharina Herold and Leire Barrera-Medrano (eds.), 'Preface: Women Writing Decadence', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2, 1 (2019), pp. i–lv.

6 Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), p. 80.

7 See especially György Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978).

8 Christopher Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West, Vol. 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004). Nick Land was writing about occulture in the late 1990s in texts such as 'CyberGothic' (1998) and 'Occulture' (1999). See Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings, 1987–2007*, 6th edn (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2018).

9 See V. K. Preston's insightful commentary in 'Reproducing Witchcraft: Thou Shalt Not Perform a Witch to Live', *TDR*, 62, 1 (Spring 2018), pp. 143–59, here p. 155.

10 Sady Doyle, 'Monsters, Men and Magic: Why Feminists Turned to Witchcraft to Oppose Trump', *The Guardian*, 7 August 2019, at www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/aug/07/monsters-men-magic-trump-awoke-angry-feminist-witches (accessed 18 June 2020).

11 Kristen J. Sollée, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (Berkeley: ThreeL, 2017).

12 Lon Milo and Constance DuQuette staged numerous productions of Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis* (1910) in California in the 1980s, as did the Scarlet Woman lodge in Texas in the 1990s and 2000s along with its own ritual theatre events. The Australian-based Metamorphic Ritual Theatre also still venerate occult rites in their work.

13 See especially DEEP TRASH in the Underworld (2017), as well as a symposium accompanying the event: 'Performing the Occult: Magick, Rituals and the Monstrous in Live Art', Queen Mary, University of London, 19 October 2017, at https://cuntemporary.org/performing-the-occult (accessed 17 June 2020).

14 Alice Condé and Jessica Gossling, 'The Devil in the Detail: An Introduction to Decadent Occultism from the Editors', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1, 2 (Winter 2018), pp. i–ix, here p. viii.

15 Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 198.

16 Jex Blackmore, 'Subversive Autonomous Satanic Ritual', at www.jexblackmore.com/satanic-ritual (accessed 17 June 2020).

17 Anna Merlan, 'Satanic Artist and Activist Jex Blackmore on Her Controversial Role in the Documentary *Hail Satan*?', *Jezebel*, 20 May 2019, https://themuse.jezebel.com/satanic-artist-and-activist-jex-blackmore-on-her-contro-1834791520 (accessed 17 June 2020).

18 Merlan, 'Satanic Artist'; Blackmore, 'Subversive Autonomous Satanic Ritual'.

19 See Jen Harvie, 'Feminism, Audience, Interaction, and Performer Authority', in Doris Kolesch, Theresa Schütz and Sophie Nikoleit, eds., *Staging Spectators in Immersive Performances: Commit Yourself!* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019) pp. 143–58, here pp. 152–3.

20 Anna Watkins Fisher, 'Like a Girl's Name: The Adolescent Drag of Amber Hawk Swanson, Kate Gilmore, and Ann Liv Young', *TDR*, 56, 1 (2012), pp. 49–76, here p. 51, original emphasis. Halberstam's concept of 'Gaga Feminism' similarly identifies 'a form of political expression that masquerades as naïve nonsense but that actually participates in big and meaningful forms of critique'. See Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), p. xxv.

21 Feminist mimesis is an influential concept introduced by Elin Diamond that refers to perverting or overidentifying with gendered processes of production, reproduction and consumption. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xvi.

22 Sarah Gorman, 'Feminist Disavowal or Return to Immanence? The Problem of Poststructuralism and the Naked Female Form in Nic Green's *Trilogy* and Ursula Martinez' *My Stories, Your Emails*', *Feminist Review*, 105 (2013), pp. 48–64, here p. 49.

23 Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used against Women* (London: Vintage Books, 2015; first published 1990), p. 2.
24 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 31.
25 Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), p. 60.
26 Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 107. Some of the theoretical touchstones that Skelly draws on are also relevant. See especially Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).
27 Barbican Centre, at www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2017/event/the-famous-lauren-barri-holstein-notorious (accessed 10 November 2017).
28 Barbican Centre, at http://blog.barbican.org.uk/2017/10/barbican-meets-the-famous-lauren-barri-holstein (accessed 20 February 2019).
29 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 53.
30 Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 325.
31 Ibid., p. 310.
32 Tom Holert, '"A Live Monster That Is Fruitful and Multiplies": Capitalism as Poisoned Rat?', *e-flux*, 36 (July 2012), pp. 1–7, here p. 4.
33 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 26.
34 Lauren Barri Holstein, email correspondence with the author, 29 June 2018.
35 Britney Spears et al., 'Work Bitch', written by Britney Spears, William Adams, Otto Jettman, Sebastian Ingrosso, Anthony Preston and Ruth-Anne Cunningham (RCA, 2013).
36 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 40.
37 Kim Solga, *Theatre & Feminism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 68.
38 'Cannibal delicacy' is a reference to Georges Bataille's short essay 'Eye' in Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stokel with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985; first published 1929), pp. 17–19.
39 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 2nd rev. edn (New York: Autonomedia, 2014).
40 Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), pp. 1–31, here pp. 12–13, original emphasis.
41 Bataille, 'Eye', p. 17.
42 See Roland Barthes, 'The Metaphor of the Eye', in Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin, 2001; first published 1963), pp. 119–27, here pp. 120–1.
43 The conference proposed to focus not on gender *per se*, but on populism, sovereignty and democracy. For the petition see CitizenGo, 'CANCELAMENTO DA PALESTRA DE JUDITH BUTLER NO SESC POMPEIA', *CitizenGo*, 26 October 2017, at http://citizengo.org/pt-br/fm/108060-cancelamento-da-palestra-judith-butler-no-sesc-pompeia (accessed 18 November 2017). For the YouTube video see Ruptly, 'Brazil: "Take Your Ideologies To Hell" – Judith Butler Haters Burn Effigy outside Sao Paulo Seminar', *YouTube*, 7 November 2017, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhlDqBM9vYU&t=93s (accessed 11 April 2020).

ADAM ALSTON (a.alston@gold.ac.uk) *is Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Theatre in the Department of Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is the author of* Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation *(2016), and co-editor of* Theatre in the Dark: Shadow, Gloom and Blackout in Contemporary Theatre *(2017). He is also the principal investigator of the AHRC-funded project Staging Decadence: Decadent Theatre in the Long Twentieth Century.*