

THE_GIFT_&_THE_LEDGER

A_DRAMATIC_WORKSHOP_IN_THREE_ACTS

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PRE_SCRIPT:

The incorruptible "Ledger" is the abstract machine that haunts the (restricted) blockchain economy of our Promethean (or "tech-bro-methean") fantasies. Imagine, if you will, an absolutely verifiable and permanent record of all credits and debits, an unimpeachable account of who puts in and who takes out, a means to instantly expose con-artists, counterfeiters, and free-riders for what they are, whenever and wherever—forever putting an end to all market failures produced by the erosion of *trust*. Ay, and more, imagine that the "Ledger" exists everywhere and nowhere, as a decentralized and distributed system. What you have just imagined is the global blockchain economy of tomorrow, "Goodbye, Washington Consensus! Hello, Nakamoto Consensus!"

The genuine "Gift", by contrast, is the abstract machine that haunts the deconstructive (general) economy of our Epimethean fantasies. Regard, if you will, our sun, the star at the center of our solar system. In the words of George Bataille, "The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy— wealth—without any return." Ay, and more, not only does our sun give without any return, our sun keeps no accounts: to think the perspective of our sun is to think nothing of con-artists, counterfeiters, and free-riders. There is no rhyme or reason in playing our sun for the fool: we can *trust* that our sun will give, give, and give as much as it can, never holding back and never wanting back. Indeed, as Georges Bataille understood, to regard our sun is to regard the general economy of the cosmos that is "always already" operating, that precedes, exceeds, and succeeds any and all restricted economies.

No doubt, the general economy of the genuine Gift is remarkably different from the restricted economy of the incorruptible Ledger, but how are we to conceive of this difference and remark upon it in ways that can make a difference to our communities, our institutions, and our relations with human and non-human others? Our workshop insists that, instead of pitting the Gift *against* the Ledger and remarking upon the differences *between* the two and their *opposition* to one another, we should think the Gift *with and through* the "Ledger" and remark upon a difference *beyond* the two, a difference that relates one to the other as an enabler. A work of performative theory, this workshop *affectively dramatizes* its insistence on "thinking with and through" instead of informatively describing or effectively demonstrating its insistence. Indeed, inspired by Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, our workshop casts participants as "spect-actors" in a series of pocket-dramas investigating the economies of the Gift and the Ledger.

SCENARIO:

Imagine, if you will, a river flowing through a valley, a fluid continuum in motion, feeding fauna, flora, and fungi along its course.

Now, let us say that you walk up to this river and dip a vessel into it, a cup. In so doing, you have discretized and appropriated a portion of the river, that fluid continuum in motion. You now possess one cup of water, and you may give this cup away or keep it for yourself. At the same time, however, dipping the cup into the river and appropriating a discrete amount of water generated some spillage, some overflow. As you walk away from the river and up the hill, you will notice that, along the course that you take up the hill, water drips and drops from the cup, and from your hands and, insofar as you stepped into the river, from your feet, leaving behind little puddles, droplets, and rivulets that feed fauna, flora, and fungi that happen across them.

Now, let's say that you drink up the cup of water when you get to the top of a hill and then, in the midst of enjoying the stunning hilltop view, very suddenly, you suffer a heart attack and you die. Over the next few hours, days, weeks, scavengers and decomposers consume your dead body, each of them appropriating some portion of that cup of water that you appropriated from the river. Ay, and each and every scavenger and decomposer produces some spillage, some overflow as they appropriate some portion of this water, leaving a trail of drippings and droppings behind them as they abandon your carcass, and these drippings and droppings feed fauna, flora, and fungi that happen across them.

Then comes the rain. What remains of the puddles, droplets, and rivulets of water that you left behind you as you walked uphill, what remains of the drippings and droppings of the creatures who consumed and decomposed your corpse, and what remains of your last gulp of water in your decomposed carcass—all of this flows back down the hill and returns to the very river from which you drew your last cup of water, feeding fauna, flora, and fungi on the re-course, on the return journey to the river.

To draw a cup of water from a river is to draw a discrete portion of water from the water cycle, which is but one of the many different biogeochemical cycles and fields coursing upon, above and below the surface of the Earth. Other biogeochemical cycles include the cycles for solar and geothermal energy and the cycles for various chemical elements: calcium, carbon, hydrogen, mercury, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus, selenium, and sulfur. Each and every one of these biogeochemical cycles is, when regarded over some greater or lesser duration, a fluid continuum in motion which spills, overflows, drips and drops, and charts an increasingly tortuous (re-)course as discrete portions are drawn from them.

Ledgering insists upon acts of discrete appropriation—by dipping a cup into the river I can simultaneously do three things: (i) I can appropriate and carry away a cup of water from the river (i.e., the cup functions as a *store of value*); (ii) I can establish the cup as a *unit of account* for appropriations from the river (e.g., an appropriation from the river may measure one cup, or a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, or a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, etc); and (iii) I can give a cup of water (or a fraction of a cup of water) away in exchange for something or for nothing (i.e., the cup functions as a *means of exchange*).

Gift giving insists upon acts of spillage, acts of overflow, acts of dripping and dropping, acts of torturing the (re-)course of a fluid continuum in motion—and these acts precede, exceed, and succeed any and every act of discrete appropriation.

ACT_I:_THE_LEDGER_&_THE_SIGNIFYING_CHAIN

Spect-actors take turns giving and taking *discrete physical tokens* from one another. Whenever one spect-actor gives/takes to/from another spect-actor, a third spect-actor *ledgers* this give/take by *physically linking* the giving/taking spect-actor to the spect-actor has been given-to/taken-from. Each spectator *must* either give or take a token from another spect-actor during their turn, they cannot "pass". At the end of every round of give/take, the spect-actor who possesses the *fewest* tokens is the spect-actor who "wins" the round, having accumulated the *least* amount of *debt*. This "winning" spect-actor decides the order in which each spect-actor takes their turn in the next round.

The workshop facilitators—playing the role of what Augusto Boal termed *jokers*, serving as emcees, exegetes, and "wild card" actors—will confront the spect-actors with different ecological, economic, and ethical dilemmas/dramas before their turns so that "winning" isn't necessarily the be-all-end-all for the spect-actors, so that some spect-actors might be motivated to accumulate more instead of less debt.

ACT_II:_THE_GIFT_&_THE_TORTUOUS_CIRCLE

Spect-actors take turns stretching, twisting, crumpling, bending, and winding a *single continuous physical medium* so as to *loop* portions of the medium around themselves. At the end of every round of looping, the spect-actor whose own loops are entangled with the loops of the greatest number of other spect-actors is the spect-actor who "wins" the round, having become the *keystone species*. This "winning" spect-actor decides the order in which each spect-actor takes their turn in the next round.

Again, the jokers will confront the spect-actors with different ecological, economic, and ethical dilemmas/dramas before their turns so that "winning" isn't necessarily the be-all-end-all for the spect-actors, so that some spect-actors might be motivated to eschew becoming the keystone species.

ACT_III:_THE_DISTRIBUTED_NETWORK_&_THE_TORTUOUS_KNOTWORK

Spect-actors play the games from Act I and Act II simultaneously, one game running atop the other. At the end of each round, the spect-actor who wins the Tortuous Circle game determines the order in which individuals must take their turn in the Signifying Chain game and, in turn, the spect-actor who wins the Signifying Chain game determines the order in which individuals must take their turn in the Tortuous Circle game.

The jokers will confront the spect-actors with different ecological, economic, and ethical dilemmas/dramas before they take their turns so that "winning" one or both games isn't necessarily the be-all-end-all for the spect-actors, so that some spect-actors might be motivated to "lose" both games, to accumulate more debt and eschew becoming the keystone species.

PERFORMANCE_NOTES: 2020.02.22_POSTHUMAN_NETWORK_iSTAGE_ASU

ACT_I:_THE_LEDGER_&_THE_SIGNIFYING_CHAIN

The spect-actors wait in the wings and the two jokers take center stage.

The jokers announce a scenario: Iowa, a small hog farming town with one savings and loan bank. One of the jokers assumes the role of the bank and claims to hold the deposits of the bank's customers, brandishing a bag full of wine corks, "Each one of these corks is a unit of currency that has been deposited in the savings and loan by one of our local customers."

The jokers invite one spect-actor to leave the wings and take the stage. The jokers cast the spect-actor in a role, "You are Ron Strickland, a hog farmer." Ron is broke, he has no cash on hand and no money deposited in the bank, but Ron needs three units of currency to for three expenditures: (i) one unit of currency to buy hog feed, (ii) another unit to lend to his ailing sister, (iii) and a third unit to put food on the table for his wife and children.

Ron has decided to borrow three units from the savings and loan. The jokers explain that the currency that the bank has on offer is of a curious sort. Every time the currency is transferred from one individual to another, the currency ledgers this transfer by physically tying the giver to the receiver. When spect-actor cast as Ron Strickland receives three units from the savings and loan, played by one of the jokers, a linen cord ties Ron back to the joker playing the savings and loan.

Three additional spect-actors are called to the stage. The first is cast in the role of the feed store owner. The second is cast as Ron's ailing sister. The third is cast as the town grocer. Each of these three spect-actors receives a unit of currency, a wine cork, from Ron and, as they each receive a unit of currency, a linen cord ties them back to Ron.

The jokers turn to the spect-actor cast as Ron's ailing sister and they inform her that she needs two units of currency to purchase her medicines. She has one unit of currency from Ron and she can get another unit by either borrowing a unit from the savings and loan or she can borrow from someone in town...perhaps from her friend the owner of the feed store. The jokers ask the spect-actor playing the sister to make a choice between the two lenders. She chooses to borrow from the feed store owner rather than the savings and loan. The spect-actor playing the feed store owner is given a choice: to lend or not to lend. He lends.

The ailing sister receives a unit from the feed store owner and a linen cord ties her back to him. The ailing sister then proceeds to the grocer, whom she has chosen to cast as the town's pharmacist, and she gives him two units. The cord that ties the sistster to Ron is extended from her to the grocer/pharmacist and the cord that ties the sister to the feed store owner is extended as to link her to the grocer/pharmacist. The ailing sister is tied to the grocer/pharmacist twice through this purchase: one tie links four characters (it runs from [i] the savings and loan to [ii] Ron to the [iii] sister and then to [iv] the grocer/pharmacist); the other tie links five characters (it runs from the [i] savings and loan to [ii] Ron to [iii] the feed store owner to [iv] the sister and then to [v] the grocer/pharmacist).

The jokers turn to the grocer/pharmacist, "You are flush, aren't you. You've got three units. You can buy whatever you want with them. So, what do you want?" The grocer/pharmacist say that they want a car--no not just a car, but, better, a whole car dealership. The jokers invite another spect-actor to the stage to play the owner of a car dealership. The new spect-actor demands five units for their dealership. The grocer/spect-actor must now either borrow from the savings and loan and/or from some other character on the stage in order to make their purchase.



The game proceeds in this manner, characters with units are asked what they want to buy. New spect-actors are invited to take the stage to satisfy new desires. Prices are negotiated, units are exchanged, sometimes money is borrowed from the savings and loan so that a spect-actor can afford a desired item, other times a spect-actor borrows from some other spect-actor. Linen cords ledger all of these transactions and it is possible, in theory, to trace the history of each unit of currency in circulation back to the savings and loan, yes, but only in theory.

In practice, things are trickier. The linen cords are awkward, they get tangled up. The spect-actors must contort themselves in order to move around the stage and engage in their commercial transactions. Only the savings and loan keeps still, at the center of the stage. One spect-actor maneuvering the stage becomes untied and the ledger is corrupted, a transaction has been dropped from the ledger. Other spect-actors recall that this transaction took place but the *proof* of the transaction, the tie that binds the giver and the receiver of currency is missing. The game stops here.

The jokers discuss the blockchain with the spect-actors. The blockchain is touted as an incorruptible ledger. The tie that binds the giver to the receiver in a blockchain economy is impervious to accident and malfeasance: the tie cannot come undone. The mechanisms that make this possible are discussed. The problem of maintaining and losing one's identity is also discussed: givers and receivers are ledgered but how are givers and receivers identified, how do they receive their identity so that they can become parties to a transaction, a give and take, a link in the blockchain. Are they each given an account number beforehand? What if one's account number is stolen or lost or forgotten? How can we keep one's account number from being used by multiple individuals, whether by accident or by malfeasance?

ACT_II:_THE_GIFT_&_THE_TORTUOUS_CIRCLE

Once more, the spect-actors assemble in the wings and the two jokers take center stage. One of the jokers is wearing a dress of sorts made of linen cords, the same cords from Act I.



The jokers announce a scenario: we are in the forests of the Pacific Northwest of the North American continent. The joker standing at center stage, the one wearing the dress of linen cords, is an old well established Douglas fir, a so-called “mother tree” or matrixial tree, a forest giant.

A few spect-actors are invited to take the stage and to position themselves at varying distances from the matrixial tree. The jokers tell these spect-actors that they are young saplings, struggling to survive, unable to get the sunlight that they need to photosynthesize and feed themselves. But these saplings are not only reaching for the sun in the sky, they are also reaching below ground, reaching so as to connect itself to the mycorrhiza of the matrixial tree.

A few more spect-actors are invited to take the stage. They are told to grab one of the cords dangling from the matrixial tree’s dress and told to wander the stage more or less aimlessly trailing and tangling the cords along with them. As they wander the space, the spect-actors find that the space responds to their motion, leaving an activated trail of light behind that slowly fades behind them. These spectators are told that they are the fungi of the matrixial tree’s mycorrhiza and they are told that, as they wander the space, the trail of light that follows them is a trail of nutrients emanating from the photosynthesizing matrixial tree.

One of the mobile fungal spect-actors wanders over and tangles its cord around one of the stationary sapling spect-actors, and the jokers stop the action for a moment. The joker playing the matrixial tree describes how the young sapling is now connected to her through the mycorrhiza and receives nutrients from her photosynthesizing body, the other joker walks back and forth along the tangled cord from the matrixial tree to the sapling, and as the joker walks along this cord a path of light is drawn from the matrixial tree to the sapling and from the sapling to the matrixial tree.

Additional spect-actors were invited to take the stage and to play additional saplings or fungi. As more and more saplings are entangled by the wandering fungi, the free joker, the joker not playing the matrixial tree, traverses the cords connecting saplings to the mycorrhiza. Paths of light that follow the joker flow between the different saplings, the matrixial tree, and the wandering fungi. In other words, the free joker animates the nutrient flow through the mycorrhiza.



Bringing the act to a dramatic close, the joker playing the matrixial tree announces her awareness of her impending death and describes how dying Douglas fir trees shoot the bulk of their nutrients into their mycorrhiza shortly before their death. The free joker runs the gamut of the cords connected to the matrixial tree animating the flood of nutrients from the dying matrixial tree through the mycorrhiza.

The action stops and the jokers proceed to discuss mycorrhizal symbiosis with the spect-actors. They discuss the fact that there were no tokens exchanged in this game but, instead, there was the picking up of the cords by the wandering fungi, the looping of the cords around the stationary saplings by the wandering fungi during their wandering, and the animation of the nutrient flow through the mycorrhiza by the free joker. In other words, there was no discrete exchange between individuals but the torturing of a continuous physical medium and the animation of the medium's tortuous course.

The spect-actors were also asked to consider the trails of light that followed the fungi as they wandered. These trails of light, which did not necessarily correspond to the manner in which the cords trailed after the fungi, could these trails of light point towards the environment that encompassed the matrixial tree, the saplings, and the fungi? Could these trails point towards the dissipation of nutrients into an encompassing environment?

ACT_ III:_THE_DISTRIBUTED_NETWORK_&_THE_TORTUOUS_KNOTWORK

Once again, the spect-actors assemble in the wings. One of the jokers stands in the far corner of the stage and the other takes center stage. Projected onto the iStage floor is a responsive simulation of a watershed with a river in flux coursing through its center. At the densest point of the flux, at center stage alongside the joker, is a tangled linen cord and a single wine cork.

The joker in the far corner reads the River Scenario (on page 2 of this document) aloud, and the joker on stage summons the spect-actors on to the stage as the story is read, casting one spect-actor as the one who draws from the river, casting the others as the flora, fauna, and fungi that feed off the drippings and droppings of the one spect-actor, that scavenge and decompose the one spect-actors dead body, and that produce their own drippings and droppings as they wander the space.

The wine cork is taken for a cup of water drawn from the river and the linen cord is taken for the drippings and droppings along the paths of the different spect-actors wandering the space. The spect-actors who play the flora, fauna, and fungi that feed on the drippings and droppings entangle themselves in the linen cord and drag it along the space with them. What's more as the spect-actors wander the space they also alter the responsive simulation of the watershed. And when the rain is announced by the spect-actor reading at the end of the River Scenario, the linen cord is disentangled from the wandering spect-actors and drawn back to the densest flux in the watershed.



The act ends after the rain stops pouring, and the jokers open the floor to a discussion. The jokers articulate their hypothesis that a watershed must be regarded as a field and that different bodies of water appear as fluxes and basins within the field. Then, the jokers discuss the relationship between (i) the cup of water appropriated, the discretum of the wine-cork, and (ii) the drippings and droppings that attended the appropriation and transportation of the cup of water, the continuum of the linen cord. Why cast the trail of drippings and dropping as a continuum, rather than a discretum? Aren't these drippings and droppings something else, something that is fortuitously *both* discretum and continuum but also *neither* discretum nor continuum? Something *stochastic* in the manner of a quantum fluctuation?

POST_SCRIPT:

NON_VERBAL_PLAY

Sha Xin Wei's question:

"How can people coordinate transformative and compelling experiences without relying on conventional linguistic categories such as verbal narrative? The technical analogue to this is: how can people create sense together in a responsive media environment (henceforth "responsive environment") without resorting to grammatical structures?"

Relation to *the Gift and the Ledger*:

Genuine gift giving can only be *affirmed* as such in and through non-verbal expressions. To affirm a gift in and through verbal language is to keep a ledger, to produce a record of *who* has given, *who* has received, and *what* has been given and received. The keeping of a ledger *represents* a gift in an *non-genuine* manner.

Sha Xin Wei's response:

What a refreshing, even enabling thought!

An excursion: This is a concrete instance of an ancient and still powerful general critique of representation. Maybe after Vicki Kirby and feminist recuperations of Derrida we should more precisely target the conceit of replacing experience by its representation.

Now, theater as watched by an audience is quite a different mode of experience than an enactive, participatory event such as what you and Yifa have designed and will realize with Garrett and Brandon today.

I feel we're on the same page, but if we ever do write something together, we cannot emphasize this too strongly.

I like very much this singling out of the ledger. This is a symptom of positivism insisting that only that which is verbally represented can be thought, subject to judgment and reasonable (ethical!) passion.

Now, what about the performative role of the tokens or the rope, or the cup in The Gift and the Ledger? Maybe after the enactive experience/experiment, the participants can reflect on the experiential difference between those objects as ciphers, tokens, prototype units of account / holders of value, versus props used in make believe play.

Performance Notes 2020.02.22:

We would like to mark a distinction between re-creation and re-presentation and to argue that the enactive, participatory event is a re-creation as opposed to a re-presentation. A re-presentation would return the presence (i.e., the being) of an experience. A re-creation would return the creation (i.e., the becoming) of an experience. What's more, if you will allow us a pun, a re-creation returns a *recreation*, a play on the experience that it returns to. A representation, by contrast, returns a *representative*, a stand-in for the experience that it returns to.

In this way there was a "meta" aspect to the enactive workshop that we staged. On the one hand, we wanted to stage enactive workshop so as not to represent Gifts and Ledgers but, rather, so as to re-create Gifts and Ledgers. On the other hand, we wanted to make the point that Ledgers are (re)present beings while Gifts are (re-)creative becomings.

Unfortunately, we didn't get to dive deeply into the "meta" aspect with the spect-actors during the workshop. If we had the time, we would have tried to discuss the role of verbalizations/representations in framing the enactive, re-creative exercise for the spect-actors, and discussing how the enactive, re-creative exercise did or did not exceed the verbalizations/representations that initially framed it.

IMPROVISED_MEANINGFUL_GESTURE

Sha Xin Wei's question:

"How could people improvise meaningful gestures collectively or singly in an environment that is as dynamic as they are, an environment that itself evolves over time as a function of its inhabitant life?"

Relation to *the Gift and the Ledger*:

Genuine gift giving is always a meaningful improvised gesture. That is to say, a genuine gift is always given *and* received *fortuitously*, without forethought. Genuine gift giving always lacks intents and purposes *as an (en)act(ion)*—the ledger ascribes intents and purposes to givers and receivers of genuine gifts *after the fact*.

Sha Xin Wei's response:

Another lovely hypothesis. This, and the next hypothesis, profoundly motivate improvisation, and an apparatus and a suite of enactive, mediating techniques carefully designed for indeterminate, improvisatory play.

This in turn calls for a theory of play. Something that we can collectively discuss.

Performance Notes 2020.02.22:

You will note from the earlier Performance Note that there is a nascent theory of play at work in the "meta" question that we didn't really get to discuss during our workshop. What does it mean for a re-creation to return a recreation, to return a *play* on an experience? We like to think of play as, in, and through viciously circular relations between simulations and dis-simulations.

In Acts II and III, we tried to give the spect-actors few verbal instructions as to how the "game" worked and, instead, used gesture to guide them to engage with the materials and environments so as to (dis)simulate our verbal prompts. Our verbal prompts involved materials, environments, and characters that could be regarded as analogous to the materials, environments, and spect-actors, but that also had their own peculiar qualities. For instance, the initial looping of a sapling-spect-actor in Act II was achieved fortuitously by the wandering fungi-spect-actors. Once that looping took place and the looping acquired meaning for the other fungi-spect-actors, and the looping of sapling-spect-actors became a trope that the other fungi riffed upon in all sorts of curious and novel ways.

THE_EMERGENCE_OF_OBJECTS_FROM_FIELDS

Sha Xin Wei's question:

"How could objects emerge continuously under the continuous action of inhabitants in a responsive space?"

Relation to *the Gift and the Ledger*.

The genuine gift is always an object that emerges from a field. We speak *after the fact* when we say that the giver is the one that gives the genuine gift and that the receiver is the one that receives the genuine gift. Genuine gift giving *as an (en)act(ion)* is a process that gives a giver the power to give a gift and gives a receiver the power to receive a gift. Before a genuine gift is given, neither the giver, nor the receiver, nor the gift are given. The giver, the receiver, and the gift *become* givens in and through the (en)act(ion) of genuine gift giving. The ledger never accounts for the emergence of the genuine gift that gives the giver the power to give and the receiver the power to receive.

Sha Xin Wei's response:

Yes, yes, and yes! This is why I /we find William James, and Whitehead, but also loop quantum gravity — a field theory! — so amenable and fertile. (We bookmark this thought for a subsequent exposition, should it ever come to pass.)

Now, the non-pre-givenness of actors prior to the event is exactly one of the three basic conditions I propose to Garrett for our research under the banner Alter-Eco.

Performance Notes 2020.02.22:

This was the most difficult of the three questions to explore. Indeed, to reference the first of the performance notes above, the only way to explore this notion is to encourage the spect-actors to (en)act in ways that exceed the verbalizations/representations that frame their (en)act(ions).

It did not seem to us as if the spect-actors had enough time to engage with the medium and the responsive media environments in order to gain a deep sense for their emergence as characters in a narrative in and through their (en)acting with and through the continuous medium of the linen cord and the responsive media environments. As jokers, we needed to find more effective ways to intervene here in order to accelerate the process of developing the spect-actors intimacy with the continuous medium and the responsive media environments: perhaps some techniques of cruelty, in Artaud's sense, or some techniques of estrangement, in Brecht's sense, could have been more skillfully deployed to accelerate the spect-actors orientation towards the mediums and environments and away from themselves as pre-given individuals.

In any case, the point to be made here is this: the technical apparatuses (including the iStage, the wine corks and the linen cords, the rules of our "Alter-Eco" games, and the framing verbalizations/representations that we employed) were not enough on their own, we needed more time to develop *techniques* in order to *inflect* the technical apparatuses so as to more rapidly orient the spect-actors towards non-verbal play, improvisation, and the emergence of objects from fields. The *technique* of the joker/facilitator/difficultator is just as important as any technical apparatus at play. It should be noted, however, that taking time, stretching the time of the workshop, making each game last 30-45 minutes instead of 15 minutes, is itself one technique that we should consider employing.

OPENINGS_TO_NATURAL_ENVIRONMENTS_VERSUS_RESPONSIVE_MEDIA_ENVIRONMENTS

In many ways, a responsive media environment, like the one we are in today, is an ideal space for us to dramatically render genuine gift giving. However, we find that such a space is somewhat inimical to a larger project that we have in mind, a project which subsumes *the Gift and the Ledger*.

You see, it is our contention that natural environments¹ are responsive environments. With that assumption, rather than conceptualizing “responsive media environments”, we conceptualize media as that which either dulls the responsiveness of natural environments and or heightens the responsiveness of natural environments. Responsiveness, as we understand it, is *not* properly attributable to media. Media *supplement* the responsiveness of natural environments, and natural environments that are *always already* there whenever we devise, develop, and deploy media. Natural environments precede, succeed, and exceed any and all media.

We use the word supplement astutely, as stalwart deconstructionists. Natural environments as responsive environments are inconceivable apart from the media that supplement them and modify/affect their responsiveness. That being said, however, we maintain that it is *dis-empowering* to consider responsiveness to be an attribute/effect of media and that it is *empowering* to, instead, consider responsiveness to be an attribute/effect of natural environments that we are able to modify/affect with and through media.

What's more, we maintain that responsiveness is “mistakenly” attributed to media when media that heightens is surrounded by media that dulls. And here we have the primary problem with the responsive media environment in which we have staged today's drama: the iStage is an apparatus that heightens the responsiveness of natural environments, yes, but the iStage only does this from within the black box theatre, and the black box theatre that surrounds the iStage is a medium that dulls the responsiveness of natural environment.

Indeed, the term “responsive media environment” makes sense to us only insofar as it refers to a heightening medium (e.g., the iStage) that is *confined, enclosed, and surrounded* by a dulling medium (e.g., a black box theatre). For us, what is more interesting than the responsive media environment is the *opening to a natural environment*. That is to say, to construct an opening to a natural environment is to construct forms of heightening media that *de-construct* forms of dulling media, forms of heightening media that breach confines, enclosures, and surrounds of dulling media. And it follows that, instead of creating works of enactive theater that take place indoors, we would prefer to create *works of enactive theatre that open doors*, allowing what is indoors to escape outdoors and allowing what is outdoors to intrude indoors.

After having experienced *the Gift and the Ledger* staged *within* a responsive media environment, we ask that you consider the following question: how might we re-stage the Gift and the Ledger with and through new media as an opening to a natural environment?

¹ A “natural environment” is our term for what philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls a “pure ground” in his book *Difference and Repetition* (Columbia University Press, 1995, pg. 152). That is to say, a natural environment is a “pure ground” that “rises to the surface yet assumes neither form nor figure”: individuated entities distinguish themselves from a natural environment, yes, but a natural environment does not distinguish itself, continuing rather to cohabit with those individuated entities that have distinguished themselves from it. The natural environment is “the indeterminate, but the indeterminate in so far as it continues to embrace determination”. The iStage is not a natural environment in so far as it is a determinate entity existing within a black box theatre, a black box theatre that is itself another determinate entity.