Staging Decadence

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Staging Decadence

Theatre, Performance, and the Ends of Capitalism

Adam Alston

Series Editors
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METHUEN DRAMA
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2023

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3502-3704-9
ePDF: 978-1-3502-3706-3
eBook: 978-1-3502-3705-6

Series: Methuen Drama Engage

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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Arts and Humanities Research Council

For those in search of putrid bounty
Alice Condé, Jane Desmarais, Jess Gossling, and Owen Parry

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1

Zombie time

Sickness, performance, and the living dead

Decadence refers to a process of falling or flowing away from an established order or hierarchy, often in ways that stylize and refine decay by luxuriating in its putrid bounty. Decadence falls and flows through time and anticipates endings, giving it a crepuscular quality – hence its affiliation with the fin de siècle. This gives decadence an apocalyptic flavour, but decadence also makes space for revelling or languishing in endings – including those things we might wish to bring to an end, cultivating a taste for their defilement – and anticipates forms of doing and not doing that might come after the end. This makes performance as a time-based art a particularly interesting forum for exploring the temporal qualities of decadence. Performance is an entropic art of making and unmaking, disappearing and haunting, ending only to be reanimated again, in one form or another, night after night.

This chapter explores the chronic qualities of decadence in performance by turning to the work of an 'artist who believes he's a zombie', as the BBC put it in a sensational headline: the British live artist Martin O'Brien.[1] How do zombies experience the passing of time? What do they have to say about 'good' uses of time – about diligence and labour, for instance, or career ambitions? Do they mind that their bodies are decomposing, and what do they make of one another's decay? Are they concerned by the apocalypse they are said to inhabit? There are a number of artist-zombies who could have been asked in exploring these questions – like Jenny Lawson and her strategies for 'becoming zombie', Claire Hind and Gary Winters with their embodiments of the dead, or any number of flesh-eaters performing in immersive zombie experiences and protests.[2] However, I opted for O'Brien because of the different ways in which his work engages with the chronic as both time and illness, and because of the relevance of his practice to this book's overarching concern with decadence and the ends of capitalism.

All of O'Brien's work is grounded in his experience of living with cystic fibrosis (CF) beyond the age of thirty, which he was told would mark the

likely span of his life. O'Brien is not the first to embrace CF as a stimulus for performance. He is working in the shadow of Bob Flanagan, who died of the disease in 1996. Flanagan's creative collaborations with life partner and mistress Sheree Rose have been well-documented, particularly their use of S&M in both managing and aestheticizing Flanagan's disease – an approach that has since inspired O'Brien's own practice.[3] Rose has also collaborated with O'Brien on a number of projects, including the staging of performances that were planned by Flanagan and Rose, but unrealized in Flanagan's lifetime, including *Dust to Dust* (2015), which was presented in Los Angeles in the United States, and *The Viewing* (2016), which was shared at DadaFest in Liverpool in the UK. These performances epitomize 'the kind of queer affiliations that challenge rote and rigidly mainstream conceptions of kinship and family', to borrow from art historian Amelia Jones, given that O'Brien becomes a kind of surrogate for Flanagan, and an adopted 'son' to Mistress Rose.[4] However, O'Brien's practice also reaches beyond the caretaking of Flanagan's legacy, especially in works that centre his interest in the zombie – and it is these works that draw focus in this chapter.

O'Brien describes the years lived since his thirtieth birthday as 'zombie time',[5] embodying the zombie as a way of exploring chronic illness and a temporality that flows away from the attachments and anxieties that affect how time is experienced in work-oriented cultures and in a globally distributed marketplace. His zombies are not the bewitched slaves associated with African-diasporic zombies, which feature in some of the earliest zombie movies, like Victor and Edward Halperin's film *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Where these films trace zombies to their Haitian roots, depicting Black people dispossessed of consciousness by sorcerers and colonial masters, George A. Romero made them chomp their way through society as 'mindless engines of decay', beginning with *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and continuing through other classics of the subgenre including *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985).[6] Romero's zombies do not become zombies because they are bewitched, although in *Night of the Living Dead* they are mysteriously reanimated by radiation from an exploded satellite. They propagate by consuming the flesh of humans. Romero made zombies infectious.

O'Brien riffs on the sickness and infectiousness of Romero's living dead, and the subversive potential of zombies once they congregate as a horde in the ruins of capitalism. Of particular note is Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, which finds zombies trudging through an abandoned shopping mall, unsure whether to consume the flesh of their victims or the latest fashion, as well as *Day of the Dead*, in which zombies overcome the attempts of living humans to domesticate their unusual tastes and drives. O'Brien shares Romero's

interest in the zombie as a contagious entity, as a surrogate for workers and consumers, and as a powerful horde. He is also drawn to the unusualness of their desire to feast indiscriminately on human flesh. None of these characteristics are decadent in themselves, but O'Brien turns their unusual appetites into a desirable taste for sickness and decay, lusting after sickness, the sick, and abject pleasures. This is what lends his zombies to decadence, which also does something interesting to how the ruins and ruination of capitalism are imagined. In O'Brien's hands, productivism – which refers to the centring of intensified productivity as a basis for self-realization, and a panacea for ailing economies – is corrupted, crumbling into a conception of society based not on the apparent permanency and intractability of productivism, but the abject pleasures and desires of the sick. In the worlds he imagines and stages, it is the kingdom of the sick – famously explored by Susan Sontag – that reigns supreme.[7]

O'Brien's invitation to consider what might happen to desire in the kingdom of the sick has taken on fresh significance in the years since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Horror movie fans were quick to connect the pandemic with the zombie's insatiable appetite and the deserted streets of quarantined towns and cities, and O'Brien has been explicit in connecting his own interest in the zombie apocalypse with the time of the pandemic, in which the normative time of business-as-usual was suspended.[8] This is an important consideration, as his work has more to offer than a purely pathological reading allows, and it is not autobiographical;[9] it is situated within and speaks to a particular and evolving social and cultural context, inflecting his work with new meanings and significance along the way. At the same time, it would be egregious to uncouple his idea of zombie time from the chronic illness that inspired its staging. This chapter therefore traces *proximities* between zombie time and interminable waiting during the pandemic, opening out to address a much broader range of issues including the medicalization of sickness, outbreak narratives, and the prizing of ever-improved health, growth, progress, and productive capabilities.

Two concerns draw particular focus. The first is an ethical concern that has to do with the expectations that surround those living in productivist societies. This concern is linked to decadence in a pejorative sense that derides the passing of time in ways that are deemed to be a waste of time, as well as forms of productivity, capability, and desire that are seen to be somehow 'unnatural' or at odds with ever-increasing healthiness and ever-expanding growth. However, I am also interested in how oppositionality might form the basis of a more positive valuation of the same factors. This leads me to the second core concern, which has to do with futurity. What might we learn from the embodiment and enactment of practices that fall

away from dominant narratives of progress? O'Brien's zombies return to different parts of this question, inviting us to query assumptions that measure progress on the basis of continual growth, the enhancement of physical and social capabilities, and the unabated intensification of productivity. In short, the challenge these zombies pose to productivism is grounded in a decadent desire to inhabit and propagate the kingdom of the sick.

Interminable waiting

One of the last performances I attended before the UK entered its first period of lockdown in the Spring of 2020 was a lecture performance at the Tate Britain in London, called *Until the Last Breath is Breathed* (2018–20). As a lecture performance, this was one of O'Brien's more reserved performances compared with his earlier actions, which tend to be very messy in their use of bodily fluids and buckets or tubs of thick green mucus-like gunge, as well as challenging in their incorporation of scarring and piercing of the body, and radical in their staging of queer desires and actions inspired by S&M practices and CF treatment regimes. *Until the Last Breath is Breathed* incorporated some familiar but less messy and resource-intensive actions from these earlier performances, including heavy pounding of his bare chest to release mucus (derived from a therapeutic exercise) and the use of an S&M breath restrictor or 're-breathe hood', as well as monologues recycled or adapted from several earlier works, including *If It Were the Apocalypse I'd Eat You to Stay Alive* (2015–17), *The Unwell* (2016), and *The Ascension* (2017). Several actions were also screened from a durational performance presented to a group of friends in an abandoned morgue in the hours leading up to his thirtieth birthday – the point at which he was told his life would end – including acts of self-cannibalism, which find O'Brien gnawing at his own joints and limbs, carving the shape of lungs onto his chest using a scalpel, and repeatedly blowing on a relighting birthday candle. (O'Brien sometimes uses the term 'endurance art' rather than 'durational performance', but the latter highlights the temporal significances of his practice).[10]

'This is the beginning of the zombie years', he tells us as the performance gets underway; 'I should be dead but I'm not. [. . .] Now I'm existing in a different time. This is the zombie time, the time of the animated corpse. I feel immortal. Death is behind me instead of in front. Zombie time is a different relationship to death, and life. It's about survival, but also infecting, creating a horde'. He daydreams about a river of phlegm that oozes through cities and villages, bubbling out of taps. People start to cough. They become diseased in a festering, viral landscape – but a luminary also preaches about a

different way of inhabiting this land. He speaks of a queer zombie apocalypse in which desires fall and flow away from normative expectations. 'The virus would infect people and kill them, but they would immediately return. [. . .] What would follow, so the luminary foretold, was the end of civilization as we know it'.[11]

Although recycled from earlier works, this sermon on sickness speaks to the hopes and fears that were circulating when the Covid-19 pandemic reared its head. Television screens and radio waves made ruination and inertia hyper-present while residents of quiet streets hauled up indoors, but what was to follow seemed an open question at risk of closure. In the UK populist impulses drew many people back to a pseudo-imperialist nostalgia based on rebuilding structures of oppression from the wreckage of an economy on its knees. The popularity of Victory in Europe (VE) Day celebrations is a case in point, with street parties marking one of the few opportunities for public gatherings that were socially legitimated at the time. As Priscilla Wald suggests in an influential study of outbreak narratives, the time of a pandemic is a time in which interaction is risky, but it is also a time when the bonds of a community can be disrupted or cemented.[12] The street parties marking VE Day bore out the latter in contrast to the more radical or reformist hopes that many on the Left pinned to the suspension of business-as-usual.

Communities based on reactionary nostalgia tend to breed xenophobic attitudes, and the pandemic was no exception,[13] but O'Brien's practice imagines a different kind of community based on the queering of dominant outbreak narratives. There's no triumph of humankind over disease, no attempt to expunge sickness and the sick, and no vigilante or medical authority rescuing a nation from the peril of infection. O'Brien's vision is based on dispersal, on rivers of phlegm lateralizing hierarchies, and on coughs serving as the hallmark of a community of equals. His practice is shaped by his own experiences of a specific chronic illness, but he has also been explicit in discussing how zombie time speaks to the time of the pandemic, as noted earlier. Zombie time and the time of the pandemic are not synonymous – those fending off the prospect of death have a different relationship to mortality compared with those for whom 'death is behind [. . .] instead of in front' – although there is a proximity between them insofar as both bring time's passing into focus, and how particular acts of passing time either play into or fall away from dominant modes of imagining community.

I was due to attend another of O'Brien's performances, *The Last Breath Society (Coughing Coffin)*, at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London the month after his lecture performance at Tate Britain, but it was cancelled once it became clear that the spread of the virus had evolved into a pandemic.[14] Its premiere had to wait until July 2021, once restrictions on

social interaction were lifted and the particular risk to those living with CF was reduced – a delay that seems appropriate given this durational performance's preoccupation with death, waiting, and the passing of time.

The performance was based around the manipulation and dismantling of eight black coffins. At times O'Brien would clamber inside an upright coffin and tilt it precariously from side to side like a ticking metronome, each time getting closer and closer to a point of collapse. At others he would hang the long flat edge of a coffin's interior along his back, making it look like it had sprouted legs. He would seal himself inside coffins, he would smash them, he would pile them one on top of another. He also recorded their handling on a series of tape recorders, as well as other sounds emitted throughout the performance: the sound of laboured breathing while wearing a re-breathe hood; the sound of violent gargling after an assistant forces O'Brien to drink water poured through a metal funnel into his open mouth; the sound of him dragging a stuffed hammerhead shark along the floor with his teeth. All of these objects – the re-breathe hood, tools of domination and subordination, a taxidermy shark – would have been familiar to anyone acquainted with O'Brien's earlier practice. They ghost the work. This performance was also the first time that previous iterations of the *same* work played into the hauntology of his practice. It was structured around the sounds of previous performances being re-played on tape recorders, making this a performance not of four hours – the duration of the live element that excludes time for attending an installation beforehand – but thirty-two hours across eight days (Figure 1.1).

Actions within a single performance followed an order that was repeated in reverse in its second half. Sometimes these actions were performed in ways that seemed to be the product of methodical planning, and sometimes in clearly improvisatory ways, but they always took a long time to complete. Time stretched as we watched O'Brien's body labour through the tasks, 'sometimes pushed to the edges of its capacities and repeated with a dedicated work ethic', as performance scholar Gianna Bouchard puts it in a commentary on his earlier performances.[15] The work ethic in question, though, is not necessarily based on the achievement of a specific goal. As the philosopher Alphonso Lingis suggests, his performances – almost purgatorial in character – manifest 'a time of waiting and of convulsive effort that [does] not advance or build or accomplish'.[16] O'Brien stages a hypnotic and absorbing form of creative endeavour that makes space for reflection and the settling of affect: not the consummation of a practice in a conventionally productive outcome, so much as an opening up of possibilities that court unpredictable consequences, including collapse.

As a durational work involving a lot of waiting – a work that was also commissioned by a Welcome Trust project, 'Waiting Times', exploring

Figure 1.1 Martin O'Brien, *The Last Breath Society* (2021). Institute for Contemporary Art, London. Photo by Holly Revell.

temporal experiences and practices of care in medical contexts[17] – *The Last Breath Society* was also about cultivating a different relationship to time: an *interminable waiting* in which moments of affective intensity were interrupted by protracted periods of meditative stillness, in which nothing much happened, or in which things happened very, very slowly. The psychosocial scholar Lisa Baraitser (a joint Principle Investigator of the 'Waiting Times' project) encourages us to think about this kind of waiting as a 'suspension' of time that can 'produce felt experiences of time *not passing*': a time in which temporal imaginaries can be invoked 'that have a tangential relation to those that characterize "the capitalist everyday", thereby stilling, even if they don't manage to disrupt, modes of production based on utility or exchange'.[18] Key to this 'capitalist everyday', I suggest, is what the economic geographer David Harvey calls 'time-space compression'. Time-space compression refers to the shrinking of time horizons in a globalized world that facilitates instantaneous transactions and communication.[19] The shrinking of a world made more accessible to those enabled by capitalism, and the intensification of a time in which more and more is achievable, is a self-perpetuating phenomenon that can arouse a desire for its furthering: for instance, getting to different places quicker and more smoothly, and achieving more in less time, regardless of necessity. The taken-for-granted-ness of time-space compression is part

and parcel of 'the capitalist everyday' today, and its continual enhancement underpins an important aspect of how socio-economic progress is appraised in advanced capitalist economies. It is also one of the things that distinguish productivity in general from productivism in particular. Productivism is the consequence of compressed space and time, potentially facilitating the achievement of more in less time, but more often than not resulting in a counterproductive and directionless busyness.

The queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman explores a similar idea to the suspension of time when she pitches queer temporalities in opposition to '*chrononormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity'.[20] O'Brien's production of interminable waiting, in the sense of suspending the compressed and intensified times of chrononormativity, might then read as a 'useless' use of time, but only to the extent that the using of time falls away from chrononormativity. The ways in which O'Brien passes time in performance are still meaningful and significant as 'necessary excavations of [. . .] self-agency and imagining the capability of choice from within lives deprived of these by sickness and the intense medical routines that this demands'.[21] Determining usefulness or uselessness depends on the register one uses to make that judgement, and takes nothing away from the significance or meaningfulness of how time is passed. O'Brien's work shines a spotlight on the cultural politics of designating a particular passing of time as useful or useless, in sync or at odds with the pursuit of time-space compression and the kinds of body and capability that it favours.

Suspended time has the capacity to 'still' the busyness of time-space compression, and can inspire sensitivity towards modes of chronic experience that are not based on an explicitly healthy or productive use of time ('chronic' both in the temporal sense of that word, and, as we watch O'Brien suffer for his art, physiological too). O'Brien approaches time as an (im)material, experimenting with what the art writer Stephen Wright describes as a 'fuzzy' time that is 'recalcitrant to the tyranny of real time': an invitation, perhaps, to think about the reclamation of time in terms of a temporal commons that exceeds the spatial.[22] The interminable waiting endured by O'Brien – and his audiences – is antithetical to the chronicity of the capitalist everyday. Otherwise put, the recalcitrant and fuzzy passing of time in this performance is what makes it *ana-chronistic*.

The anachronistic codification of temporal experience in *The Last Breath Society* felt especially resonant as I stood in the airy studio space of the ICA in what turned out to be a period of respite between two waves of infection during the Covid-19 pandemic. There was no shortage of time to mull over the past and to reflect on the present and the future in periods

of lockdown. Days, weeks, and months seemed to blur into one another; they acquired a 'viscosity', to borrow another of Baraitser's tropes.[23] There were no social engagements to speak of other than those held online, leaving work as one of the few activities left to mark time's passing, not least for those living alone, as I was at the time, and who were neither furloughed nor jobless as a precarious freelance worker or as someone unemployed. Putting time to use lent itself to the marking of its passing during the pandemic, often in ways that risked distorting an appreciation of its mindful experience – apart from when time had been judiciously allocated for mindful reflection.

The Last Breath Society was reimagined from the ground up when the pandemic reared its head, having been commissioned before its emergence.[24] What was ultimately presented to audiences was clearly a response to the undoing of chrononormativity and its impact on sociality. Time passed in ways that were useless in a productivist sense, taken up with gestures and actions that, with time, became significant as indices of a life lived longer than expected. This was a performance about the lived experience of survival – of living with death – but it was also about the insights that emerge from the time and space of doing and experiencing nothing in particular: the time and space, perhaps, of the temporal commons.[25] It was structured around a sequence of repeated actions, manifesting '[t]he repetitively performed impossibility to reach what one is aiming for', as the performance scholar Eirini Kartsaki writes;[26] however, it was ultimately *in*action and stillness that prompted reflection on the counting of a productive use of time, and the kinds of meaning that one might derive from or attach to the use of time (Figure 1.2).

Time that is passed in ways that flow away from a normatively useful or productive spending of time need not be a waste of time. As the playwright Chris Thorpe observes in a reflection on theatre making in the wake of the pandemic, 'the biggest waste of time is the time you spent punching yourself for not being as productive as you'd been taught to expect'.[27] Thorpe advocates for the unexpected affordances of reflection, surprise, intimacy, and slow learning that can emerge from the time and space of doing nothing in particular. *The Last Breath Society* does something similar, although it is not simply about clearing mental space in order to render oneself more productive in the future; it is about luxuriating in or suffering through the aimless passing of time.

Slowness and interminable waiting, hovering between impulses to act and inertia, are what characterize this performance's decadence most of all. One of the reasons why I wanted to dive into this performance as one of the first detailed examples considered in this book is because of the ways it makes clear, from the outset, that decadence in performance need not

Figure 1.2 Martin O'Brien, *The Last Breath Society* (2021). Institute for Contemporary Art, London. Photo by Manuel Vason.

necessarily refer to immoderate wastefulness in the sense of some mindless profligacy leading to massive expenditure on material resource. There is an asceticism to this performance: discipline and sparseness, especially, but also wasting time in the productivist sense and expending energy that might otherwise be put to productivist use. This 'would seem to be the very opposite of excess', to borrow from the philosopher Karmen MacKendrick: 'a defiance even of the moderate demands of one's bodily and social selves, certainly a defiance of hedonistic extravagance. Yet it is in this *defiance* that we find not only the *pleasure* of asceticism' – what she refers to as a form of 'counterpleasure' – but 'a denial beyond all moderation'.[28] For MacKendrick, counterpleasures invoke pleasures (of the kind explored by Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, among others) that are explicitly 'nonproductive', and that 'tend away from all sorts of teleologies. Even the aim of subject shattering' in certain kinds of submissive and masochistic practice 'can be approached only indirectly, and will destroy the pleasures if it takes them over'.[29] The asceticism of O'Brien's practice, particularly its 'denial beyond all moderation' of productivist endeavour, its improvisatory refusal of goal-oriented action, and its languishing in a recalcitrant and fuzzy time, is what lends that practice to decadence, particularly once drawn into the orbit of a taste for the abject and the counterpleasures of queer desire. It is to such tastes and desires that the next section turns.

Zombie time

Until the Last Breath Is Breathed and *The Last Breath Society* both explore zombie time, although the zombies familiar from popular cinema do not feature in either. Zombiedom is explicitly referenced in *Until the Last Breath Is Breathed*, but O'Brien appears as himself; he does not look like a zombie, at least not the campy zombies made famous by Romero in his classic films, although he does permit zombies to appear in the mind's eye in his monologues. The same is true of *The Last Breath Society*, although to a lesser extent. O'Brien presents himself as a living corpse, but there is no attempt to mimic pop-cultural zombiedom. However, the pop-cultural zombie is pulled front and centre in some of O'Brien's other works, queering these zombies in ways that are distinctly decadent.

Multiple histories have informed the development of zombiedom in twentieth-century popular culture. As noted earlier, some of the earliest depictions of zombies in cinema – including *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie* – make explicit reference to the zombie's roots in the African diaspora and slavery. Performance scholar Lee Miller defines the African-diasporic zombies in these films as 'proto-zombies': completely objectified forerunners under the influence of a colonial master or sorcerer that tend to be whitewashed in the late-twentieth-century renaissance of zombie films inspired by Romero, although it is notable that *Night of the Living Dead* cast a Black actor as a protagonist seeking refuge from an army of predominantly white flesh-eaters.[30] O'Brien's living dead owe more to the kitschy cultishness of Romero, which is an important point. Where zombies of the African diaspora were generally depicted as being controlled by a zombie master,[31] O'Brien turns to the cult cinematic zombie as a stimulus for exploring the retrieval of autonomy from a specific disciplinary regime (medicine) in a society that pushes sickness and queerness (as distinct from the mainstreaming of homosexuality) to its peripheries. The environmental conditions in which O'Brien's submissive actions take place are of his own choosing, as is the public spectacularization of more explicit acts of degradation (in a particularly memorable example he pours a bucket of his own shit mixed with gold paint over his head, extracted by means of an enema – a purgative that interested several decadent writers).[32] However, as O'Brien points out, there is also a clear 'tension between voluntary endurance in performance and the endurance of a life lived within the duration of slow death'.[33]

The constellation of themes that I will be exploring in this section – unconventional productivity, drawing sickness into the orbit of desire, antithetical relations to the quantification of goal-oriented progress,

and a taste for decay and abjection – lends O'Brien's zombies a decadent edge once put into dialogue with more typical features of the zombies made famous by Romero, especially their idleness, slowness, and inertia (as compared with post-millennial 'Zombie 2.0' films like *28 Days Later* (2002), in which zombies appear as frenzied monsters).[34] These themes are especially present in O'Brien's film *The Unwell* (2016), which was made in collaboration with the filmmaker and musician Suhail Ilyas, and was originally intended as 'a strange, tongue in cheek utopia [. . .] in which only the sick can survive'[35] – although it took on weightier resonances with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting O'Brien to re-release the film in March 2020 when the survival of the sickest was in particular jeopardy.

The film opens with a zombie labourer crawling on his hands and knees out of a woodland, his high-vis jacket glowing in the dark. He is alone, as are all of the sixteen zombies we encounter in empty car parks, squares, and industrial estates. As the film cuts to an empty highway, we hear O'Brien intoning a monologue: '[t]his used to be the most optimistic city in the world. Now the sun never rises. The shops are never open. The birds never sing. The streets are always empty. [. . .] Perhaps this place used to be beautiful, but it seems as though it has experienced an apocalypse'. A zombie staggers in an abandoned shopping mall. 'Time has ended here [. . .]. But something still remains [. . .]. Something moves slowly through the darkness. They have replaced human life. They resemble us, but they are not us. They fill the city with an unwell sound'.[36] Heavy breathing . . . Phlegmy coughs . . . Voicings of an inner creature that do not adhere to language: 'the voice of illness', demanding to be heard.[37]

Zombie time underpins a logic of futurity in *The Unwell*, a logic that is also closely indexed to the present. To paraphrase the feminist, queer, and disability theorist Alison Kafer, how one comes to understand sickness in the present determines how one imagines sickness in the future.[38] To conceptualize the absence of sickness in positive terms and the presence of sickness in negative terms is to limit how we might come to imagine sickness in the future: that is, we would be better off without, for good. For instance, bio-medical discourse understands the time of sickness as a 'curative time' defined by prognosis and the prospect of remission.[39] This discourse reads time and futurity through a progressive journey from sickness to health, or the management of occurrences and relapse. Alongside bio-medical discourse, productivism is another influence that forecloses sick futures. Productivism sees sickness as a hindrance to the maximization of productivity, or in Kafer's terms 'as obstacles to the arc of progress', unless rehabilitation positions the sick as a 'sign of progress, the proof of development, the triumph over the mind or body'.[40]

Understanding ever-improving health as an inherent good and as a necessity for productive enterprise negates the politics of sickness, insofar as the desirability of sick experiences, sick feelings, sick people, and sick capacities are assumed to be 'against nature' and beyond debate in their wrongness. O'Brien's experimentation with futurity (as with other kinds of queer and crip futurities)[41] refuses this act of foreclosure by challenging the assumptions that determine the casting of sickness as that which must be purged in a 'healthier' and 'more productive' present or future. Instead, he celebrates activities that unfold in zombie time – especially those activities that are indulged for their own sake (lingering, observing, wandering, longing) – and does so through the fabulation of post-apocalyptic worlds and scenarios in which the sickest both survive *and thrive*, drifting away from, while remaining haunted by, productive regimes 'in order to make room for pleasure'.[42]

In his filmed work, the passing of zombie time is 'mapped' more concretely in comparison with his live performances, where there is greater openness to unpredictability in live events that might, just might, go wrong, or that are guided by indefinite ends. Nonetheless, these films make space for silence and stillness, which encourages those watching to attend to the flow of zombie time. Zombies in *The Unwell* also roam the ruins of productivism. O'Brien's zombies might find themselves dressed as workers, but time is not passed by working. They feed on their own flesh, consuming themselves as if haunted by auto-exploitation, and yet their silent bodies also 'speak' to futurity – what the performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz, after the philosopher Ernst Bloch, calls the 'not yet conscious' of a future society 'that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment'.[43] Their slow stagger is not goal-oriented. They have no career ambitions. It is as if the structures and processes of zombification have vanished, leaving behind a dazed horde – only now the zombies are awakening to a new kind of potentiality.

Zombie time is not to be confused with the 'chronic' time of capitalism, which refuses to die despite perennial crises, its life endlessly extended by means of political and organizational ingenuity. For the cultural theorist Eric Cazdyn, to 'settle for the new chronic is to choose the known limits of the present over the unknown freedom of the future'.[44] In contrast, O'Brien's embrace of zombie time as an (im)material in film and performance is about a relationship to the future: an exceptional time in which death is behind and not in front (not being-*toward*-death, in its Heideggerian formulation, so much as death-*in*-and-*behind*-being), and in which acts of fabulation prefigure a strange and radically different future.[45] In this, O'Brien's zombies have more in common with what Cazdyn calls the 'already dead' insofar as these zombies suggest 'a future beyond the temporal constraints of the new

chronic [. . .] informed by a certain way of living in time and space, and in relation to an unknown and unrealized future'.[46] However, it is sickness – not its 'cure' or expungement – that forms the basis for this 'certain way of living in time and space', a notion that would be quite unpalatable for Cazdyn despite his own experiences of living with a chronic illness.[47]

Sickness forms the basis of the clearest sign of life that these zombies have, as well as their clearest form of productivity. The frequent coughs that are a hallmark of CF and that punctuate the film are what remains of life – convulsive sickness animates the coughing body – and they are also symptomatic of an unconventional productivity that finds the body producing an excess of phlegm. This makes O'Brien's zombies excessively productive as a 'mucus factory' – a term that O'Brien draws from Bob Flanagan[48] – but in a way that would not be recognized as a particularly useful or valuable form of productivity in medical contexts or in the capitalist everyday given the limited ways in which physical capability is understood in these contexts. O'Brien's zombies queer 'healthy' productivity by framing an alternative capacity, which productivism recognizes as an incapacity, as a site of excessive production.

O'Brien's zombies are also driven by and drawn to an uncommon sense and a taste for the distasteful, which the decadence scholar David Weir identifies as a key feature of decadence.[49] Their kingdom of the sick is a kingdom of infection, a kingdom in which 'mortality is sexy'.[50] Their taste for the distasteful draws them to this kingdom, although it is not a taste that is cultivated in the reclusive environs of an ivory tower. Their uncommon sense is connected to an irresistible intimacy: a queer intimacy with strangers based on acts of consumption, communion, and consummation. Their uncommon sense is also not altogether 'indifferent to right and wrong', which Jack Halberstam identifies as a hallmark of pop-cultural zombies.[51] Unlike Romero's stumbling flesh-eaters, O'Brien's zombies seem to be awakening to a social consciousness of a kind that makes space for bodies and acts deemed abject or unnatural. Their behaviour is not based on an ethos, although in falling away from the normative streaming of desire and appetite they make apparent the extent to which productivism shapes desire and appetite. They are driven instead by a conflation of sickness and desire, prompting reflection on the assumptions and prejudices that stick to sick bodies in societies that prioritize the productive capabilities of the healthy.

It is important to emphasize the humour in these kingdoms of the sick. O'Brien does not want to die, and he does not want others to fall ill. These are fables told with a wry smile.[52] For instance, a monologue in *Until the Last Breath is Breathed* descends from an innocent memory of participating as an actor in a live zombie horror experience to delighting in the putrid and

sloppy practicalities of sex between zombies, imagining what it must be like to be smothered by the ass of another zombie, 'with the smell of death and rotten organs emanating out of it. I couldn't help but imagine his massive, rotten gangrenous penis shooting blood and puss all over me'.[53] O'Brien's tongue may be in his cheek – or between cheeks, as the case may be – but there is also a seriousness behind the nods, winks, and abject humour. He invites his audiences to question teleological narratives of health, growth, and betterment, and the prizing of capabilities well-suited to productivity's continual intensification.

Bio-medical science and the capitalist everyday provide the clearest examples of the kind of teleological narratives of health, growth, and betterment that O'Brien's zombies refuse. However, other, particularly illuminating, examples can also be found in Marxist literature, which one might otherwise assume would be an ally of those pushed to the margins of society. For instance, György Lukács, in his essay 'Healthy or Sick Art?' (1934), finds irremediable regression in the collapsing of love into 'mere' eroticism, of eroticism declining into 'mere' sexuality, and sexuality into 'mere' phallicism.[54] He goes on:

> The man of decadent bourgeois society who stunts himself spiritually and morally not only has to go on living and acting in his crippled state; in this inhuman self-deformity, he must even seek a psychological and moral 'cosmic' justification for his condition. And he finds this justification, too, no longer basing his conception of the world on how the world is objectively constituted or how it affords a real object of mankind's revolutionary practical activity; instead he adapts his conception of the world to fit his own deformity and to provide an appropriate environment for his own crippled state.[55]

O'Brien queers what Lukács sees in this 'man'. In fact, it is not a man at all that O'Brien imagines, but an 'inhuman' zombie – a sick zombie who seeks cosmic justification for the condition of zombiedom, and who does so by basing a conception of the world not on the realism of its objective constitution, but a conception that fits his sickness, desires, and the abject sickness of those desires. The revolutionary consciousness of these zombies reacts to the reality of a society that does not accommodate their alternative capabilities and productivities, their distaste for the useful and taste for decay, or their uncommon desires. Where Lukács limits his interest in decay and ruination to their socially mimetic representation as 'unhealthy' symptoms of a decadent society that has lost sight of its monolithically revolutionary purpose,[56] O'Brien's kingdom of the sick presents a challenge to the values

that codify and shape ideas of progress and regress, and that lead to the measurement, monitoring, and privileging of 'health' and 'the healthy'.

O'Brien does not regard health in teleological terms, as that which must be 'improved' and 'bettered' with time, but instead turns to his own temporal experience of sickness as a basis for thinking about and intervening within the spheres of social and cultural production, or mimetic reproduction (with Jacques Derrida, we might say that O'Brien's '[e]schatology breaks teleology apart'; it has an astonishing side to it that is alien to the achievement of a goal).[57] Progression along a legitimated path might be eased for those attuned to established arcs of progress, but, as the cultural philosopher Sara Ahmed puts it, '[i]t can be wearing to inhabit a world that is not built for you'.[58] O'Brien's zombies are ghosted by productivism's exhausting excesses, which is especially evident in *The Unwell*, but he also steers their incompatibility with productivism along a different path. The daydreams and sermons that O'Brien stages or narrates in his performances and films are always set in some unknown future, a future that is near, in which the smell of decay 'is an aphrodisiac'.[59] These daydreams and narratives prefigure alternative worlds that are at odds with regimes of progress based on teleological and contingent notions of betterment and enlightenment: the purity of a gene pool, for instance, or the integrity of a family unit, or designs upon the health and wealth of a nation and its capacity to continually grow and to produce ever-more productively and competitively in a global marketplace. In O'Brien's kingdoms of the sick, unproductive counterpleasures are enjoyed by unusually abject entities: the very monsters and nightmares imagined by societies fixated on linear conceptions of progress. Also, when he describes zombie time, it is not in the future tense; 'This *is* the zombie time. The time of the animated corpse. [. . .] It's no longer linear. It's full of breaks and ambushes. In zombie time you keep moving, but not towards anything. [. . .] No goals, only desires. No plans, only reactions'.[60] This time of the animated corpse is out of step with productivist-led conceptions of progress. It is an errant time that luxuriates in its passing.

In sum, the ways in which O'Brien conjoins sickness and desire, along with a conception of futurity that resists productivist regimes of progress, are important factors in what lends his work to decadence. He stages a decadent historicity that rejects the steering of progress towards spurious notions of betterment, growth, health, and productivity. His embodiment of the zombie and explorations of zombie time encourages us to think beyond the realism of productivism in ways that challenge its taken-for-granted-ness, just as his rejection of conventional progress narratives invites us to think beyond the myth of perpetual growth in capitalist economies condemned to perennial crises. The futures he prefigures are not based on these narratives and myths; they are based on the centring of abject bodies and behaviours, on the time

of the sick, and the ruins of a post-apocalyptic world. In short, *these* zombies lend themselves to decadence. They manifest a decadent temporality at odds with both the compression and intensification of productivist time, and the positioning of productivism and its conventionally healthy stakeholders as engines and guarantors of progress.

Conclusion

What lends the performances discussed in this chapter to decadence is their conjoining of sickness, queerness and desire, a taste for abjection, their fascination with morbidity, their disruption of chrononormativity, and a conception of futurity that resists or corrupts productivism. The kingdoms of the sick he imagines are not based on the myth of perpetual growth and betterment, but sickness, abjection, and the post-apocalypse. Time flows differently in these kingdoms, away from the compression and intensification of productivist tempos and rhythms. His embodiment of the zombie also demands engagement with the viscerality and temporality of chronic sickness, desires that fall and flow away from 'healthy' attachments, and unconventional productivities – for instance, in their excessive production of phlegm.

Zombie time and interminable waiting are first and foremost about conceptualizing a different relationship to death, experiencing it not in teleological terms – not as a point one reaches – but as that which is already experienced as being both present within a body, and behind it as a subject who has surpassed their own life expectancy.[61] For O'Brien, the pandemic brought about a newly dispersed proximity to zombie time as millions of people around the world negotiated a different relationship to death and the prospect of 'gainful' employment, throwing into question what might be meant by gainfulness as a condition of living or a possibility for thriving. This makes it all the more important to resist pathologizing O'Brien's work as being 'about' his own chronic illness – his performances are not autobiographical – although experiences of the chronic clearly frame and shape each aspect of his practice, including his engagement with the kingdom of the sick. His zombies invite us to imagine these kingdoms as places where time flows differently, no longer bound to the injunctions of productivism, stretching time rather than compressing and intensifying its passing and use: a time of crescendos as much as cadences, growth as much as decay, creativity as much as ruination, and the creativity to be found *in* ruination, the aesthetics *of* decay, and an experimental relationship to futurity that refuses the myth of perpetual growth, and the cultish pursuit of more.

Notes

Introduction

1 'HERE RAW – Staging Decadence', HERE Arts Centre, New York City, 9 September 2021. http://here.org/shows/raw21-staging-decadence/?fbclid=IwAR1ceRaNhq_MnGBfLuPpShr0emQphuwkHJSdAKoUh_ewShc2wKJ_i2ESD9k, accessed 30 June 2022. This salon was one of several events associated with an Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellowship, titled 'Staging Decadence: Decadent Theatre in the Long Twentieth Century' (2020–2). For more on the Staging Decadence project, visit: www.stagingdecadence.com.

2 Normandy Sherwood qtd. in *Staging Decadence* [film], created by Adam Alston, Owen Parry, and Sophie Farrell, 12 May 2022, https://www.stagingdecadence.com/films, accessed 12 May 2022.

3 Normandy Sherwood, Interview with the author. HERE Arts Centre, New York, 9 September 2021.

4 Border crossing has been identified as a key facet of decadence. See Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky, 'Introduction', in Constable, Denisoff and Potolsky (eds), *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics & Politics of Decadence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1–32 (pp. 11 and 25); Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 2.

5 *Decadēre*, meaning 'to fall' (*cadēre*) 'down' (*de-*). As Richard Gilman explains, the word 'decadence' was not used in Roman times; it first appears in Medieval Latin in the second millennium. Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 36–7.

6 Sherwood, Interview with the author.

7 adrienne maree brown, 'Introduction', in adrienne maree brown (ed.), *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Chico and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019), pp. 3–18 (p. 13).

8 Nia O. Witherspoon, Interview with the author. HERE Arts Centre, New York. 9 September 2021.

9 See Alice Condé, 'Decadence and Popular Culture', in Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 379–99 (p. 395).

10 Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 60–1. An article by Richard Schechner proved especially influential in fostering

this view of performance. See Richard Schechner, 'Theatre Criticism', *The Tulane Drama Review*, 9 (3) (Spring 1965), pp. 13–24 (p. 24).

11 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 146.

12 Note that for Phelan, it is not just performance that 'becomes itself through disappearance'; subjectivity becomes itself through disappearance as well. Phelan's work on the ephemerality of performance has also been contested by numerous scholars, most famously in a well-rehearsed debate with Philip Auslander. See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

13 For an indicative example documenting the expanded breadth of Decadence Studies, see Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

14 Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020), p. 11. There are echoes of Oswald Spengler in Douthat's writing, particularly with regard to cultural production. See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, abridged by Helmut Werner (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 158.

15 For North American examples of these diatribes in the puritanical vein, see Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1997); Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our country and Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002). In France, some more recent writing derives from an Islamophobic fear of cultural contamination, and its impact on the perceived decline of a coherent national identity. See Alain Finkielkraut, *L'identité malheureuse* (Paris: Stock, 2013); Éric Zemmour, *Le Suicide Francais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014). David Fieni has also studied declinist literature stemming from the nexus between the Arab world and France. See David Fieni, *Decadent Orientalisms: The Decay of Colonial Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

16 Giulia Palladini, 'Logic of Prelude: On Use Value, Pleasure, and the Struggle Against Agony', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 'Interventions', 29 (4) (Winter/Spring 2019/20), https://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2020/logic-of-prelude-on-use-value-pleasure-and-the-struggle-against-agony/, accessed 2 February 2022.

17 Witherspoon, Interview with the author.

18 I am basing this definition on the work of Jean Baudrillard. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), pp. 17–19.

19 The term 'frenetic standstill' is drawn from Jonathan Trejo-Mathys translation of Hartmut Rosa's '*rasender Stillstand*', which is itself a translation of Virilio's term *l'intertie polaire*. Hartmut Rosa, *Social*

Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 15. This translation has also been used by others engaging with Rosa's work. See especially Bart Zantvoort, 'Political inertia and social acceleration', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 43 (4) (2017), pp. 707–23 (p. 717). Ivor Southwood describes a similar phenomenon as 'frenetic inactivity' and 'non-stop inertia'. See Ivor Southwood, *Non-stop Inertia* (Arlesford: Zer0 Books, 2011), p. 11. Studies of frenetic standstill were also anticipated in earlier studies of the postmodern condition. See especially Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 59.

20 Mark Fisher, *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater, 2018), p. 462, original emphasis. See also Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester and Washington: Zer0 Books, 2009). Fisher explains that 'capitalist realism' is not his coinage. He contextualizes it in light of a niche group of German pop artists in the 1960s, and parodic references to 'socialist realism' in work by Michael Schudson. See Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 16.

21 For an overview of these contributions in the UK context, see Creative Industries Council, 'The Economic Contribution of the Arts', 2 March 2021, https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/facts-figures/industries-arts-culture-arts-culture-facts-and-figures-the-economic-contribution-of-the-arts, accessed 2 February 2022.

22 Richard Schechner, 'A New Paradigm for Theatre in the Academy', *TDR*, 36 (4) (Winter 1992), pp. 7–10 (p. 8). See also Johannes Birringer, *Media & Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 6–7.

23 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 19.

24 See Jane Desmarais, 'Decadence and the Critique of Modernity', in Desmarais and Weir, *Decadence and Literature*, pp. 98–114 (p. 98).

25 The prevalence of dandyism among aesthetes and decadents is illustrative. Rachilde and Jean Lorrain (another novelist and playwright associated with literary decadence) were famed for wearing gender-queer attire in public, and Rachilde even had an application to the police rejected for the right to continue to do so. See Frazer Lively, 'Introduction', in Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively (ed. and trans.), *Madame La Mort and Other Plays* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), pp. 7–8.

26 Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgandy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1970), pp. 56–7 and 143–5.

27 See Graham Pont, 'In Search of the *opera gastronomica*', in Anthony Corones, Graham Pont, and Barbara Santich (eds), *Food in Festivity:*

Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy (Sydney: Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, 1990), pp. 120–1.

28 Scot D. Ryersson and Michael Orlando Yaccarino, *Infinite Variety: The Life and Legend of the Marchesa Casati* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 57; see also Catherine Spooner, 'Fashion: Decadent Stylings', in Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 417–41 (p. 431).

29 See, for instance, Adam Alston and Alexander Bickley Trott (eds), *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 'Decadence and Performance', 4 (2) (Winter 2021). For an overview of West African and Caribbean playwrights associated with decadence, see Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2018). The Staging Decadence blog also features posts exploring theatre and decadence in China, Japan, Russia, the United States, and across western Europe, available at: www.stagingdecadence.com. For a selection of work by theatre historians who have explicitly addressed or touched on theatre, performance and decadence, see: Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Sos Eltis, 'Decadent Theater: New Women and "The Eye of the Beholder"', in Desmarais and Weir, *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, pp. 318–50; Sos Eltis, 'Theatre and Decadence', in Alex Murray (ed.), *Decadence: A Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 201–17.

30 *Femme fatales* and objectified women abound in decadent art and fiction, as do exotic figurations of 'the Orient'. Nonetheless, these tropes were often used to displace, mock or undermine jingoistic grandstanding, patriarchy, and normative codifications of gender and sexuality. There is also a rich history of women writing decadence. See, for instance, Katharina Herold and Leire Barrera-Medrano (eds), 'Women Writing Decadence', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2 (1) (Spring 2019). For an instructive definition of 'decadent orientalism', see Fieni, *Decadent Orientalisms*, p. 3.

31 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 155; Potolsky, *Decadent Republic of Letters*, p. 4.

32 Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020).

33 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2021), p. 23.

34 Richard Drake, 'Decadence, Decadentism and Decadent Romanticism in Italy: Toward a Theory of Decadence', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17 (1) (January 1982), pp. 69–92 (p. 69).

35 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 7.
36 David Weir, 'Afterword: Decadent Taste', in Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (eds), *Decadence and the Senses* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 219–28 (p. 221).
37 For discussions of this refusal, see Dave Beech's critique of Oscar Wilde's affirmation of idle leisure, and Kirsten MacLeod's writing on anti-capitalist decadent dilettantism and the refusal of productive use. Dave Beech, *Art and Postcapitalism: Aesthetic Labour, Automation and Value Production* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), pp. 86–8; Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 29.
38 Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, pp. 13–14.
39 Alvin Toffler [and Heidi Toffler], 'The Future as a Way of Life', *Horizon*, 7 (3) (Summer 1965), pp. 108–15.
40 Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London and New York, 2001).
41 Critical Art Ensemble, 'Reinventing Precarity', *TDR*, 56 (4) (Winter 2012), pp. 49–61 (pp. 49–50).
42 See, for instance, Theron Schmidt, 'Troublesome Professionals: On the Speculative Reality of Theatrical Labour', *Performance Research*, 18 (2) (2013), pp. 15–26 (p. 15); Randy Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', *TDR*, 56 (4) (Winter 2012), pp. 62–77 (p. 66). See also Beech, *Art and Postcapitalism*, p. 8.
43 Graphs produced by the UK Office for National Statistics setting out national productivity levels between 1971 and the coronavirus outbreak in 2019 (both output per hour worked, and output per worker) show steady rises in the years running up to the 2008 financial crash, and a petering out and occasionally slight drops between 2008 and 2019. ONS, 'Labour Productivity', *Office for National Statistics*, 5 July 2019, https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity, accessed 2 February 2022. Labour productivity figures in the United States are more volatile over the same period, albeit with a general upward trend, but the gap between productivity and worker compensation has widened significantly since 2000. Benjamin Landy, 'Graph: Does Productivity Growth Still Benefit the American Worker?', *The Century Foundation*, 15 August 2012, https://tcf.org/content/commentary/graph-does-productivity-growth-still-benefit-the-american-worker/?agreed=1, accessed 2 February 2022. For critical analyses of declining growth and productivity, see Danny Dorling, *Slowdown: The End of the Great Acceleration – And Why it's Good for the Planet, the Economy, and Our Lives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020); Robert J. Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U. S. Standard of Living Since the Civil War* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016); Tim Jackson, *Post Growth: Life after Capitalism* (Cambridge and Medford,

MA: Polity Press, 2021); Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

44 Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (New York: Penguin, 2018), p. 329. The UK economy rebounded in 2021 with the fastest growth since the Second World War, but the 7.5 per cent growth it achieved was still less than the 9.4 per cent collapse it experienced in the previous year when parts of the economy were shut down. The end of the year also marked the beginnings of a significant cost of living crisis in the UK. See Russell Hotton, 'UK Economy Rebounds with Fastest Growth Since WW2', *BBC News*, 11 February 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60344573, accessed 11 February 2022.

45 Francis Green et al., 'Is Job Quality Becoming More Unequal?', *Industrial & Labour Relations Review*, 66 (4) (2013), pp. 753–84 (p. 778).

46 A 2015 YouGov poll reports that 37 per cent of British workers believe that their job makes no meaningful contribution to the world, and a study by Schouten & Nelissen suggests that 40 per cent of workers in Holland believe that their job should not exist. See David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London and New York: Penguin, 2018), p. xxii. According to another YouGov poll, 24 per cent of American workers say that their job does not make a meaningful contribution to the world. See Peter Moore, 'One Quarter of Americans Think Their Jobs are Meaningless', *YouGov*, 14 August 2015, https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2015/08/14/one-quarter-americans-think-their-jobs-are-meaning, accessed 2 February 2022.

47 Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 4–5 and 64–5.

48 Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 10.

49 Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage, 2000), p. 21, original emphasis. The notion of 'intensive time' is a common trope in postmodern discourse and speed theory. See, for instance, David Harvey's writing on time-space compression, Manuel Castells's notion of 'timeless time', Frederic Jameson's remarks on a 'steady stream of momentum and variation that [. . .] seems stable and motionless', Helga Nowotny's writing on simultaneity in the 'extended present', and John Urry's concept of 'instantaneous time'. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 50–1; Jameson, *Cultural Turn*, p. 59; John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000). Modernist precedents also abound. Charles Baudelaire famously identified 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent' in modernity, and Walter Benjamin influentially explored how modernity antiquates the recent

past via the temporality and experience of 'shock'. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: de Capo Press, n.d.), p. 12; Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 90.

50 For examples, see Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (London and New York: Verso, 2019); Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017); Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (London: Penguin, 2015); Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2016). For instructive critiques of social acceleration and accelerationism (although Hassan anticipates acceleration*ism*), see Robert Hassan, *The Information Society* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008); Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2014). For more controversial examples of radically libertarian accelerationism, see Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, 6th edition, ed. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic, 2018).

51 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 12.

52 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 40.

53 See, for instance, Pirjo Lyytikäinen, 'Decadent Tropologies of Sickness', in Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (eds), *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End: Studies in the European* Fin de Siècle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 85–102. The Norwegian singer-songwriter's Jenny Hval's debut novel *Perlebryggeriet* (*Paradise Rot*, 2009) has also attracted the attention of scholars interested in contemporary decadence. See, for instance, Sally Blackburn-Daniels, '"His Red Flesh Their Forbidden Fruit": Permeable Bodies in Hval's *Paradise Rot*', paper presented at *Decadent Bodies*, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, 28–29 July 2022.

Chapter 1

1 BBC, 'The Artist Who Believes he's a Zombie', podcast, 4 April 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/disability-47813085, accessed 6 July 2022. See also Adam Alston, 'Martin O'Brien – Interview for Staging Decadence', *Staging Decadence Blog*, 26 July 2022, https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/martin-obrien, accessed 10 August 2022.

2 For more on these examples, see: Jenny Lawson, '*Eating Minds*: Fantasizing Undead, Becoming Zombie in Performance', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 34 (3) (2014), pp. 236–43; Claire Hind and Gary Winters,

Embodying the Dead: Writing, Playing, Performing (London: Red Globe Press, 2020); Teri Howson, 'Zombies, Time Machines and Brains: Science Fiction Made Real in Immersive Theatres', *Thesis Eleven*, 131 (1) (2015), pp. 114–26; Rebecca Schneider, 'It Seems As If . . . I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 56 (4) (Winter 2012), pp. 150–62. Numerous scholars have also noted connections between performance and the living dead. See especially Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 83.

3 The extent of Rose's contributions to these collaborations have only recently gained focused attention. See Yetta Howard (ed.), *Rated RX: Sheree Rose with and After Bob Flanagan* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020). See also Adam Alston, 'Survival of the Sickest: On Decadence, Disease and the Performing Body', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 4 (2) (2021), pp. 130–56.

4 Amelia Jones, 'Rose/Flanagan/O'Brien: The Aesthetics of Resurrection', in Howard, *Rated RX*, pp. 98–109 (p. 101).

5 Martin O'Brien, 'Until the Last Breath is Breathed – Martin O'Brien Performance Lecture DaDaFest International 2018', *YouTube*, 14 January 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEvGjLgw-A0, accessed 27 March 2020.

6 Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 366.

7 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 3.

8 Lúcio Reis Filho, 'No Safe Space: Zombie Film Tropes during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Space and Culture*, 23 (3) (2020), pp. 253–8; Martin O'Brien, 'You Are My Death: The Shattered Temporalities of Zombie Time', *Welcome Open Research*, 5 (135) (2020), pp. 3–10 (p. 3).

9 O'Brien does not approach pathology as a subgenre of autobiography, although his work might be said to stage a resistant mode of embodied pathography based not on autobiography, but a falling away from bio-medical discourses that shape and discipline sick bodies. For more on embodied pathography, see Emma Brodzinski, 'The Patient Performer: Embodied Pathography in Contemporary Productions', in Alex Mermikides and Gianna Bouchard (eds), *Performance and the Medical Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 85–97.

10 See Martin O'Brien, 'Performing Chronic: Chronic Illness and Endurance Art', *Performance Research*, 19 (4) (2014), pp. 54–63 (p. 56).

11 O'Brien, 'Until the Last Breath is Breathed', from 01:11.

12 Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 52–3 and 67.

13 See Alan Kraut's notion of 'medicalized nativism' in Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 3. Numerous studies evidence a connection between the Covid-19 pandemic and increased xenophobia. For instance, see Zhuang She et al., 'Does COVID-19 Threat Increase Xenophobia? The Roles of Protection Efficacy and Support Seeking', *BMC Public Health*, 22 (485) (2022), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12912-8, accessed 14 June 2022.

14 The World Health Organization formally identified the spread of coronavirus as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The UK government did not implement its 'stay at home' message until 23 March 2020, although by this point many theatres, including the ICA, had already cancelled or postponed live performances.

15 Gianna Bouchard, 'Introduction: With (Dis-eased) Affection', in Martin O'Brien and David MacDiarmid (eds), *Survival of the Sickest: The Art of Martin O'Brien* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2018), pp. 6–9 (p. 7).

16 Alphonso Lingis, 'Consecration', in O'Brien and MacDiarmid, *Survival of the Sickest*, pp. 22–4 (p. 23).

17 'Waiting Times' was a Welcome Trust Collaborative Awards in Humanities and Social Science project led by Laura Salisbury and Lisa Baraitser. For further information, see: https://waitingtimes.exeter.ac.uk/.

18 Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 2, original emphasis. Baraitser positions her study of time's suspension in opposition to interminable time 'in the sense of Heidegger's account of boredom'; she is more concerned with the relationship between ethics and ontology, and in connecting suspended time to practices of care. Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, p. 4.

19 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 147.

20 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3. See also Dana Luciano's writing on 'chronobiopolitics' in Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 9. Note that Freeman forwards a critique of 'suspended time', but of a kind that focuses on nation-building events like the Olympics, and hence of a different ilk to the time-in-suspension explored by Baraitser. See Freeman, *Time Binds*, p. 6.

21 O'Brien, 'Performing Chronic', pp. 62–3.

22 Stephen Wright, 'The Fate of Public Time: Toward a Time Without Qualities', *North East West South*, 10 January 2008, https://northeastwestsouth.net/fate-public-time-toward-time-without-qualities-0/, accessed 16 February 2022. For more on the temporal commons, see Allen C. Bluedorn and Mary J. Waller, 'The Stewardship of the Temporal Commons', *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 27 (2006), pp. 355–96 (p. 357).

23 Baraitser conceives of the suspension of time 'as a viscous fluid'. Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, p. 1.
24 Alston, 'Martin O'Brien – Interview for Staging Decadence'.
25 O'Brien makes a similar point in the performance's programme notes. See Martin O'Brien, 'You Are My Death: The Shattered Temporalities of Zombie Time', in *The Last Breath Society (Coughing Coffin)*, programme notes (London: Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019), pp. 2–3 (p. 2).
26 Eirini Kartsaki, *Repetition in Performance: Returns and Invisible Forces* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 124.
27 Chris Thorpe qtd. in Caridad Svich, 'Chris Thorpe', *Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations During a Pandemic* (London and New York: Methuen Drama 2022), para 8.185 [E-book viewer EPUB], https://www.bl.uk/.
28 Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: New York State University, 1999), pp. 65–6, original emphasis.
29 MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures*, pp. 3 and 12.
30 Lee Miller, 'Editorial Introduction', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 34 (3) (2014), pp. 191–200 (p. 194). For a discussion of the racial politics at stake in *Night of the Living Dead*, see Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 164–6.
31 An interesting exception is the Halperin brothers' *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), which depicts the 'horror' of a native Cambodian population refusing to work for their colonial masters. For contextualization of this and other zombie films exploring African-diasporic slavery, see Chera Kee, '"They Are Not Men . . . They Are Dead Bodies!": From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again', in Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro (eds), *Better off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (New York: Fordham, 2011), pp. 9–23.
32 O'Brien, *Last(ing)*, SPILL Festival of Performance, Toynbee Studios, London, 11 April 2013. The crowning achievement of the protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysmans's decadent urtext *À rebours* (1884), Jean Floressas des Esseintes, is to devise a means whereby nourishment can be delivered by means of an enema. The decadent writer Jean Lorrain also died after an enema ruptured his colon.
33 O'Brien, 'Performing Chronic', p. 63. The term 'slow death' is drawn from Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 95.
34 The category 'Zombie 2.0' is taken from Miller, 'Editorial Introduction', p. 196.
35 Martin O'Brien, 'The Unwell', *Martin O'Brien – Performance Artist*, https://www.martinobrienart.com/the-unwell.html, accessed 31 March 2020.
36 O'Brien, 'The Unwell'.
37 The cough as the 'creature voiced' is taken from Simon Bayly, *A Pathognomy of Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 166–7. See

also Martin O'Brien, 'Cough, Bitch, Cough: Reflections on Sickness and the Coughing Body in Performance', in Mermikides and Bouchard, *Performance and the Medical Body*, pp. 129–36 (p. 132).

38 Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 2.

39 Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, pp. 26–7.

40 Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, p. 28.

41 Kafer is one of the most significant theorists of crip time, which she refers to in terms of a perennial lateness, additional time, and flexible standards of punctuality – in short, a 'reorientation to time'. See Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, pp. 26–7. See also Irving Kenneth Zola, 'The Language of Disability: Problems of Politics and Practice', *Australian Disability Review*, 1 (3) (1988), pp. 13–21; Carol J. Gill, 'A Psychological View of Disability Culture', *DSQ: Disability Studies Quarterly*, 15 (4) (1995), pp. 16–19.

42 Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, p. 39.

43 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), p. 30.

44 Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 6.

45 For a meticulous consideration of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), see Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 55–62, especially p. 57. For an overview of the distinction between a quantitatively-measured duration (*chronos*) and the exceptional time of 'a qualitative event that creates, arrests or changes time', see Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 5. Note that *chronos* is often framed as being 'merely' endured, whereas O'Brien foregrounds endurance in his engagement with *kairos* as that which interrupts the standardization of *chronos*. See also Steven Shaviro's remarks on 'the slow meanders of zombie time' in Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 98.

46 Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 9.

47 Cazdyn's management of leukaemia inspired certain aspects of *The Already Dead*. See Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, pp. 9–10. Note that Cazdyn would also be sceptical of allegorical figurations of the zombie, which play an important role in O'Brien's practice. See pp. 201–4.

48 See Martin O'Brien, *Mucus Factory*, in *Access all Areas: Double DVD Set*, ed. and produced by Andrew Mitchell and Paula Gorini. Available in Lois Keidan and C.J. Mitchell, eds, *Access all Areas: Live Art and Disability* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2012).

49 See David Weir, 'Afterword: Decadent Taste', in Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (eds), *Decadence and the Senses* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 219–28 (p. 221).

50 Dodie Bellamy, *When the Sick Rule the World* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), p. 36.

51 Halberstam, *Wild Things*, p. 148.
52 Alston, 'Martin O'Brien – Interview for Staging Decadence'.
53 O'Brien, 'Until the Last Breath is Breathed'.
54 György Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 106.
55 Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, p. 106.
56 Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, pp. 107–8.
57 Jacques Derrida, 'The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', trans. Jonathan Rée, *Radical Philosophy*, 68 (Autumn 1994), pp. 28–41 (p. 32).
58 Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 64.
59 O'Brien, 'Until the Last Breath is Breathed'.
60 O'Brien, 'Until the Last Breath is Breathed', my emphasis.
61 O'Brien, 'You Are My Death' (2020), p. 3.

Chapter 2

1 I explore these issues and relationships elsewhere. See Adam Alston, 'Decadence and the Antitheatrical Prejudice', in Dustin Friedman and Kristin Mahoney (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1890s* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). For an authoritative study of the relationships between decadence and symbolism, see Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 6–7. For a discussion of decadence, embodiment and disembodiment, see John Stokes on the 'Paterian Paradox' in 'The Legend of Duse', in Ian Fletcher (ed.), *Decadence and the 1890s* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc.), pp. 151–71 (p. 151).
2 See James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2018), pp. 34–40 *passim*. See also Robert Hassan on 'digital magic' in *The Condition of Digitality: A Post-Modern Marxism for the Practice of Digital Life* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020), pp. 51–2.
3 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester and Washington: Zer0 Books, 2009), p. 2; Frederic Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review* 21 (May/June 2003), pp. 65–79 (p. 76). See also Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester and Washington: Zer0 Books, 2014), pp. 8–9; Franco 'Bifo' Beradi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn, trans. Arianna Bove et al. (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), pp. 17–18; Paul Virilio, *The Futurism of the Instant: Stop-Eject*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 22–3 and 71.

4 Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 12 and 97.
5 Sarah Hemming, 'Murdering the Text: Sarah Hemming on Julia Bardsley's Macbeth in Leicester, and Murder Is Easy in London', *The Independent*, 3 March 1993, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-murdering-the-text-sarah-hemming-on-julia-bardsleys-macbeth-in-leicester-and-murder-is-easy-1495320.html, accessed 24 February 2022. The UK slipped into a short recession in the early 1990s as a consequence of the US savings and loan crisis and an inflationary spiral associated with the Lawson Boom in the late 1980s.
6 For an instructive biographical overview, see Dominic Johnson, 'The Skin of the Theatre: An Interview with Julia Bardsley', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20 (3) (2010), pp. 340–52.
7 NRLA, 'Julia Bardsley: Aftermaths: A Tear in the Meat of Vision', *NRLA30*, 2020, https://nrla30.com/the-artists/julia-bardsley/, accessed 12 April 2022.
8 Bardsley has turned to Fisher's book in subsequent practice. In June 2017, she presented a collaborative performance, a 'Reading Room', with Dominic Johnson at Queen Mary, University of London, in which *Capitalist Realism* was read cover to cover. See http://www.airproject.qmul.ac.uk/whatson/.
9 Mark Fisher, *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater, 2018), p. 462, original emphasis.
10 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 15.
11 The plague costumes in *Aftermaths* seem to reference the ten Plagues of Egypt more than the seven bowls (or plagues) depicted in Revelation 16.
12 'Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la decadence': translated variously as 'I am the Empire at the end of decadence', or 'I am the Empire in the last of its decline'. The latter translation can be found in Paul Verlaine, 'Languer', in Gertrude Hall (trans.), *Poems of Paul Verlaine* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1906), p. 79.
13 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25 (p. 6). Compare with Laura Bissell's writing on Bardsley's Plagues as 'both cyborgian and grotesque'. Laura Bissell, 'The Female Cyborg as Grotesque in Performance', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 9 (2) (2013), pp. 261–74 (p. 261).
14 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 7.
15 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 12. See also Elaine L. Graham on the monster and the 'gates of difference' in Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, aliens and others in popular culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 39 and 47–55 (*passim*).
16 Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 16.
17 Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 12.

Mary Shelley describes Frankenstein's monster as 'hideous progeny', and bids them to 'go forth and prosper'. See Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. M. K. Joseph (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 10.

18 Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 231–2.

19 For more on utopia and the apocalypse, see Vita Fortunati, 'From Utopia to Science Fiction', in Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (eds) *Utopias and the Millenium* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), pp. 81–9.

20 See, for instance, Roger Luckhurst, 'The Weird: A Dis/orientation', *Textual Practice*, 31 (6) (2017), pp. 1041–61 (p. 1046).

21 Eirini Kartsaki, 'Rehearsals of the Weird: Julia Bardsley's *Almost the Same (Feral Rehearsals for Violent Acts of Culture)*', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 30 (1) (2020), pp. 67–90 (p. 68).

22 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2016), pp. 10–11 and 61. See also Jonathan Newell, *Weird Fiction 1832–1937: Disgust, Metaphysics and the Aesthetics of Cosmic Horror* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020). For an instructive literature review surveying key scholarship on British weird fiction, see James Machin, *Weird Fiction in Britain 1880–1939* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 5–11. Note that Lovecraft's interest in monstrous others was controversial even for its own time. For one of the more erudite accounts of Lovecraft's xenophobia, see Abel Alves, 'Humanity's Place in Nature, 1863–1928: Horror, Curiosity and the Expeditions of Huxley, Wallace, Blavatsky and Lovecraft', *Theology and Science*, 6 (1) (2008), pp. 73–88 (pp. 74–6 and pp. 82–3).

23 See Katharina Herold and Leire Barrera-Medrano (eds), 'Women Writing Decadence', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2 (1) (Spring 2019). See also Nicole G. Albert, *Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of fin-de-siècle France*, trans. Nancy Erber and William Peniston (New York and York: Harrington Park Press, 2016); Elaine Showalter (ed.), *Daughters of Decadence: Stories by Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2016).

24 One might think here of the influence of Charles Baudelaire on French and English decadents in the nineteenth century. Although Baudelaire is often cited as a misogynist, feminist scholars have also revisited his work as evincing a more complex relationship to women and women's empowerment. See Michèle Roberts, 'Should Feminists Read Baudelaire?', *BBC Radio 4*, 28 March 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000tmhp, accessed 24 February 2022.

25 Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 4.

26 Skelly, *Radical Decadence*, p. 38.

27 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 151. See also Mary Russo,

The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 70.

28 Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 17.

29 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 2nd edition (New York: Autonomedia, 2014), p. 8. Federici is drawing on the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa. See Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Potere Femminile e Sovversione Sociale* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1972), p. 31.

30 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 11 and 40. As Federici explores, the sexual aspects of heresy that came to underpin many charges of witchcraft only become prominent after the spread of the plague in the mid-fourteenth century.

31 Charles Baudelaire, 'In Praise of Makeup', trans. Jane Desmarais, in Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick (eds.), *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 22–4 (p. 23).

32 Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen, 'Introduction: The Empire at the End of Decadence', in Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (eds), *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End: Studies in the European* Fin de Siècle' (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–14 (p. 4).

33 Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: New York State University, 1999).

34 Härmänmaa and Nissen, 'Introduction', p. 4.

35 Sharon G. Feldman, 'An Aspiration to the Authentic: La Fura dels Baus', in *In the Eye of the Storm: Contemporary Theater in Barcelona* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009), pp. 75–102 (pp. 83–4). While referred to as 'The Madrilenian Scene', the movement quickly spread to other cities – including Barcelona.

36 Eva Bru-Domínguez, 'Becoming Undone: Colour, Matter and Line in the Artwork of Marcel·lí Antúnez', in Stuart Davis and Maite Usoz de la Fuente (eds), *The Modern Spanish Canon: Visibility, Cultural Capital and the Academy* (Abingdon and New York: Legenda, 2018), pp. 37–57 (pp. 38 and 54).

37 Steve Dixon, 'Cybernetic-Existentialism and Being-Towards-Death in Contemporary Art and Performance', *TDR*, 61 (3) (Fall 2017), pp. 36–55 (pp. 37–8).

38 Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, p. 183. Note that the original conceptualization of the cyborg was also focused on the achievement of homeostasis in space. See Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, 'Cyborgs in Space', in Chris Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29–33. An early theorist of cybernetics, Norbert Weiner, also positioned cybernetics as an attempt to mitigate entropy, or 'nature's tendency to degrade the organized'. Norbert Weiner, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (n.c.: De Capo Press, 1954), p. 17.

39 Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Basingstoke and New York:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 44–5. Parker-Starbuck distinguishes 'abject bodies' from 'object bodies' and 'subject bodies' (as well as abject, object and subject technologies). In this example, it is more accurate to say that the robot is both abject and objectified, approximating without realizing cyborgian subjecthood. Parker-Starbuck also considers La Fura dels Baus in a chapter on Object Bodies, pp. 94–102.

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44 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 152 and 166; Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intellingentsia', in Edmund Jephcott (trans.), Peter Demetz (ed.), *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 177–92 (p. 177 and pp. 181–2).

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49 Euripides, *The Bacchae*, p. 217.

50 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 176.

51 Rachel Hann, *Beyond Scenography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 28.

Chapter 3

1 David Fieni, *Decadent Orientalisms: The Decay of Colonial Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 8, original emphasis.

2 See, for instance, Alain Finkielkraut, *L'identité malheureuse* (Paris: Stock, 2013); Éric Zemmour, *Le Suicide Francais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014). These are more extreme examples than Douthat's that forward xenophobic and misogynistic perspectives. Zemmour is also a far-right politician.

3 See, for instance, William S. Sadler, *Race Decadence: An Examination of the Causes of Racial Degeneracy in the United States* (Ann Arbor and London: University Microfilms International, 1981 [1922]). Sadler's thesis aligns with other texts of the period addressing 'degeneration'. See, for instance: E. Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880); Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans, from the second German edition by George L. Mosse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). See also Arthur de Gobineau's and Houston Stewart Chamberlain's writing on racial degeneration, which influenced Adolf Hitler's Aryanism. An instructive overview is available in Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), pp. 54–63 *passim*. Hitler was influenced by Chamberlain, while Chamberlain worked in the shadow of Gobineau.

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11 See, for instance, jaamil olawale kosoko, *Syllabus for Black Love* (2021), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c74c0fb4d87115cde1dccfa/t/60edf06ac450ee4730810c0a/1626206331114/SFBL-zine-spreads.pdf, accessed 16 March 2022; kosoko, *Syllabus for Survival* (2020), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c74c0fb4d87115cde1dccfa/t/5e9f0d4a97b64409fdb9cdd6/1587481965196/Jaamil_ZINE_17.pdf, accessed 16 March 2022.

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13 The content and language differ slightly from that documented in jaamil olawale kosoko, *Black Body Amnesia: Poems & Other Speech Acts*, ed. Dahlia (Dixon) Li and Rachel Valinsky (Brooklyn, NY: Wendy's Subway, 2022), pp. 73–81. All quotations are drawn from filmed documentation of the 2017 premiere, made available courtesy of the artist.
14 kosoko, Personal interview [video call], 20 May 2020.
15 See Brenda Dixon Gottschild, 'Where is the Theology?' (2018), p. 39 https://legacy.blackbox.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BBTP-00_Gottschild.pdf, accessed 16 March 2022. The Gelede is another possible influence, which is a Yoruban masking tradition. Kimberley Miller has considered the gender non-conformity of the Gelede performer as 'a trickster figure, the Gelede dandy. He confounds our perceptions of what makes a male or a female, our perceptions of sex and gender'. Kimberley Miller, 'Cross-Dressing at the Crossroads: Mimic and Ambivalence in Yoruba Masked performance', in Susan Fillin-Yeh (ed.), *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 204–16 (p. 211).
16 Edgar Saltus, *The Philosophy of Disenchantment* and *The Anatomy of Negation* (N.C.: Underworld Amusements, 2014), p. 45.
17 See Nicolette Gable, '"Willful Sadness": American Decadence, Gender, and the Pleasures and Dangers of Pessimism', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26 (1) (2017), pp. 102–11 (p. 103). Note that Gable's article draws on an 1897 essay titled 'Willful sadness in literature' by Louise Imogen Guiney.
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83 See also Tavia Nyong'o's writing on 'tenseless time' and 'black polytemporality' in *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), pp. 10 and 51.
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same year as the Apollo moon landing). Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 1–3.

Chapter 4

1 Given names follow surnames in Japan. However, I will be using a Western name order throughout because it is the order most commonly used when the Japanese artists and writers discussed in this chapter present or publish work outside of Japan. Diacritics have also been applied where appropriate, although there are exceptions. 'Nikaido' would usually include a macron (Nikaidō), but she presents her name as 'Nikaido'.
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10 André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.
11 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), pp. 8–9.
12 Peter Eckersall, 'Toshiki Okada's Ecological Theatre', *PAJ*, 43 (1) (January) (2021), pp. 107–15.

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15 Jansen, 'In What Time Do we Live?'. Harry Harootunian makes a similar point, commenting on a 'future [that] could no longer be anticipated', and a past that 'had become a phantom'. Harry Harootunian, *Uneven Moments: Reflections on Japan's Modern History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 296.
16 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 18.
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33 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 7.

34 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 202.

35 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, pp. 14–15; see also pp. 192–7.

36 Ikuho Amano, *Decadent Literature in Twentieth-Century Japan: Spectacles of Idle Labor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 18–19.

37 Amano offers a fuller historicization of Japanese decadence than I can offer here. See Amano's commentary on the literary group *Pan no kai* (The Circle of Pan) the post-war *Buraiha* (the School of Decadence) associated with Ango Sakaguchi, and the short-lived journal *Blood and Roses* (1968–69) in Amano, *Decadent Literature*.

38 Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (London: Vintage Books, 2001). Stefano Evangelista also explores how the writer Koizumi Yakumo (aka Lafcadio Hearn) 'used the myth of a democracy of the "beautiful" in Japan to criticize the degradation that, according to him, industrialization and capitalism had caused in Western societies'. Stefano Evangelista, 'Japan: Decadence and *Japonisme*', in Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 10. [E-book viewer EPUB], https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/.

39 Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020), pp. 86–8; Mark Driscoll, 'Debt and Denunciation in Post-Bubble Japan: On the Two Freeters', *Cultural Critique*, 65 (Winter) (2007), pp. 164–87 (p. 164); McCormack, *Emptiness*, p. xi; Akira Moriki, *Nisen hatinen IMF senryô* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2005); Tomiko Yoda, 'A Roadmap to Millennial Japan', in Yoda and Harootunian, *Japan After Japan*, pp. 16–53 (pp. 16–17).

40 Takashi Murakami, 'Earth in my Window', in Murakami, *Little Boy*, pp. 99–149 (p. 132).

41 Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1998), p. 123; see also Douthat, *Decadent Society*. The idea of hyperculture extends Alvin and Heidi Toffler's concept of 'future shock', which has since been adapted in Douglas Rushkoff's theorization of 'present

shock'. See Alvin [and Heidi] Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1971); Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*, New York: Penguin, 2013).

42 Yoda, 'A Roadmap to Millennial Japan', p. 21.

43 For a dramatization of the cultural politics surrounding *hikikomori*, see Yōji Sakate's play *The Attic* (*Yaneura*, 2002). See also Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1–3.

44 Marilyn Ivy, 'Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessionary Japan', in Yoda and Harootunian, *Japan After Japan*, pp. 195–215 (p. 196).

45 Thiam Huat Kam, 'The Common Sense that Make the "Otaku": Capital and the Common Sense of Consumption in Contemporary Japan', *Japan Forum*, 25 (2) (2013), pp. 151–73 (p. 160, my emphasis).

46 Akira Asada, 'Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale', trans. Kyoko Selden, in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (eds), *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 273–8 (p. 275).

47 See Mardi Reason, 'Miss Revolutionary Idol Berserker: Inside the Out of this World', *Scenestr*, 2 September 2015, https://scenestr.com.au/arts/miss-revolutionary-idol-berserker-inside-the-out-of-this-world, accessed 20 May 2022. There are a number of *otaku* subcultures that celebrate intergenerational desires for eroticized two-dimensional images of young girls exhibiting some form of *kawaii ero* ('cute eroticism'). The extent to which this constitutes paedophilia is a matter of some debate. Some critics distinguish between adolescent girls and two-dimensional manga/anime characters (e.g. Patrick W. Galbraith), while others draw explicit parallels (e.g. Caroline Norma). See Patrick W. Galbraith, *The Moé Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime and Gaming* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2014); Patrick W. Galbraith, *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019); Caroline Norma, 'Catharine MacKinnon in Japanese: Toward a Radical Feminist Theory of Translation', in Beverley Curran, Nana Sato-Rossberg, and Kikuko Tanabe (eds), *Multiple Translation Communities in Contemporary Japan* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 79–98 (pp. 85–6).

48 Tadashi Uchino, 'Globality's Children: The "Child's" Body As a Strategy of Flatness in Performance', *TDR*, 50 (1) (2006), pp. 57–66 (p. 58).

49 See Uchino, 'Globality's Children'. See also Anan's critique of Murakami's occlusion of women's perspectives in his theorization of superflatness. Anan, 'Chapter 4: "Little Girls" Go West?', para. 14.16. As she explores in this chapter, the dance troupe KATHY stage a very different kind of superflatness in a mode oriented around the perspectives of women.

50 Murakami, 'Earth in My Window', p. 100.

51 Takashi Murakami, 'Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive', in Takashi Murakami (ed.), *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New

York: Japan Society; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 151–61 (p. 153).

52 Toco Nikaido, 'In Their Words: Miss Revolutionary Idol Berserker', *Barbican .org.uk*, 16 June 2016, https://www.barbican.org.uk/read-watch-listen/in-their-words-miss-revolutionary-idol-berserker, accessed 19 May 2022.

53 Allen C. Bluedorn and Mary J. Waller, 'The Stewardship of the Temporal Commons', *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 27 (2006), pp. 355–96 (p. 357).

54 Amano, *Decadent Literature*, p. 15.

55 Ayaka Someya, 'Miss Revolutionary Idol Berserker', press release, 2018, http://missrevodolbbbbbbbberserker.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/EnglishPR.pdf, accessed 5 March 2020. Amanda Waddell, teleconference interview, 12 May 2020.

56 Amanda Waddell, email correspondence with the author, 16 May 2020.

57 Waddell, teleconference interview.

58 A prominent figure associated with this discourse is Shintarō Ishihara, who was governor of Tokyo from 1999 until 2012, and a member of the House of Representatives between 1975 and 1999 and again from 2012 until 2014. For paternalist commentators like Ishihara, principles centering around law, self-control, and commitment to public virtue have been threatened by 'the harmful excesses of motherhood and the maternal principle both inside and outside homes, encouraging uncontrolled egoism, narcissistic and hedonistic consumer culture, and the hysteria of entitlement and victimhood'. Yoda, 'The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society', p. 239.

59 Tom Wilson, personal interview, Shoreditch Town Hall, London, 11 March 2020.

60 Mark Fisher, *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater), p. 551.

61 Fisher, *K-Punk*, p. 552.

Chapter 5

1 Jim George, 'Introduction: Are the Culture Wars Over?', in Jim George and Kim Huynh (eds), *The Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century* (South Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–15 (p. 7).

2 Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), pp. 6, 27 and 243–4.

3 Oliver Dowden, 'The Threat to Democracy: Defeating Cancel Culture by Defending the Values of the Free World', *Heritage Foundation*, 14 February 2022, https://www.heritage.org/europe/event/the-threat-democracy-defeating-cancel-culture-defending-the-values-the-free-world, accessed 22 April 2022.

4 For instance, see Joshua Chambers-Letson's commentary on the artist Félix González-Torres. Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer Color of Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), pp. 149–50.
5 Andrew Hartman suggests that the culture wars were not consigned to the period running from 1989 to 1996, as debate in this period was informed by attitudes towards the legacy of radical and progressive activism in the 1960s. However, this period 'should perhaps be known as the "Era of Culture Wars" proper'. Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 294. For a discussion of relevant precedent in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Alan Howard Levy, *Government and the Arts: Debates over Federal Support of the Arts in America from George Washington to Jesse Helms* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1997).
6 Alex Palmer, 'When Art Fought the Law and the Art Won', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2 October 2015, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-art-fought-law-and-art-won-180956810/, accessed 11 June 2021. Note that Jesse McBride, one of the two children featured in the exhibition, would later pose for a photograph by Judy Linn – only this time he appeared as a smiling eighteen-year-old looking down at Mapplethorpe's earlier photo of him. McBride also suggested that it was 'sick to equate [Mapplethorpe's earlier photograph] with pornography'. See Richard Meyer, 'The Jesse Helms Theory of Art', *October*, 104 (Spring 2003), pp. 131–48 (pp. 143–4).
7 Qtd. in Richard Serra, 'Art and Censorship', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (3) (Spring 1991), pp. 574–81 (p. 578).
8 Camille Paglia, 'The Beautiful Decadence of Robert Mapplethorpe: A Response to Rochelle Gurstein', in *Sex, Art and American Culture: Essays* (New York: Viking, 1992), pp. 40–4.
9 For an overview of arguments expounding the negative influence of the arts – specifically theatre – see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
10 Qtd. in Cynthia Koch, 'The Contest for American Culture: A Leadership Case Study on The NEA and NEH Funding Crisis', 1998, http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/ptkoch.html, accessed 11 June 2021.
11 Fritz Kaiser, *Degenerate Art: The Exhibition Guide in German and English*, trans. anon (N.C.: Ostara Publications, 2012), p. 66.
12 Kaiser, *Degenerate Art*, p. 2.
13 Michael St. John, *Romancing Decay: Ideas of Decadence in European Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. xii.
14 St. John, *Romancing Decay*, p. xii.
15 Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 19. The connection between Hitler's condemnation of 'degenerate' art and artistic censorship in North America during the culture wars was also made by Robert Brustein and Joshua Goldstein in 1989. See Brustein and Goldstein,

'Hitler, on Art', *New York Times*, 28 July 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/28/opinion/op-ed-hitler-on-art.html, accessed 25 August 2021.

16 Qtd. in Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys*, p. 19. The NEA was established in 1965 during Johnson's Presidency, and Alexander served as its chairwoman between 1993 and 1997.

17 Buchanan qtd. in Buchanan, *Death of the West*, p. 7.

18 Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, p. 2. See also Buchanan, *Death of the West*, pp. 6 and 8.

19 Libertarian writers have also described the 1960s as a period of social and cultural decadence. However, for the libertarian Jeff Riggenbach, such decadence was to be praised as 'the overall decay of the influence of traditional authority'. Jeff Riggenbach, *In Praise of Decadence* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 108.

20 Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1997), p. vii.

21 See Dominic Johnson, '"Does a Bloody Towel Represent the Ideals of the American People?": Ron Athey and the Culture Wars', in Dominic Johnson (ed.), *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey* (London: Live Art Development Agency; Bristol: Intellect, 2013), pp. 64–93 (p. 72).

22 Helms is a case in point. See Johnson, 'Bloody Towel', pp. 75–6.

23 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 146–7.

24 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 2–3.

25 Recent curatorial work has clarified the importance of the controversy surrounding the performance at Patrick's Cabaret. Amelia Jones curated the first retrospective exhibition of Athey's work in 2021 – 'Queer Communion: Ron Athey' – which was presented at New York's Participant Inc. It featured a range of events, including a live-streamed recreation of *4 Scenes* on 16 February 2021. See also Johnson, 'Bloody Towel'.

26 'For the umpteenth time', writes Athey, 'I'm HIV-positive. Darryl Carlton – aka Divinity Fudge, the man whose blood was central in the work – isn't'. Ron Athey, 'Polemic of Blood: Ron Athey on the "Post-AIDS" Body', in Amelia Jones and Andy Campbell (eds), *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (Bristol: Intellect, 2020), pp. 55–8 (p. 57). See also Dominic Johnson, 'Divine Fire: Ron Athey in Europe', in Jones and Campbell, *Queer Communion*, pp. 294–303 (p. 295).

27 See 'Congressional Record: July 25, 1994', p. 140 (p. 98), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-1994-07-25/html/CREC-1994-07-25-pt1-PgS17.htm, accessed 5 February 2020.

28 Ron Athey, *4 Scenes in a Harsh Life*, L.A. Center Theater, 15 October 1993. Filmed and directed by Louis Elovitz. Available at: https://vimeo.com/47239842, accessed 5 February 2021.

29 'Congressional Record'. Note that the same congressional record in which this letter is reproduced states that the Department of Health were

contacted 'after the fact', and that the paper towels in question 'could be troublesome'.

30 Jones and Campbell, *Queer Communion*, pp. 420–1.

31 'Congressional Record'.

32 Jesse Helms, 'It's the Job of Congress to Define What's Art, *USA Today*, September 8, 1989', in Richard Bolton (ed.), *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992), pp. 100–1 (p. 101).

33 'Roll Call Vote 101st Congress – 1st Session', *United States Senate*, 7 October 1989, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=101&session=1&vote=00242, accessed 9 July 2021. Amendment No. 991 was defeated the following year in favour of a vague decency clause.

34 Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, John Fleck, and Tim Miller (the so-called 'NEA Four') made headlines after challenging a decision to rescind their NEA grants. NEA Chair John Frohnmayer enforced the recently approved decency clause as justification for rescinding their artist grants, despite successful peer review. The clause demanded that decisions about the allocation of NEA funds take into consideration 'general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American people'. The debate prompted by Frohnmayer's decision ended up in the Supreme Court. See Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, pp. 196–8. For more on NEA budget reductions, see Johnson, 'Bloody Towel', p. 73.

35 'Congressional Record'.

36 Meyer, 'Jesse Helms', p. 137.

37 'Congressional Record'.

38 Pat Robertson, 'Christian Coalition direct mail, October 25, 1989 (excerpt)', in Bolton, *Culture Wars*, pp. 123–5 (p. 124).

39 See Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt, 'Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century', in Alyson Campbell and Dirk Gindt (eds), *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 3–46 (pp. 8–9). See also Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 91.

40 Athey, 'Polemic of Blood', p. 56.

41 Julia Yost, 'New York's Hottest Club Is the Catholic Church', *New York Times*, 9 August 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/09/opinion/nyc-catholicism-dimes-square-religion.html, accessed 23 August 2022.

42 Rory Mulholland, 'Parisians Snap up "Butt Plugs" after "Tree" Fiasco', *The Local*, 2 December 2014, https://www.thelocal.fr/20141202/parisians-butt-plug-sex-toy-paul-mccarthy/, accessed 25 June 2021.

43 Tony Perucci, 'Irritational Aesthetics: Reality Friction and Indecidable Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, 70 (4) (December 2018), pp. 473–98 (p. 473).

44 Claudia Kammer, 'De kerstman die niet de straat op mocht', *NRC*, 12 October 2018, https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/10/12/de-kerstman-die-niet-de-straat-op-mocht-a2417443, accessed 25 June 2021.
45 Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020), p. 82.
46 Kristina Lee Podesva et al., 'Responses to the Recent Cuts to Arts Funding in the Netherlands', *Fillip*, Summer 2011, https://fillip.ca/content/responses-to-recent-dutch-arts-cuts, accessed 5 July 2021.
47 Arie Altena et al., 'A New Dark Age for Dutch Culture', Summer 2011, https://ariealt.home.xs4all.nl/dark_ages.html, accessed 5 July 2021.
48 Moosje Goosen, 'Going Dutch', *Frieze*, 1 January 2021, https://www.frieze.com/article/going-dutch-0, accessed 5 July 2021.
49 Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', *Ornament and Crime: Thoughts on Design and Materials*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (N.C.: Penguin Books, 2019), pp. 185–202 (pp. 188 and 195–6).
50 See, for instance, *Bossy Burger* (1991), *Painter* (1995) and the Caribbean Pirates project (2001–05).
51 The term 'infantile disorder' is taken from Patrick Buchanan, 'Where a Wall is Needed, *Washington Times*, November 22, 1989', in Bolton, *Culture Wars*, pp. 137–8 (p. 138).
52 Ralph Rugoff, 'Mr. McCarthy's Neighbourhood', in Ralph Rugoff, Kristine Stiles, and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio (eds), *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 32–87 (p. 14).
53 David Weir, 'Afterword: Decadent Taste', in Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (eds), *Decadence and the Senses* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 219–28 (p. 221).
54 See Dominic Johnson's instructive discussion of kalliphobia in *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 7; see also p. 177.
55 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy. Volume 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 22.
56 Bataille, *Accursed Share*, p. 22.
57 For an instructive overview, see Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, 'Autonomy of the Arts and Rejection of Instrumentality', in *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 176–90.
58 Dan Rebellato qtd. in *Staging Decadence* [film], created by Adam Alston, Owen Parry, and Sophie Farrell, 12 May 2022, https://www.stagingdecadence.com/films, accessed 12 May 2022.
59 Paul Bolton, 'Higher Education Funding in England' (House of Commons Library, 2021), p. 18, https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7973/CBP-7973.pdf. See also Gavin Williamson, 'Guidance to the Office for Students – Allocation of the Higher Education

Teaching Grant funding in the 2021–22 Financial Year', Department for Education, 19 January 2021, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/a3814453-4c28-404a-bf76-490183867d9a/rt-hon-gavin-williamson-cbe-mp-t-grant-ofs-chair-smb.pdf, accessed 10 May 2022. Note that Williamson's letter does mention support for 'specialist providers' in the performing and creative arts that are 'world leading', although in time it became clear that this support was to be specifically geared around industry-facing graduate destinations and outcomes, rather than the range of careers and incomes that a university arts degree can provide.

60 Michelle Donelan and Nadhim Zahawi, 'Higher Education Policy Statement & Reform Consultation', Department for Education, 24 February 2022, pp. 9, 11, and 30, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1057091/HE_reform_command-paper-web_version.pdf, accessed 10 May 2022. Passing reference is made to the creative arts and humanities (pp. 11 and 36), but these are tokenistic gestures.

61 Donelan and Zahawi, 'Higher Education Policy Statement', p. 33.

62 Prime Minister's Office, 'PM: A New Deal for Britain', 30 June 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-a-new-deal-for-britain, accessed 30 June 2021.

63 BBC, 'Photographer "Devastated" by Government-Backed "Fatima" Dancer Advert', 15 October 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-54553828, accessed 30 August 2022.

64 CyberFirst, *This is a CyberFirst World: Annual Highlight Report 2019–20*, National Cyber Security Centre, https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/files/CF-421540-Annual-Report-2019-20-V6.pdf, accessed 27 April 2022.

65 ITV News, 'Covid: Rishi Sunak Says People in "All Walks of Life" are Having to Adapt for Employment', *ITV News*, 6 October 2020, https://www.itv.com/news/2020-10-06/rishi-sunak-suggests-musicians-and-others-in-arts-should-retrain-and-find-other-jobs, accessed 27 April 2022.

66 PA Media, 'Rishi Sunak Vows to End Low-Earning Degrees in Post-16 Education Shake-up', *The Guardian*, 7 August 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/aug/07/rishi-sunak-vows-to-end-low-earning-degrees-in-post-16-education-shake-up, accessed 17 August 2022. Sunak's initial campaign was unsuccessful, ceding victory to Liz Truss. However, Sunak replaced Truss as Prime Minister only fifty days after she took office, with Truss having lost the confidence of her party after a series of controversial policy U-turns.

67 Nadia Khomami, 'Theatre in UK Faces Exodus of Women After Pandemic, Study Finds', *The Guardian*, 9 October 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/09/theatre-in-uk-faces-exodus-of-women-after-pandemic-study-finds, accessed 27 April 2022. The comment – which is alleged to have been said during a Downing Street teleconference meeting on the

future of the arts – was leaked by the actor Guy Masterson on Twitter on 2 August 2020.

68 See, for instance, Ayesha Hazarika, 'Nadine Dorries becoming Culture Secretary in the Reshuffle Shows Boris Johnson is Still the Master of Outrage', *iNews*, 16 September 2021, https://inews.co.uk/opinion/nadine-dorries-culture-secretary-cabinet-reshuffle-boris-johnson-master-outrage-1203302, accessed 27 April 2022.

69 Nadine Dorries, Tweet, 27 December 2017, https://twitter.com/NadineDorries/status/945973216778031110, accessed 27 April 2022.

70 Higher Education Policy Institute, 'Where and What did the New Cabinet Study?', 26 July 2019, https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2019/07/26/where-and-what-did-the-new-cabinet-study/, accessed 17 August 2022.

71 Dowden, 'The Threat to Democracy'.

72 Dowden, 'The Threat to Democracy'. See also Douthat, *The Decadent Society*. Note that Dowden's condemnation of universities as 'decadent' finds precedent during the culture wars in the United States in the 1990s. For a discussion of examples, see Mark Rawlinson, 'The Decadent University: Narratives of Decay and the Future of Higher Education', in Michael St John (ed.), *Romancing Decay: Ideas of Decadence in European Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 235–45 (p. 235).

73 Dowden, 'The Threat to Democracy'. The legislation that Dowden refers to was still being debated at the time of Dowden's speech, including proposals to sanction universities and students' unions for breaching existing legislation that protects freedom of speech in universities and colleges, and the appointment of a Free Speech and Academic Freedom Champion to the board of the Office for Students to investigate the no-platforming of speakers and the dismissal of academics because of their unpopular views. See Gavin Williamson, 'Higher Education: Free Speech and Academic Freedom', Department for Education, February 2021, p. 8, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/961537/Higher_education_free_speech_and_academic_freedom__web_version_.pdf, accessed 11 May 2022. The report cites existing legislation that is meant to protect freedom of speech on campus. UK Public General Acts, 'Education (No. 2) Act 1986, Section 43', 1 August 2019, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/61/section/43, accessed 12 May 2022.

74 Joint Committee on Human Rights, 'Freedom of Speech in Universities', 27 March 2018, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtrights/589/58909.htm#_idTextAnchor058, accessed 11 May 2022.

75 Adele Redmond, 'Arm's-Length Policy at Risk in "Contested Heritage" Debate', *Arts Professional*, 8 October 2020, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arms-length-policy-risk-contested-heritage-debate, accessed 11 May 2022.

76 Andrew Anthony, '"She Often Speaks Without Thinking": Nadine Dorries, our New Minister for Culture Wars', *The Guardian*, 31 October 2021, https://

www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/oct/31/she-often-speaks-without-thinking-nadine-dorries-our-new-minister-for-culture-wars, accessed 27 April 2022.

77 Francis Fukuyama and Steven Pinker are noteworthy examples. See Fukuyama, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (London: Profile Books, 2022); Fukuyama, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Profile Books, 2019); Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (New York: Penguin, 2018). See also Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

78 Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, pp. 17 and 33.

79 Inspired by the Sokal affair, Helen Pluckrose, James A. Lindsay and Peter Boghossian published a number of hoax articles using various pseudonyms. See Helen Wilson (pseudonym), 'Human Reactions to Rape Culture and Queer Performativity at Urban Dog Parks in Portland, Oregon', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 27 (2) (2018), pp. 307–26; M. Smith (pseudonym), 'Going in Through the Back Door: Challenging Straight Male Homohysteria, Transhysteria, and Transphobia Through Receptive Penetrative Sex Toy Use', *Sexuality & Culture*, 22 (4) (2018), pp. 1542–60; Richard Baldwin (borrowed identity), 'Who are They to Judge? Overcoming Anthropometry Through Fat Bodybuilding', *Fat Studies* 7 (3) (2018), pp. i–xiii; Richard Baldwin (borrowed identity), 'An Ethnography of Breastaurant Masculinity: Themes of Objectification, Sexual Conquest, Male Control, and Masculine Toughness in a Sexually Objectifying Restaurant', *Sex Roles*, 79 (11–12) (2018), pp. 762–77.

80 Alexander Adams, 'On Identity Politics', in *Culture War: Art, Identity Politics and Cultural Entryism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic Ltd., 2019), pp. 84–105 (pp. 100–1). Adams draws on Émile Durkheim's writing on 'anomie'.

81 Pluckrose and Lindsay make this point most succinctly in *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody* (N.C.: Swift Press, 2020).

82 For more on the role of the internet in the unfolding of a culture war, see Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester and Washington: Zer0 Books, 2017).

83 The British Academy has produced an evidence-based outline of the benefits of skills developed in the arts, humanities and social sciences to the wider economy and society in the UK context. British Academy, *Qualified for the Future: Quantifying Demand for Arts, Humanities and Social Science Skills* (London: The British Academy, 2020), https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/skills-qualified-future-quantifying-demand-arts-humanities-social-science/, accessed 17 August 2022.

84 Nuccio Ordine, *The Usefulness of the Useless*, trans. Alastair McEwen (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2017), p. 1.
85 Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 10 and 48.
86 Terry Eagleton makes a similar point. See Eagleton, 'Bodies, Artworks, and Use Values', *New Literary History*, 44 (4) (Autumn 2013), pp. 561–73 (p. 569).
87 James Graham qtd. in Caridad Svich, 'James Graham', *Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations During a Pandemic* (London and New York: Methuen Drama 2022), para 8.54 [E-book viewer EPUB]. Retrieved from https://www.bl.uk/. Note that Svich argues for the necessity of theatre in the collection's introduction. Svich, 'Introduction', *Toward a Future Theatre*, paras. 6.4 and 6.12.

Conclusion

1 'Decadence @ Iklectik', Iklectik Art Lab, London, 29 July 2022, https://iklectikartlab.com/decadence-iklectik/, accessed 2 August 2022.
2 Mieke Bal, *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 3.
3 See Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky, 'Introduction', in Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky (eds), *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics & Politics of Decadence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1–32 (pp. 11 and 25). Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 2.
4 Matthew Potolsky has done much to challenge this limiting understanding of decadence. See Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters*, p. 6. For examples of texts propagating associations between decadence, individualism and atomization, see Paul Bourget, 'The Example of Baudelaire', trans. Nancy O'Connor, *New England Review*, 30 (2) (2009), http://cat.middlebury.edu/~nereview/30-2/Bourget.htm, accessed 9 August 2022; Havelock Ellis, 'A Note on Paul Bourget', in *Views and Reviews: A Selection of Uncollected Articles 1884–1932* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), p. 52. For a detailed study of canonical texts that cemented links between decadence and individualism in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
5 David Weir, 'Afterword: Decadent Taste', in Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (eds), *Decadence and the Senses* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 219–28 (p. 221).
6 Oscar Wilde, 'The Preface', in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Croxley Green: Chiltern Publishing, 2020), pp. 5–6 (p. 6). Wilde is writing in the shadow of

Théophile Gautier, who famously wrote that '[t]he only things that are really beautiful are those which have no use'. Théophile Gautier, 'Preface', in Helen Constantine (trans.), *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 3–37 (p. 23).

7 Holbrook Jackson identifies the first four of these characteristics as key decadent tropes in *The Eighteen-Nineties* (London: Cresset Library, 1988), p. 70.

8 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 111.

9 Potolsky, *Decadent Republic*, p. 4.

10 These four characteristics are identified by Jackson as key decadent tropes in *The Eighteen-Nineties*, p. 76.

11 Potolsky adds these characteristics to Jackson's list in Potolsky, *Decadent Republic*, p. 2.

12 Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky succinctly outline these political associations, but they also offer an instructive challenge to the limiting ways in which the politics of decadent writing has tended to be considered. See Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff, 'Introduction', pp. 25–6.

13 Alice Condé, 'Decadence and Popular Culture', in Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 379–99 (p. 395).

14 David Weir and Jane Desmarais, 'Introduction: Decadence, Culture, and Society', in Jane Desmarais and David Weir (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 1–17 (p. 14).

15 At the time of writing, Dennis Denisoff is developing relevant projects exploring decadence and ecology, building on his book *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860–1910: Decay, Desire, and the Pagan Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

16 There is now a burgeoning literature on the desirability of de-growth. For an instructive overview, see Jason Hickel, *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (London: Windmill, 2021). For early advocacy of de-growth, or 'low-entropy' values', see Jeremy Rifkin, with Ted Howard, *Entropy: A New World View* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 205.

17 Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020). See also remarks made by Senator Jesse Helms in 'Congressional Record: July 25, 1994', 140 (98), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-1994-07-25/html/CREC-1994-07-25-pt1-PgS17.htm, accessed 5 February 2020. See also Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1997); Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our country and Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002). Declinist literature is also thriving in France, where it has taken on a much more xenophobic and racist character. See, for instance, Alain Finkielkraut, *L'identité malheureuse*

(Paris: Stock, 2013); Éric Zemmour, *Le Suicide Francais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014).

18 Oliver Dowden, 'The Threat to Democracy: Defeating Cancel Culture by Defending the Values of the Free World', *Heritage Foundation*, 14 February 2022, https://www.heritage.org/europe/event/the-threat-democracy-defeating-cancel-culture-defending-the-values-the-free-world, accessed 22 April 2022.

19 See, for instance, Cebr, *Contribution of the Arts and Culture Industry to the UK Economy*, report for Arts Council England, April 2019, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Economic%20impact%20of%20arts%20and%20culture%20on%20the%20national%20economy%20FINAL_0_0.pdf, accessed 5 August 2022; National Endowment for the Arts, 'New Report Released on the Economic Impact of the Arts and Cultural Sector', 30 March 2021, https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2021/new-report-released-economic-impact-arts-and-cultural-sector, accessed 5 August 2022.

20 For examples, see: All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, 2nd edition, July 2017, https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017_-_Second_Edition.pdf, accessed 5 August 2022; Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, 'Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project', *Cultural Trends*, 25 (4) (2016), pp. 273–6; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, *Changing Lives: The Social Impact of Participation in Culture and Sport*, 11th report of session 2017–19, 14 May 2019 HC 734.

21 Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien, and Mark Taylor, *Culture is Bad for You: Inequality in the Cultural and Creative Industries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 10.

22 Audre Lorde, 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury', in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), pp. 25–8 (pp. 25–6).

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