

‘I don’t know why she’s crying’:  
Contagion and Criminality in Clean Break’s  
*Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*

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A frenzied *spree*; a crushing *wave*; radiation from a *hotspot*: collective nouns for criminal activity often affiliate crime with the uncontainable. As the infection and body count of a crime *epidemic* denotes, what is uncontainable about criminal threat can also be contagious. These idioms portend an erosion of boundaries – civic, physical, environmental and moral. Within this, they implicitly appeal to applications of force, even and perhaps especially extralegal ones, to incapacitate an impending ravage of criminal acts.<sup>1</sup>

In carceral societies such as the United Kingdom and United States, ‘contagious crime’ transcends the figural. The social sciences position contagious criminal behaviour as an articulation of *social contagion*, a concept first made prominent by sociologist Robert Park (1915). Building on the nineteenth century’s innovations in epidemiological modelling, investments in social reform and the formalization of public health frameworks, social contagion adapted bacteriological theories of disease transmission to explain cultural contact and transmission of behaviour (Wald 2008). Today, epidemiological modelling generates all-too-real predictive policing algorithms engendered by extreme social bias, peddled to the public via racist and classist politics of fear and danger (e.g. Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). Accordingly this chapter approaches ‘social contagion’ as a metaphor weaponized to discipline, imprison and kill – through police brutality, acts of deportation and the ‘letting die’ of negligent prison management.

Social contagion, legitimated through policing and policy, leads to conditions of death and social death-in-life for disproportionate numbers of people of colour; people with refugee or immigrant status; people living with complex mental health conditions; addiction; and personal histories of abuse, among many factors (see Prison Reform Trust 2017). In this, I suggest here, social contagion acquires the syntax of Achille Mbembe’s concept of

necropolitics (2003). Necropolitics describes technologies of governance that implement 'death worlds' for those who threaten the security of white hegemony and heteropatriarchy inherited from colonialism. When contagion, as a necropolitical metaphor, creates conditions of social and physical death for the others of white heteropatriarchy, what capacity does theatre have to intervene? How might performance practice create the conditions for audiences to become aware of both their discursive and their affective investments in the necropolitics of contagion?

Since 1979, UK-based Clean Break Theatre Company's dramaturgy of women and crime aims to redress prejudicial imbalances in the UK legal system. In this chapter, I argue that two recent works by the company, *Dream Pill* (Rebecca Prichard, touring 2010–15) and *Little on the inside* (Alice Birch, touring 2013–14), activate and interrogate pre/conceptions of social contagion via sites of textual infection and emotional contagion. In particular the line 'I don't know why she's crying' (which opens both plays) proliferates, hosting transmissions of character and complicating criminal affects between the plays. This chapter positions the epidemiological modelling of policing and sentencing as a necropolitical tool; mirroring these social practices, a contagious dramaturgy creates carceral objects out of dissident bodies.

In 2013, audiences crowded into one of the dressing rooms at the Almeida Theatre, London, for Clean Break's *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard: the story of Bola and Tunde, two Nigerian girls sex-trafficked to the UK. Audiences then moved to the Almeida foyer for performances by the same actors, now portraying two adult women in prison, in *Little on the inside* by Alice Birch. Despite a lack of narrative continuity between the two plays, echoes of Bola and Tunde's lines in *Dream Pill* provide the formal structure for *Little on the inside*. Two innocent girls have suddenly become criminalized, but implicitly so; in *Little on the inside* the two characters perform a rumour of *Dream Pill*'s Bola and Tunde – or an assumption, even a prejudice. Predicated on physical and cultural contact, this is social contagion at work as a performance aesthetic, working to reveal how the social imaginary of women and crime creates the material conditions for women to enter the criminal justice system.

### Contagions of threat and compassion

In the spirit of an expansive metaphor, I suggest that Clean Break's artistic model participates in a contagious assemblage for every production. The company brings women theatre artists (some with lived experience of the criminal justice system and some without) and audiences into aesthetic

vectors of imprisonment, subject formation and empowerment at the theatre. One of the ways this is achieved in the productions of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* relies on movement – of both performers and audiences – between imagined carceral zones.

In an Almeida Theatre dressing room, small audiences encountered the story of Bola and Tunde, two young Nigerian girls sex-trafficked to the UK. Rebecca Prichard's *Dream Pill* brings the audience into the immediate space of the two performers, both professional actors, who interact with the audience throughout. Bola and Tunde address the audience sometimes as other girls in captivity with them; sometimes as punters; at times, more implicitly, as theatre-goers. A stripped down, poor theatre aesthetic with minimal lighting and props supports these sudden ruptures of identification. The performers' animation, stories and laughter pull the audience into a wavering awareness of the narrative scenario: the play 'lets you forget they're trafficked children. You just see them as children and then suddenly you remember why they're there' (Director Tessa Walker in Caird 2011). This makes for an emotionally challenging and politicized audience-performer relationship. *Dream Pill* affords no reprieve: neither narratively for the young girls and even less for the audience who by the end of the thirty-minute play have been interpellated into the structure as its co-creators through audience interaction.

Forty-five minutes following *Dream Pill*, the same actors – Susan Wokoma and Simone James – perform Alice Birch's *Little on the inside* in the Almeida Theatre foyer. Where the discretely drawn characters of Bola and Tunde once were, now stand A and B – granular, hyper-lyrical data points striding around the stage and bouncing off the walls of what, it becomes clear, is a prison cell. As with *Dream Pill*, there is minimal lighting, sound and set. *Dream Pill*'s opener 'I don't know why she's crying / She just has days like this. She's just having a bad day / Why are you here?' becomes Alice Birch's opener: 'I don't know why she's crying. / I don't know why she is crying. / She steps out of the sea with a crown of dolphins I've got eleven brothers and six sisters I love you so much I could die and die and die' (2013). The diffuse, wild A and B crackle like the exposed innards of Bola and Tunde: guts, ectopic rhythms and gleefully mutating stories break down and reform in the viral ravage of Birch's structure.

Where Prichard's *Dream Pill* works as a limit case to interrogate the audience's social and affective participation in the trafficking of young, innocent black bodies, Birch's *Little on the inside* throws audiences into a scenario of implicit criminalization of adult black bodies, this time in state-sanctioned captivity. Both plays provoke and problematize audiences' desire to empathize with performances of black pain and resilience. The variable positioning of innocence and guilt in the two plays reveals what

Saidiya Hartman identifies as ‘the need for the *innocent* black subject to be victimized by a racist state in order to *see* the racism of the racist state’ (2003: 189, original emphasis) and fiercely challenges audiences to recognize this paradigm. If *Bola*, *Tunde*, *A* and *B* are performed on a continuity – as they are in the double bill – the audience’s own trajectory from witnesses of innocence to quasi-complicit traffickers and jailers becomes an unavoidable performance within the matrix of social contagion.

As part of the 2013 Almeida Festival, the plays each occupied quotidian spaces within the theatre: a dressing room for *Dream Pill* and a foyer for *Little on the inside*. These spatial in-betweens displace the plays’ theatricality, an effect that becomes amplified by uncertain temporalities between the plays – they echo each other in words and gesture, but not narrative. Though both narrative environments are carceral, their extreme disparity derives in part from an ambient attribution of guilt. The carceral environment of the trafficked girls of *Dream Pill*, held against their will, functions as an *innocent-carceral* environment (guilt belongs with the captors in degrees of complicity with the audience). The environment of *Little on the inside* signifies, by contrast, a state-sanctioned *guilty-carceral* of adult women in prison. Alongside each other, the plays dilate an aporia fundamental to carceral society: treatment of prisoners simultaneously as slaves and as citizens.

This vacillating perception of guilt and innocence within captivity stems from Enlightenment discourse around applications of the ‘social contract’ in penal reform. Rousseau’s social contract, as adapted by eighteenth-century legal scholars, positioned the modern citizen as infinitely capable of self-reform through the corrective assistance of the state. Yet public imagination of the prisoner/captive was then, as it is indeed now, equally enflamed by the figure of the slave. This dual consciousness – the abjection of the slave, dehumanized and without rights, alongside the rehabilitating rationality of the citizen – continues to regulate and inform contemporary perceptions of carcerality. That the same actors perform first as slaves, then as prisoners, crystallizes this central discord within the carceral state, where prisoners become dehumanized within the prison system, even as they are expected to engage in self-reform and rehabilitation as productive members of society.

In the performance event, *Dream Pill* is literally the immediate past of *Little on the inside*. Yet audiences’ sense of temporal progression is complicated by narrative dislocation: while the women in prison are not narratively connected to *Bola* and *Tunde*, they *are* textually connected. This helps to displace what the audience may hold in terms of hegemonic constructs of procession of time, agency and life chances for those who are criminalized. The plays enact a ruptured temporality, demonstrating a sentencing protocol of the present that captures rather than adjudicates. There is never a clear

sense of why Birch's characters in *Little on the inside* are in prison; instead they exist in a brutalized present that draws into question the teleology of the justice system.

The net effect of these continuities and ruptures – physical, temporal and narrative – is a performance of the remainders of flesh and law. Vibrant storylines become unhinged in the space of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, and in the space of the performance the black characters become what Alexander Weheylie describes as a 'fleshly surplus' (2014: 2), which both articulates and transcends oppression. Crucial to this interpretation of *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, Weheylie's concept of 'racializing assemblages of subjection' (2014: 2) radically reinvests the perception of black subjectivity on a dynamic spectrum through and beyond pain. The 'freedom dream' of the carceral state is alive in this theatre and is what brings the audience into complicity with the social discourse surrounding the narrative: 'Rather than displacing bare life or civil death, [these assemblages] excavat[e] the social (after)life of these categories ... [and] can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds' (Weheylie 2014). The audience are drawn into a racializing – and socially contagious – assemblage through what Leticia Sabsay calls 'permeable alliances' in which 'affective investments and shared vulnerability [...] reconfigure social antagonisms, calling into question the hegemonic borders of the body politic' (2016: 297). Such a relational permeability, between and amongst audience and performers, connects audience members' own subjective vulnerability to pathogenic vulnerability experienced by the politically and socially oppressed. Audiences achieve a discursive awareness of how social antagonisms, contagiously dispersed through prejudice and bias, become agents of criminalization. This awareness, fledged and maintained through the affective registers of social contagion, operates via emotions of threat and compassion.

*Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* bring audience and performers into scenarios of criminalization that rely on the cultural power of what René Girard terms a 'reciprocal affinity' between disease and social disorder (1974: 834). Underlying this reciprocity, for Girard, is a mimetic violence that animates both concepts. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* germinate a similar reciprocal affinity of mimetic violence: here, between compassion and threat. A painful twist of the affective and social dimensions of the two emotions capitalizes on majority white audiences' 'compassionate' response to black pain, alongside 'threatened' response to black resilience.<sup>2</sup>

Audience and critical response to *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* took on markedly different tones when performed together, as at the Almeida Festival, and apart, as each play has its own production history separate from

the other.<sup>3</sup> Putting aesthetic differences between the plays for the moment aside, I contend that the audience commentary reveals a strong shift between responses to portrayals of innocent children in contrast to criminal adults – and that these responses vacillate along a scale of threat. For *Dream Pill*, feeling silenced was a common response: ‘the two girls address questions to us, the audience, to which, of course, we cannot answer. We are made dumb before them’ (Woddis 2010) and ‘a devastating directness that leave[s] you feeling lost for words’ (Taylor 2010). Even more frequently, people talked of mobility. Of physical mobility: ‘Sometimes people couldn’t move afterwards’ (Walker in Caird 2011); ‘At the end, they all got up and ran to the stairs to get out!’ (Clean Break 2010). And of emotional mobility: on Twitter, sixteen audience members called *Dream Pill* ‘moving’ or ‘captivating’.<sup>4</sup> In stark contrast, the responses to Birch’s *Little on the inside* take on the tenor of an assault. Guts and body parts feature prominently: ‘bruising – a bloom wrapped in barbed wire’ (Love 2013); ‘hard work to stomach’ (Bowie-Sell 2014); ‘an impactful punch’ (Pritchard 2013); ‘wallop’ (Cox 2014); ‘hiss[ing]’ or ‘sear[ing]’ acid (Pringle 2013; Love 2013); ‘a blow-torch blasted directly into your face’ (Gillinson 2013); ‘illusions shatter and blood is spilt as actor and audience are left in tears’ (Slater 2014). Following Brian Massumi’s assertion that ‘the affective reality of threat is contagious’ (2015: 195), I suggest that the rehearsal of both threat and compassion in the theatre of Clean Break generates an emotional rupture: a tearjerking.

## Tearjerking

About 20 minutes in, a woman fainted. [...] After the performance a young woman sitting on the floor was crying and would not get up for some minutes. Eventually her friend convinced her that it ‘wasn’t real, it’s only a play’ and she felt able to leave.

*Dream Pill* Show Report 4, 17 November 2010, Soho Theatre

In thinking about emotional rupture, I want to position crying at Clean Break’s *Dream Pill* as a contagious affect peculiar to a practice of tearjerking; by this I mean eliciting, conjuring and measuring tears in the encounter with narratives of imprisonment. Tim Etchells writes in ‘The crying game of theatre’: ‘I’m not immune to a crying jag myself but I think weeping is of most interest in an audience when it’s held in check or tension with other things ... The best tears come unbidden’ (2009). Etchells uses disciplinary terms to discuss crying – *bidding*, *holding in check*, *crying jag* – all pointing to the punitive side of tearjerking. In the 1910s the effervescent gestures of soda

jerks and beer jerks were appropriated by US journalists to describe a new kind of writing: *tearjerkers* were ‘newspaper stories about tragic situations’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Tearjerking modes of artistic production became closely connected to traditions of penal reform and consciousness-raising in social and criminal justice domains.<sup>5</sup> Connections between aesthetic experience and call to action are manifestly present in Clean Break’s approach today: ‘DON’T JUST GO HOME’ read the back of the programme when *Dream Pill* was first performed (2010).

In her essay ‘On Affect and Protest’, Deborah Gould articulates the connection between emotion and political mobilization as overshadowed by Western scholarship with ‘a tendency to render emotion in cognitive and rationalist terms, thereby taming it’ (2010: 23). *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* overtly work against this trend with the opener ‘I don’t know why she’s crying’ and its subsequent mutations. Rationalist awareness is situated as not only fallible but structurally affiliated with the unseen captor’s universalist perspective – in other words, the prison-industrial complex in its punishment of bodies who know, or create knowledge, within cultural spaces and methodologies anathema to white, hegemonic subjectivity. Foucault discusses such knowledges as ‘subjugated’: ‘a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, [...] hierarchically inferior knowledges’ (2003: 7). In *Dream Pill* the audience slinks towards an awareness of the fictional Bola and Tunde, and other enslaved and trafficked children, as articulating simultaneously ‘the foundation of the national order’ and the ‘position of unthought’ (Hartman 2003: 184–5): blackness and black sentence as the unthinkable other to the audience’s rationalist discourse. In *Dream Pill* crying does not allow a ‘restitution’ of black subjectivity into a carceral freedom narrative of heroism, survival and triumph. Instead it forces recognition of the racialized and material circumstances of children under violent domination. This complication of knowledge construction pulls the audience out of their sense of stability as unquestioned ally.

Crying in an audience demonstrates the generation of a social mechanism that is possibly more politically effective in a social field which has become wary of rationalist or moralist appeals for change (Willett and Willett 2014: 87). A tearjerk play, evoking again the effervescence of the soda jerk, blubs and bubbles over in a flow between audience and performers, moving through a reef of emotion, affect and political mobilization. In this, the tearjerking affect reaches a symbiosis with concepts of emotional contagion. To return again to Etchell’s vocabulary, ‘I’m not immune’: crying can infect as a transmissible event. The arrival of tears – bidden or unbidden – flowing around the audience space allows for a shift in the audience’s sensorium. This shift is an affective articulation within a sociopolitical space, relating to an

epidemiology of affect: mimetic communication that spreads in the wider community with a role in ‘making – and breaking – of social bonds. These [affective modalities] form the basis for a sense of belonging, and, ultimately, of the polis, as what forms the affective bases of political orders’ (Gibbs 2010: 191). If any one emotion hovers between the affective and the rational – some emotions pull more on cognitive processing than others (Gould 2010) – then a contagion of emotions as cultural-biological feedback loop brings multiple channels into play, from imitative behaviour (crying because others are, or Bola and Tunde are), to culturally constructed emotions (crying because of the situation of the narrative), to performances of judgement (crying because of a social requirement to respond to unacceptable brutality).

Judgement and contagion form a key nexus of the tearjerking apparatus of *Dream Pill*. ‘By an affect’, writes Teresa Brennan, ‘I mean the physiological shift accompanying a judgment’ (2004: 5). A majority white audience watches two black actors perform as sex-trafficked children:

Just as the master depends on the slave[, f]or the one who is projected upon, the drive becomes an affect, a passionate judgment directed inward, a judgment that constitutes a kind of hook on which the other’s negative affect can fix. (2004: 111–12)

Prichard tearjerks the audience with *Dream Pill*; in staging an encounter with sex-trafficked children she demands that the audience acknowledge their social duty to judge the situation, and at the same time, she provides no easy object on which to hook that judgement. Her writing refuses to allow Bola and Tunde to stand as victims in front of the audience; it also refuses the audience their own injurability by splicing the grief and dread that the audience wants to feel with quirky, funny lines and hopeful shouts from the actors. The projection of judgement travels around the space like a bottle rocket – the situation of Bola and Tunde is so unacceptable that there is no adequate landing zone for this impassioned, negative affect. *Dream Pill*’s original staging on Dean Street, with Soho walk-ups all around, brings the audience to the very precipice of recognition. Instead, the girls turn to the audience in the last lines of the play: ‘Are we real? Are you?’ – keeping open the dialogic address. A play, depicting children subjected to unspeakable acts of violence, has the audacity to question the reality of the audience!

To return to the performance of November 2010: a woman fainted and a woman was on the ground weeping. Here the tearjerk resurfaces, as a yank, a pull downwards. Witnessing Bola and Tunde – as trafficked characters, as black people, as actors, as confident and funny characters, as raped



characters, as people coming off the stage to touch the audience – manifested an extreme discomfort at this event of permeable co-constitution. One of the reasons for this discomfort is, finally, recognition that *Dream Pill* is not ‘only a play’ as the friend of the crying woman says.<sup>6</sup> To be on the floor weeping with abandon following a performance of *Dream Pill* presents a complex set of impulses and affects, arising from witnessing black pain, in combination with a denial of easy empathy. Crying here also encompasses a necropolitical gesture.

Bola and Tunde begin and end *Dream Pill* lying on the floor. The audience member’s mimetic body on the ground recalls Sara Ahmed’s notion of the ‘stickiness’ (2014: 4) of emotion – enveloped by contingent pain, she is stuck to the floor in an ‘over-representation of the pain of others ... significant in that it fixes the other as the one who “has” pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give’ (Ahmed 2014: 22). In this context, appropriative crying at black pain supports the necropolitics of the carceral state in which the theatre is made. In many crucial ways, the friend consoles truthfully: this *is* only a play. The girls, not girls, are not being held at the theatre; they have risen from the floor to take a bow and leave the stage. The lights are up and people are filtering back upstairs. Yet the crying woman refuses to rise.<sup>7</sup> Her mirroring, sticky articulation of pain, refuses to let the girls rise, in what becomes a necropolitical entanglement. The world of *Dream Pill* yokes the subjectivity of its characters to the ‘triple loss’ of slavery, as Mbembe identifies it: ‘absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)’ (2003: 21), a form of ‘death-in-life’. Yet in Prichard’s writing, the girls live, and live at times exuberantly; their vulnerability is agential and never in a state of equivalency with their injurability. The ‘permeable alliances’ afforded by the play in fact bring the audience’s own reality into a differential distribution of vulnerability (‘Are we real? Are you?’). Thus the tears that do not allow a rise from the floor, when emerging from the necropolitical instincts of a citizen of a carceral state, become an act of aggressive mourning. The ‘omnipotency’ (Mbembe 2003) of this instinct both to create and to memorialize the living dead lends it all the powers of tentacular, totalizing ontology, laden with affect – reaching all the way to something so seemingly harmless as crying at theatre.

## Guts and algorithms

In Alice Birch’s *Little on the inside* A and B leave *Dream Pill*’s expression through direct address to embrace a physically active back-and-forth filled

with shouts and jumps and narrative loops that seem to refer to a private world only they can know. As fragments of Prichard's text ricochet through Birch's, A and B regenerate as remainders – both as data points of Bola and Tunde, and social pathogens entirely unmoored from any one subjectivity. A text filled with organic imagery, riddled with guts, yet combines and recombines with algorithmic precision.

*Little on the inside* operates within a semantic of 'predictive' governance that invests significant public and private capital in converting the metaphor of organic contagion into social necropower via a development of crime mapping software based on epidemiological modelling tools. Crime mapping in the UK draws on a mixture of homegrown and commercially marketed risk assessment algorithms deployed in carceral states worldwide. Rather than indicating crime of the future, policing 'predictions' expand on an indefinite sentencing protocol of the present, stemming from conviction histories – postcode, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and sexuality, among other 'data'. Facilitating what R. Joshua Scannell calls 'deep managerial time' these 'data-driven police practices ... conjure new social objects. Not exactly human, but extracted and recombined from the human, these carceral quasi-objects thrive on dilating human life chances and debilitating human bodies' (2016: 248). A and B express this not-exactly-humanness but they also embody a communal resistance through riots of movement and touch, building on and solidifying each other. This is Rizvana Bradley's notion of 'kinaesthetic contagion': 'Black bodies cut movement's law ... Black movement, insofar as it is understood to be embedded in a mode of sociality concerned with the irreducible and eruptive potential of black life and labor, is contagious' (2018: 23, 24, original emphasis). As Bola and Tunde become A and B in Alice Birch's *Little on the inside*, they resonate as en fleshed remainders of the law, cut free in contagious movement.

In tandem, *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside* articulate the relationship between slavery, prison and – crucially – theatre in carceral societies today: the shift of register exposes the judging, and policing, algorithms alive in the audience. In his concept *habeas viscus*, Weheliye explores 'the breaks, crevices, movements, languages, and such found in the zones between the flesh and the law':

The conjoining of flesh and habeas corpus in the compound *habeas viscus* brings into view an articulated assemblage of the human (viscus/flesh) borne of political violence, while at the same time not losing sight of the different ways the law pugnaciously adjudicates who is deserving of personhood and who is not (habeas). (2014: 11)

Predictive algorithms and biased sentencing in courts of law – in their allocation of ‘personhood’ – make the political promise of *habeas viscus* a vital one. Rational ‘knowing’ via the surveilling mechanisms of theatre is under siege, as is the traditional dramaturgical model of compassionate middle-class liberalism, that is sending playwrights to the margins to gather messages for the centralized, hegemonic audience. Where in Prichard’s *Dream Pill* this model becomes disrupted through the permeable co-construction of audience, performer and social narrative, in Birch’s *Little on the inside* the play as a form of cultural hegemony is deconstructed through character and language – leaving a contagious residue from the crevice between flesh and law.

In Birch’s play the enactment of behavioural contagion between the plays crystallizes in splits, breakdowns, and reconstitutions of language and knowing. A and B exist in this transmission in a relationship of what Christina Sharpe calls anagrammatical blackness (2016). They are never only who or what they appear to be on stage: prisoners, lovers, women, black. They are scrambled identities – anagrams of Bola, Tunde; guards and theatre-goers. Existing ‘in an index of violability and also potentiality’ (2016: 75), they are informatic data points. The audience is prevented from allocating a ‘personhood’ to A and B. Nameless and fluid, and if not interchangeable, verging constantly on rupture, ‘they are good at pretending to be other people’, writes Birch in her character notes. Essentially, contagiously, every word rolls with the performative remainders of a stranger’s tongue in one’s own mouth; in this, one or many new legal vocabularies of *habeas viscus* become enunciated.

In her work on outbreak narrative, Priscilla Wald writes of the stratified social body: ‘Constituting a threat to [social] borders, the [contagion] carrier, one of “the individual parts,” comes dangerously close to being equated with the dissociable diseased organ’ (2008: 77). Following this same vein, Birch’s play manifests a body of prolifically dissociable organs. ‘Over the other side of that wall. Just behind that patch of grass by your foot, the bit that’s all burnt and covered in hair and thick dark moss and shoelaces’ – A and B place all their organs on this prison boundary wall. Chins, lips, hearts, faces and guts are all proffered as tokens of conciliation, of rejoining the social body: ‘I’d cross seas on a raft made of fish guts and the bones from little faces and I’d fight Every Single Thing that I found, just to get to your lip’ (Birch 2013).

In a 2007 article, Ian Hacking asks: ‘Does anyone ask criminals about to be executed in the United States whether they would care to have their organs recycled? ... [Bills proposing measures to allow for this consistently] fail to pass’ (84). Later, Hacking discusses the ‘strange family

relations' created by organ transplants: '[Recipient] Mr B also feels that he bears some of the soul of young C, not just his energy but also some of C's quirks and fascinations' (Hacking 2007: 94). *Little on the inside* explores just this contagion of character, the parasite that haunts the host or engenders the host to new/old consciousness. There is no resolution to A and B; they rise and die off in many ways, multiple times through the performance.

*Little on the inside* writhes and contorts with the infection of the legal sentence, bringing it to violent articulation via viral, deliberately enflashed language of guts and heartbeats. Birch's de-stratified voices give an embedded framework from within which ethics of precipitating another's tongue can be deeply examined, the ethics required when hearing the voice of a group of people who are, as A petitions, 'consistently threatened with the removal of her tongue in a very real manner, members of the jury, and so on and so forth' (Birch 2013).

## Conclusion

In the UK, 22 per cent of all women in prison had no previous convictions or cautions (Prison Reform Trust 2017: 36). Bola, Tunde, A and B are voices, bodies, histories, which in contagious dialogue give a storyline of many women trapped and criminalized as a result of social oppression. As these plays demonstrate, Clean Break's prison theatre is about everything in the world, including prison. They manifest storylines that sustain, and grow, run rampant and lush in carceral environments.

A continued legitimization of state- and culturally-sanctioned police brutality, stigma within legal systems and predictive policing depends upon the contagion metaphor. The weaponization of social contagion instructs the social field to aggressively contain, and 'prevent', epidemic overflows of criminality and violence. As I have investigated here, one way of becoming aware of personal investment in social contagion, and correspondingly its greater or lesser investment in us, is through the conscience-catching permeability of the theatre. *Dream Pill* and *Little on the inside*, in their precipitation of affective response to carceral zones across multiple sites of performance, make the complicity with policing more powerful. They also engender resistance. Within its contagious assemblage, theatre facilitates immense imaginative and material agency to recognize criminalizing bias as it threatens to saturate social life in carceral states.

## Notes

- 1 In the first months of 2018, London ‘in the grips of a knife crime epidemic’ has been widely reported by British and international press; yet look further, and mentions of crime epidemics in London crop up in 2017, 2016, 2015 and on. In stark contrast, police brutality (in London or elsewhere) remains comparatively rarely discussed in the terms of contagious epidemic.
- 2 ‘The Audience Agency’s [UK theatre] booking data from 2011/12 to 2014/15 ... showed that 90% of bookers in 2014/15 were white. [In London] ... 79% of London bookers are white, 12% Asian/Asian British and 4% Black/Black British’ (Arts Council England 2016: 53). Black and minority ethnic population in London is 40 per cent (ACE 2016).
- 3 *Dream Pill* production history, dir. Tessa Walker: Soho Theatre (2010); Metropolitan Police’s Human Trafficking Conference (2010); annual London Safeguarding Children Board conference (2011); Edinburgh Festival Fringe (2011); White Ribbon Campaign Scotland tour (2012); Latitude and Greenbelt Festivals (2012); Almeida Festival (2013); National Underground Freedom Center (US, 2015, dir. Eric Vosmeier). *Little on the inside* production history, all dir. Lucy Morrison: Almeida and Latitude Festivals (2013); Edinburgh Festival Fringe (2014).
- 4 ‘Moving’ x 14: @iAmBayo 9 August 2011; @JoBoaden 20 August 2011; @walkingheads 26 August 2011; @inthewrongcrowd 1 March 2012; @MissRudiBlue 25 August 2012; @knighthallagent 26 July 2013; @soophiaf 25 July 2013; @SKShlomo 28 August 2011; @tamashatheatre 20 August 2011; @NickHernBooks 18 August 2011; @scotrefcouncil 18 August 2011; @yosoyrobcazoz 10 August 2011; @jenckloey 6 August 2011; @EmilyJenkins 6 August 2011. ‘Captivating’ x 2: @OpenClasp 14 July 2012; @jenckloey 6 August 2011.
- 5 Within British criminal justice policy and legislation, a key illustration of tearjerking impact from the period: in reaction to John Galsworthy’s 1910 *Justice* audiences’ ‘many “tear-stained” letters to the then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, begging him to reconsider the use of solitary confinement’ immediately resulted in changes to British legislation (McAvinchey 2011: 43).
- 6 Prichard’s AHRC-funded research for *Dream Pill* involved consultation with the Metropolitan Police’s Human Trafficking Team, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), AFRUCA (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse) and the Poppy Project.
- 7 On not allowing the actor to rise for applause, Frank Wilderson notes: ‘not only is the slave’s performance (dance, music, etc.) the property of white enjoyment, but so is [...] the slave’s own enjoyment of his/her performance: that too belongs to white people’ (in Hartman 2003: 188).

## References

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