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Carnal Acts: Decadence in Theatre, Performance and Live Art¹

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Decadence is a promiscuous concept. For literature and film scholar David Weir, decadence

is hard to make sense of because the concept is attached to so many different ideas, attitudes, orientations, movements, histories, arts, artists, and so on. [...] Is it racial degeneration, historical decline, philosophical pessimism, personal immorality, physical entropy, artistic imperfection, artistic innovation, or all of the above? The fact that decadence has been studied using the analytical procedures of such disparate disciplines as eugenics, history, philosophy, psychology, physics, and aesthetics illustrates just how polyvalent the concept of decadence is.²

One of the few things that unites the various connotations that circle around decadence – and one of the most overlooked – is the fact that decadence is *performed*, particularly if we understand the word ‘perform’ in an archaic sense as an ‘alteration’ (*parfourmer*). Decadence alters something by changing its character, composition, or directionality. This might involve: beginning at the end; corrupting conventional beauty by imbuing it with autumnal or crepuscular qualities; understanding sickness as the ground of a preferred sensibility; displacing or distorting supposedly timeless moral standards; inverting gender roles; channelling desire away from monogamous heteronormative relationships; turning *à rebours*, as J.-K. Huysmans put it in his famous decadent urtext (1884); absconding from or striving to reverse techno-scientific or industrial progress; and revelling in the undoing of that which ruins. As a concept, decadence is also performed because it is ‘brought forth’ (*parfourmir*) and furnished with specific meanings in specific contexts (as Weir’s querying of the term goes some way toward illustrating). This makes decadence highly contingent on the contexts in which it is summoned as a concept, just as it makes it an excellent trope for examining the beliefs and prejudices of its interlocutors.

But decadence is also more than a concept. Decadence can refer to different practices in a variety of time periods and continents, not least performance practices. For instance, Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé* (1891), which theatre and literature scholar Sos Eltis describes as the ‘dramatic epitome

of *fin-de-siècle* Decadence',³ has travelled across diverse performance forms, bodies, and stages that include the likes of Aurélien Lugné-Poe's seminal production at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris in 1896, while Wilde was serving time in Reading Gaol for 'gross indecency'; a 1902 staging starring Gertrud Eysoldt at Max Reinhardt's 'Schall und Rauch' [Sound and Smoke] in Berlin;⁴ the dances of Maud Allan and her 'Salomania' kin; Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905); the New Negro Art Theater's *Salome* (1928), which starred Hemsley Winfield (the first African American modern dancer) in the titular role when the lead actress was ill; Mario Montez's (René Rivera) *Dance of the Seven Veils* (1966);⁵ Lindsay Kemp's drag *Salomé* (1973), which drew liberally on a number of artworks and books associated with fin-de-siècle decadence; and Owen Parry's audio and cosplay performance *Salome baby! (Dance of the Infinite Veil)* (2014).

Salomé's lines of flight have been well documented, but if we look beyond the staging or adaptation of a given play text, especially a canonical text like Wilde's, then the extent to which decadence travels as a practice becomes yet more apparent. For instance, the very same Schall und Rauch that presented *Salomé* in 1902 hosted Anita Berber – 'the high priestess of choreographic decadence' – when the Weimar Republic was first finding its feet.⁶ Also, in the North American context (among theatre scholars, at least), a word like 'decadence' is more likely to evoke the riotous excesses of a company like the Play-House of the Ridiculous: perhaps a show like Jackie Curtis' acid-inspired *Heaven Grand in Amber Orbit* (1969), in which the inimitable Penny Arcade (Susana Carmen Ventura) appears as a gold-painted Siamese triplet, and Ruby Lynn Reyner as Heaven Grand, 'the "star" of the pleasure house managed by Lady Galaxy, who finally [...] dies of syphilis'.⁷ In Japan, attention might be drawn instead to its various Schools of Decadence associated with authors and playwrights like Mishima Yukio, whereas in the Nigerian context the word 'decadence' is more likely to conjure associations with the redundancy of the British Empire.⁸ Alternatively, if you ask a live artist or a cabaret or neo-burlesque fan what they think of when they hear the word 'decadence', you may find yourself regaled with stories of sweaty clubs in our own century featuring shows by the likes of David Hoyle – the self-confessed 'patron saint of decadence

and nihilism⁹ – or an offering from La Pocha Nostra somewhere near Mexico’s border with the United States, now home to a menagerie of ‘ethno-cyborgs’, ‘intelligent raves and art expos of Western apocalypse’.¹⁰ And all this is to say nothing of the darker side of decadence: the side that found the gay and trans Eldorado club in Berlin being turned into the Nazis’ district headquarters in 1933, ‘as if a desecrated Nordic temple had been thoroughly cleansed of polluted influences’, stamping out the last vestiges of the Weimar Republic’s ‘cultural decadence’ (as Hitler put it);¹¹ or the side that found conservative commentators and politicians like Patrick Buchanan and Jesse Helms decrying ‘the death of the West’ and the saturation of American society with an ‘unmistakable decadence’ at the cusp of the twenty-first century, credited, in part and among others, to the transgressive performances of Ron Athey, Bob Flanagan, and Sheree Rose;¹² or the more sober (but nonetheless disarming) diagnosis of the 2020s as the dawn of a new societal decadence, as Ross Douthat advances in a recent critique of political sclerosis, economic stagnation, cultural exhaustion, and the fact that the West is not making enough babies (he is Catholic, after all).¹³

Decadence has rhetorical utility as a concept, then, and this utility (a strange phenomenon given decadence’s resistance to the very idea of instrumentality) has been harnessed at various times to frame and make sense of decadent practices, be they social, literary, behavioural, or related to performance and the visual arts. Decadence slips through the hands of those who use it, whatever their political persuasion, just as it plays across the bodies of those who dance, act, embody, or write it. In each case, decadence is transmogrified. So, while decadence has been used to demean and ostracize marginalized demographics and cultural practices as being in some way corrupt or degenerate, decadence has also been reclaimed and reimagined as that which finds refuge in marginality, which might revel in transgression, or which occupies cultural fringes in ways that shine a light on the exclusionary parameters and contingencies of virtue, virtuosity, taste, and decency.

This special issue of *Volupté* asserts that decadence is a practice that can be performed and embodied, that this practice is of significant cultural, aesthetic, and political interest, and that decadent practices spill beyond the European fin de siècle. Framing decadence as a practice that can be performed accounts for why discussion of plays sits alongside considerations of choreography, scenography, aesthetics, and live art. When space is made for the discussion of plays, the focus lands on the work of playwrights who lived and worked outside the European fin de siècle. You will find examples in Amano Ikuho's article on the Shōwa period playwright Mishima Yukio, Özen Nergis Dolcerocca's essay on decadent drama in the late Ottoman Empire, and Stephen Cedars's study of the queer theatre-maker and playwright Charles Ludlam, whose work spanned and helped to shape New York's counter-cultural scene between 1967 and his death from AIDS-related illness in 1987. This issue also makes space for space, which is to say, the scenographic. Hence, in Barbara Bessac's study of interior design and its impact on theatre-making in nineteenth-century London and Paris, the emphasis is not on text, but on decadence's material environments on and off stage. A focus on performance also enables us to consider a wider range of contexts than a focus on dramatic literature would otherwise permit. This includes dance – which, alongside Katharina Herold-Zanker's engagement with the work of Berber and Sebastian Droste (Willj Knobloch) in Weimar Berlin, includes Frankie Dytor's analysis of the early twentieth-century Renaissance dances of Alexander Sacharoff – as well as late twentieth- and twenty-first-century performance and live art in my own piece on the work of Bob Flanagan, Sheree Rose and Martin O'Brien, Phoebe Patey-Ferguson's review of Lucy McCormick's *Life: Live!* (2019), and Owen Parry's review of Jake Elwes' *The Zizi Show: A Deepfake Drag Cabaret* (2020).

This issue therefore aims to make several epistemological interventions, by taking an expansive approach to the study of decadent performance in ways that resist neatly bounded and exclusive taxonomies; looking beyond a European frame for examples of decadent performance; celebrating decadence as a form a 'perennial decay'¹⁴ of persistent relevance to performance; and embracing an approach that cuts across literary studies (which has dominated the field to date),

and theatre and performance studies (which has largely occluded decadence from its lexicon and core conceptual frameworks).

Decadence and performance

The dominance of literary studies in considerations of decadence, and the relative lack of engagement with decadence in theatre and performance scholarship, means that this issue traverses material that will be familiar to some, but new to others – particularly those for whom the term ‘decadent’ is not yet recognized as a critical concept or practice. Moreover, to borrow from performance theorist Diana Taylor, the challenge in drawing performance into dialogue with a field so deeply embedded in literary studies ‘is not to “translate” from an embodied expression into a linguistic one or vice versa but to recognize the strengths and limitations of each system’.¹⁵ In other words, the challenge is to recognize the ways in which discourse and performance, text and practice, are intertwined.

‘Decadence studies’ can be traced back to attempts to map decadent literature in the late-nineteenth century, although literary-critical scholarship is generally understood to have begun with Richard Gilman’s *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (1979). Interestingly enough, Gilman was a theatre critic, although theatre barely features in that particular book.¹⁶ Gilman’s account of the term’s promiscuity and multiple valences provided an impetus for subsequent, less dismissive scholarship,¹⁷ and decadence studies now boasts a thriving community of scholars primarily grounded in literary studies. In the year running from July 2018 to July 2019 in England, there were no fewer than five international conferences addressing decadent literature in addition to specialist panels held at discipline-wide annual conferences, several events arranged by the AHRC-funded Decadence and Translation Network, a one-day symposium on decadence and disease, and various lectures on decadence and the occult at venues like The Last Tuesday Society and Treadwell’s Books in London.¹⁸ The British Association of Decadence Studies, along with this very journal, was also launched at Goldsmiths in 2018. In the United States, the Aestheticism and

Decadence Caucus of the North American Victorian Studies Association was formed less than a year earlier, in autumn 2017, and New York University played host to a one-day symposium on ‘Transnational Poetics, Aestheticism, and Decadence at the Fin de Siècle’, which included discussion about developing a transnational Aestheticism and Decadence Network. Decadence studies, in other words, is thriving.

However, the significant majority of attendees at each of the events flagged above came from literary studies and presented research on European – and especially English and French – literature of the fin de siècle. This is not particularly surprising given the traction that decadence has gained in the discipline, but the field’s interdisciplinary ambitions are yet to reach their full potential. This picture is starting to change, with several edited collections making clear efforts to put literary studies into dialogue with other art forms, including theatre and performance.¹⁹ *Volupté* has also published two articles exploring decadence and the performing body,²⁰ and some compelling studies of dandyism and performativity have been undertaken,²¹ although generally theatre and performance – as opposed to the study of written play texts – tend to be marginalized in decadence studies. There is no shortage of dramatic criticism, but discussion of decadence in relation to live performance is limited, and tends to relate to a small handful of plays by playwrights of the European fin de siècle, especially Wilde’s *Salomé* and the ‘Salomania’ it produced.²² A historian of decadent verse dramas might put this down to their being ‘unactable’, but, as literature scholar Ana Parejo Vadillo reminds us, this is a rather dated perspective given the possibilities opened up by twenty-first-century stage production.²³

What, then, does performance have to offer to how we think about and engage with decadence? Firstly, a consideration of decadence and performance invites us to move beyond the prevalence of the ‘antitheatrical prejudice’ among self-professed decadents in the late nineteenth century, as well as intellectual assumptions about the cultural status of the performing body.²⁴ The antitheatrical prejudice describes views that regard theatre and theatricality more generally as relating in some way to duplicity or untrustworthiness, as well as various forms of decline and

degeneracy, such as fears around the spreading of moral corruption. An example that comes most readily to mind is Ancient Rome's first actor-emperor, Nero, who was roundly castigated by chroniclers who held fast to the antitheatrical prejudice *avant la lettre*.²⁵ But in the context of fin-de-siècle decadence, the antitheatrical prejudice refers to a belief that the materiality of theatre debases an otherwise pure verse form. For instance, Anatole Baju was among those decadents who regarded theatre as a dying genre, the demise of which could not come soon enough.²⁶ But many decadent writers castigated the stage at the same time as they wrote for it, or fluctuated between condemnation of the dissimulation and egoism of performers and unabashed eulogizing of their charisma. For example, Octave Mirbeau viewed actors as being wrapped in a degenerative unreality, but he also wrote for the stage – albeit in a less decadent vein than his satirical novel *Le Jardin des supplices* [*Torture Garden*] (1899) – and paid hyperbolic tribute to the Divine Sarah Bernhardt (Henriette-Rosine Bernard).²⁷ More famously, Maurice Maeterlinck spurned the flesh-and-blood corporeality of the actor in favour of marionettes, although his plays were staged by Paul Fort with Maeterlinck's blessing. As theatre historian Jonas Barish ponders, in spite of initial doubts, Maeterlinck

nevertheless dreamed of creating, in the theater, the effects of charged silence and muted intensity to which his plays so palpably lend themselves. Perhaps he was ready to risk a measure of theatrical coarsening in order to arrive at a greater degree of theatrical delicacy.²⁸

As demonstrated by the photograph of the Théâtre d'Art's own printed serial (fig. 1), Paul Verlaine, too, was actively supported by theatre makers, and also wrote works for the stage. While recognized primarily as a poet rather than a playwright, Verlaine both benefitted from and contributed to theatre-making of the Parisian fin de siècle. We even owe the term 'fin de siècle' to a 'Schnitzleresque but badly crafted' play by F. de Jouvenot and H. Micard titled *Fin de Siècle: Pièce en Quatre Actes*, which was first performed in Paris on 17 April 1888.²⁹ Furthermore, among those writers who might be thought of as progenitors of decadence, we find a clear advocacy of theatricality. Charles Baudelaire built his corpus of poems around an inversion of the Platonic

critique of dissimulation, as does Huysmans's Jean Floressas des Esseintes in *À rebours*. 'The theatre' might not be front and centre in these works, but theatricality haunts the decadent imagination – from vaunting the dandy's feigned indifference, to waxing lyrical about makeup and artificial paradises. Several prominent aesthetes and decadents, such as Arthur Symons, also dedicated a substantive portion of their careers to the analysis not just of drama, but its realization in theatre and performance.³⁰

Performance also enables encounters with decadence *in the flesh*. Decadence feeds nicely into sensory studies, with many illuminating essays and an instructive introduction gathered together in Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé's *Decadence and the Senses* (2017). However, while literary decadence in the nineteenth century is marked by an overriding concern with the sensual and corporeal, especially as the senses and the body pertain to rarefied or otherwise unconventional pleasures and pains, the medium of the page – however evocative the inscriptions, and however much, like Dorian Gray, we may find ourselves poisoned by a book – can only go so far in evoking the 'fleshiness' of a decadent sensibility.³¹ Similarly, putting to one side the satiation of deliciously unreachable desires and whims, what might it mean to be physically immersed in the 'pulsing landscape that is sensual, gendered, dangerous, contaminating, and contaminated by the self through immersion and embodiment', as literature scholar Kostas Boyiopoulos so evocatively puts it?³² What new issues and opportunities might this present? To pose such questions is not to dismiss the fact that literature can arouse deeply felt physiological responses in the reader; rather, it is merely to ask what live performances in a shared space have to offer to this interest in the fleshiness of decadence. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, theatre and performance lend themselves to exploring the sensorial, corporeal, and sartorial aspects of decadence. This demands that we acknowledge how encounters with decadent literature relate to the body, but it also invites us to think both with and beyond the literary and conceptual, opening out to considerations of theatre and performance as live art forms that may bear very little connection to a written 'text'.

THÉÂTRE D'ART

THÉÂTRE D'ART

DIRECTEUR : PAUL FORT
 Secrétaire général : Jules MÉRY
 Siège social : 60, rue Sainte-Placide, 60

Représentation mensuelle d'œuvres inédites

Prochainement le THÉÂTRE-D'ART donnera une représentation au bénéfice du poète Paul Verlaine et du peintre Paul Gauguin.

Cette soirée sera composée surtout d'œuvres symbolistes.

En voici le programme :

MAURICE MAETERLINCK. *L'Intruse*.
 PAUL VERLAINE. *Les Uns et les Autres*.
 CHARLES MORICE. *Chérubin*.

Puis le *Gugnon*, de Stéphane MALLARMÉ et plusieurs autres poèmes de divers écrivains nouveaux. Ces œuvres seront interprétées par des artistes de la Comédie-Française, de l'Odéon et des principaux théâtres.

CHEMINS DE FER DE L'ÉTAT

Fêtes de Pâques

AVIS

A l'occasion des fêtes de Pâques, l'Administration des Chemins de fer de l'Etat a décidé que les billets d'aller et retour délivrés de toute gare à toute gare pendant la période du mercredi 25 mars au samedi 4 avril, dont la validité expirerait avant le mardi 7 avril 1891, seront exceptionnellement valables, pour le retour, jusqu'au dernier train du mardi 7 avril inclusivement.

En ce qui concerne les billets d'aller et retour de ou pour Paris, cette prolongation de validité sera applicable quel que soit l'itinéraire par lequel les billets sont valables. (Toute voie Etat ou voies mixtes Etat-Orléans et Etat-Ouest.)

Chemin de fer de l'Est

VOYAGES CIRCULAIRES EN ITALIE

PAR LES LIGNES DE L'EST

La Compagnie des Chemins de fer de l'Est délivre toute l'année des billets pour de nombreuses combinaisons de voyages circulaires ayant principalement l'Italie pour objectif.

Au moyen de ces combinaisons, les voyageurs ont le choix entre un grand nombre d'excursions au nord des Alpes (parcours en dehors de l'Italie) et au sud des Alpes (parcours italiens), qu'ils peuvent effectuer avec deux billets dont l'un est valable pour les parcours Français, Suisses, Allemands ou Autrichiens, suivant l'itinéraire choisi, et l'autre pour les parcours italiens. La durée de validité pour les deux parcours réunis est de 60 jours.

Les prix et conditions sous lesquels les différents itinéraires à emprunter figurent dans un livret spécial des voyages circulaires qui est délivré à Paris (Gare de l'Est), et dans les bureaux succursales de la Compagnie.

Nota. — Les voyages circulaires et excursions, qu'ils soient commençés par la voie de Delle ou les lignes allemandes, peuvent être effectués sans passeport pour l'ALLEMAGNE, à la condition de ne pas séjourner en Alsace-Lorraine.

Chemin de fer de l'Est

FRANCE, SUISSE ET ITALIE

PAR LE SAINT-GOTHARD

Sans passeport

Les voyageurs peuvent se rendre de Paris à Milan par trains directs et rapides, via Troyes, Belfort, Delle, Porrentruy, Delémont, Bâle, Lucerne (Lac des 4 Cantons), le Saint-Gothard, (Lacs Majeur, de Lugano et de Côme).

Cet itinéraire dispense de la formalité du passeport. La durée du trajet est de 20 heures environ.

Des voitures directes de 1^{re} classe effectuent le trajet entre Paris et Milan par le train partant de Paris à 8 h. 40 du soir et au retour par le train quittant Milan à 10 h. 15 du matin.

A Milan, les voyageurs trouvent des correspondances pour toute l'Italie.

Pour tous les autres renseignements, consulter les indicateurs, et s'adresser aux gares.

Chemins de fer de l'Ouest

BILLETS D'ALLER ET RETOUR

A PRIX RÉDUITS

La Compagnie des Chemins de fer de l'Ouest délivre de Paris à toutes les gares de son réseau situées au delà de Gisors, Mantes, Houdan et Rambouillet, et vice versa, des billets d'aller et retour, comportant une réduction de 25 o/o. La durée de validité de ces billets est fixée ainsi qu'il suit :

Jusqu'à 75 kil. inclus, 1 jour; de 76 à 125, 2 jours; de 126 à 250, 3 jours; de 251 à 500, 4 jours; au-dessus de 500, 5 jours.

Les délais indiqués ci-dessus ne comprennent pas les dimanches et jours de fête; la durée des billets est augmentée en conséquence.

Chemin de fer de l'Ouest

SERVICES QUOTIDIENS RAPIDES

ENTRE PARIS ET LONDRES, PAR DIEPPE ET NEWHAVEN

Les importants travaux exécutés dans les ports de Dieppe et de Newhaven, en donnant la facilité d'organiser, dans ces deux ports, des départs à heures fixes, quelle que soit l'heure de la marée, ont permis aux Compagnies de l'Ouest et de Brighton de réduire considérablement la durée du trajet entre Paris et Londres et de créer des services rapides qui fonctionnent tous les jours, sauf le cas de force majeure, aux heures indiquées ci-dessous :

DE PARIS A LONDRES :

1^{re}, 2^e, 3^e Cl.

Départ de Paris (Saint-Lazare) 8 h. 50 du soir.
 Départ de Dieppe 1 h. du matin.
 Arrivée à Londres (London-Bridge) 7 h. 40 matin.
 — — (Victoria) 7 h. 50 matin.

Prix des Billets :

Billets simples, valables pendant 7 jours :
 1^{re} classe 41 fr. 25; 2^e classe 30 fr.; 3^e classe 21 fr. 25, plus 2 fr. par billet pour droits de port à Dieppe et à Newhaven.

Billets d'aller et retour valables pendant un mois :
 1^{re} classe 68 fr. 75; 2^e classe 48 fr. 75; 3^e classe 37 fr. 50, plus 4 fr. par billet pour droits de port à Dieppe et à Newhaven.

Ces billets donnent le droit de s'arrêter à Rouen, Dieppe, Newhaven et Brighton.

Paris. — Jules Méry, impr.-gérant.
 14, rue Duperré.

Dans son indicible douleur, LE POÈTE-ROI jette la Lyre qui se brise en un lamentable sanglot et le cri des fibres est si déchirant que LA JEUNE FILLE tremblante d'effroi et d'amour revient vers le royal Désespéré, comme résignée aux flammes d'une imminente géhenne. Pendant qu'ils sont enlacés, UN CHOEUR D'ANGES, entendu jadis, effleure leurs oreilles extasiées.

Ecarte le conseil de tes mauvaises craintes.
 Le Seigneur t'a rendu des mains pour les étreintes,
 Fais à l'amant royal le don de ton orgueil,
 Vais laisse le troupeau neigeux d'immaculés ;
 Vers l'amorcelement des glaces reculees,
 Les rouges Kéroubim les repoussent du seuil.

Aimer-vous ! le blé mûr épars des Madelaines,
 Epars sur les pieds nus avec les urnes pleines,
 Brûle seul dans la sainte auréole de feu,
 Dans le brasier de Christ, avivé de colères,
 Vous foudriez, ô froides fleurs des soirs polaires,
 Qui ne partirez pas les hommes avant Dieu.

Lorsque le Rédempteur brisé les statues
 D'autrefois, parmi les colonnes abattues,
 Il laissa reverdir, seul d'entre les Maudits,
 Eros, et lui donna pour royaume la Terre :
 Immortelle, la soif des lèvres vous altère,
 Et l'enfer des baisers vaut notre paradis.

PIERRE QUILLARD.

PROGRAMME

LES VEILLEUSES

pièce en 1 acte, en prose, de M. PAUL GABILLARD

La Folle M^{lle} Lemoré.
 L'orpheline M^{lle} Camée.
 La première vieille M^{lle} Suzanne Gay.
 La deuxième vieille M^{lle} Dénac.
 La religieuse M^{lle} Moret.
 La jeune femme M^{lle} d'Épernay.
 La jeune fille M^{lle} Maréchal.

LA FILLE AUX MAINS COUPÉES

mystère en 2 tableaux, en vers, de M. PIERRE QUILLARD,
 décor de M. PAUL SÉRUSIER.

La jeune fille M^{lle} Camée.
 Le père M. Prad.
 Le chœur d'anges M. Paul Franck.
 Le Poète-Roi M. Beuve.
 Le serviteur M. Félix.
 La résistante M^{lle} Suzanne Gay.

MADAME LA MORT

drame cérébral en 3 tabl., en prose, de M^{lle} RACHIDE

Paul Dartigny M. Paul Franck.
 Jacques Durand M. Félix.
 Le docteur Godin M. Prad.
 Jean M. Ricqmer.
 Lucie M^{lle} Suzanne Gay.
 La Mort M^{lle} Camée.

LE GUIGNON

poème de M. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ, dit par M^{lle} Camée.

LE SPHINX, OU LA FIN DE PIERROT

pantomime mystique en 1 acte, de M. PAUL HUGOINET,
 musique de M. LETOURNEUX.

Pierrot M. Félix.
 Lord Punch M. Prad.
 Hermonthis M^{lle} Pelegrino.

PROSTITUÉE

scène NATURALISTE, en 2 tabl., de M. de CHIRAC

Germain M. Prad.
 Pauline M^{lle} Camée.
 Un Monsieur M. X...

Fig. 1: Théâtre d'art, printed serial [excerpt]. 20 March 1891.
 Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de la Réserve des livres rares.

The text translates as: 'Soon the theatre will give a benefit performance for the poet Paul Verlaine and the painter Paul Gauguin', and the programme includes works by Maurice Maeterlinck (*L'Intruse*), Paul Verlaine (*Les Uns et les Autres*), and Charles Morice (*Chérubin*).

A focus on performance also invites us to reconsider how decadence relates to escapist individualism. This line of thought has been influenced by novelist and critic Paul Bourget's essay 'The Example of Baudelaire' (1881), which explores decadent literature in relation to the individual 'man of decadence', a social organism that 'succumbs to decadence', and a 'decadent style' characterized by a breakdown of the whole into smaller and smaller parts.³³ We can trace Bourget's influence through the work of contemporaries like Havelock Ellis and Friedrich Nietzsche, just as we can find it in twenty-first century reflections on decadence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁴ However, much as the emphasis placed on individualism accords with the dominant narratives that derive, in part, from Bourget's study, decadent writers and artists tended to move in the same circles. They supported one another through patronage and paeans to one another's work, and formed direct and indirect communities of sense in what Matthew Potolsky has usefully described as an international and cosmopolitan 'mode of reception', or relationship to the culture and traditions that influenced them.³⁵ Here we might think not only of writers but also of performers as cases in point, especially the international tours of Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse, which prompted a flurry of articles, poems, and communal gatherings honouring their divergently decadent sensibilities. We might also think of the salons that brought together like-minded artists and writers. Rachilde and Jean Lorrain helped to cement their 'decadent' reputations by dressing in eccentric garb at events such as these (Rachilde was known to have dressed as an eighteenth-century marquise and a debonair man – which required a permit at the time – and Lorrain as a semi-nude wrestler).³⁶ This suggests that performing as a decadent subject contributed to the formation of a decadent style, establishing modes of behaviour in the process which could go on to influence behaviours and styles elsewhere.

Some of the most important writers associated with decadence were also avid supporters of theatre communities. For instance, Rachilde's advocacy and encouragement helped to launch the career of her friend Alfred Jarry, as well as Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art (and to a lesser extent Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre). Several of Rachilde's plays featured in the Théâtre d'Art's

programmes from the outset, her reputation ensuring a crowd, and she also pushed for the inclusion of work by lesser-known writers when she became part of the theatre's programming committee.³⁷ Wilde, too, served as one of the Théâtre d'Art's artistic advisors.³⁸ In other words, key progenitors of decadent literature and drama might well be credited with influencing one of the most important periods in west-European modernist theatre, although Rachilde's work as a playwright and impresario is largely ignored in favour of that of her male peers, which is especially frustrating given the clear overlap between decadence and what is more usually taxonomized under the rubric of Symbolism in undergraduate degrees and textbooks.³⁹

In displacing narratives that emphasize the solipsism of decadence, asking instead how it is formed in the context of specific communities of sense, this issue also invites its readers to consider who decadence is for. Is it the preserve of wealthy aristocrats and bohemian elites? How else might decadence be imagined, and what might this do to its supposedly apolitical or reactionary associations? These questions are especially pertinent to the articles in this issue that focus on the queering of decadence as a pejorative term, as explored in Cedars's, Dytor's, Parry's, and my own contributions. Each raises a set of issues that are specific to the historical contexts addressed, but they also invite reflection on wider, more fundamental issues around what it means to engage with decadence in the twenty-first century, not least with regard to the baggage that decadence has accrued as both a concept and a practice, as the following section explores.

Owning everything: on decadence and privilege

When I first encountered the word 'decadence' in a research context, I assumed it would relate in some way to indulgence and orgiastic excess, such as one might find depicted in paintings like Thomas Couture's *Romains de la décadence* (1847) or Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888). These paintings present an empire's swan song steeped in the aesthetics of opulence and luxury, and have a part to play in why decadence and subsidiary concepts are so frequently associated with the haves rather than the have-nots. The emphasis that is so often placed

on the value of uselessness in decadent art and literature – the belief that ‘the only things that are really beautiful are those which have no use’, as Théophile Gautier put it⁴⁰ – suggests that the pleasures of decadence may be contingent on a sublimation (or in some cases a fetishization) of the labour required to produce those pleasures, which would seem to make decadence the preserve of those who do not need to labour (or labour much) themselves.⁴¹ How, then, might we think of decadence as something other than an aristocratic or elitist privilege?

‘Progressiveness’ would be antithetical to Gautier’s valorisation of the beautiful, just as ‘ethical sympathy’ was ‘an unpardonable mannerism of style’ for Wilde.⁴² You will struggle to find much ‘ethical sympathy’ in Huysmans’s *À rebours* or Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). What you will find, though – as Bessac explores in her study of interior design and its influence on theatre staging – is a perversion of the relative frugality that tends to characterize the inheritance of class. Opulence is indulged in Huysmans’s and Wilde’s novels in ways that connect taste to inherited power and privilege, sometimes in ways that bring a similarly privileged public to the table, such as in the extravagant ‘black feast’ scene that opens *À rebours*, in which Des Esseintes mourns the loss of his virility, or in ways that align more closely with what Weir describes as an ‘uncommon sense’ that can be cultivated, expending the last of the aristocracy’s lavish resources on the refinement of exquisitely debauched pleasures.⁴³ Associations such as these might tempt us to assume that decadence necessitates being high class and wealthy, but – aristocrats like Robert de Montesquiou aside – the bohemianism or aristocratic dandyism of these writers was more often the product of a carefully-crafted and consciously-performed stance expressed through sartorial and corporeal self-fashioning.⁴⁴

Gender non-conformity pertains to several of the articles in this issue, although Cedars’s, Dytor’s and Parry’s contributions especially invite reflection on the relationships between decadence, opulence, and privilege in the history of drag performance. The relationships between these themes are immortalized in Jennie Livingston’s landmark documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990), when Junior LaBeija encourages a congregation of disenfranchised black and Latinx drag

performers to be opulent, to ‘own everything’.⁴⁵ An aesthetic predicated on ‘owning everything’, in this context, is not connected to disposable income or wealth so much as the fantasies and modes of representation that surround such disposability. It is also connected to the *practising* of these fantasies, and the fostering of countercultural communities of the disenfranchised and the dispossessed. Hence, for opulence to have meaning, it needs to be recognized as being ‘opulent’ either by virtue of an inherited understanding of what constitutes and entitles one to its enjoyment, or an understanding produced within a particular culture of sense-making at odds with this entitlement – perhaps by way of its being contaminated or sullied and enjoyed for that very reason, as Cedars explores in his study of Charles Ludlam and his work with the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

The issues at stake in this discussion of decadence, opulence, and privilege also pertain to race, as do the reactions of many who have been derogatorily accused of simulating the aesthetics of excess and luxury. For instance, in the words of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, black diasporic subjects frequently turned to their body ‘as if it was, and it often was, the only cultural capital we had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation’.⁴⁶ It is clear to see how this insight relates to the Harlem ballroom scene and *The Zizi Show*, but it also resonates with the kinds of black and Latinx cultural production studied by the curator and scholar Jillian Hernandez in her book *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (2020) where such ‘cultural capital’ is prone to processes that consciously and deliberately augment the aesthetics and politics of excess. For Hernandez, the kinds of excess associated with the aesthetics of opulence in black and Latinx self-fashioning is akin to an embrace of abundance ‘where the political order would impose austerity upon the racialized poor and working class’.⁴⁷ Equally, the sartorial and corporeal augmentation explored in Parry’s review of *The Zizi Show* invites us to reflect on who decadence is for – or who it *could* be for – in ways that intersect as much with class and inherited wealth as race, gender and sexuality.

Along with the bohemian and the dandy, the *femme fatale* is another prominent character in nineteenth- and twentieth-century decadent literature and theatre. You will find her in the pages of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) and Catulle Mendès' *Mephistophela* (1889), and in productions of Wilde's *Salomé* (1891) and Murayama Tomoyoshi's *A Nero in Skirts* (1927). Luxuriating in the demonization of women as *femmes fatales* might be seen as an attempt by men to deal with their own fears around the increasing access of 'New Women' to employment, education, and the public sphere, although prominent women writing decadence in their plays and novels make clear the extent to which the *femme fatale* was by no means limited to the male imagination.⁴⁸ Also, while some of these authors opposed feminist activism, as in Rachilde's case,⁴⁹ decadence has also been reclaimed as a basis for critical frameworks that are explicitly feminist. Visual cultures scholar Julia Skelly's *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (2017) is an example, in which 'radical' decadence forms the basis of a feminist framework 'that transgresses gendered norms in relation to not only behaviours but also art-historical ideologies'.⁵⁰ In other words, although nineteenth-century decadence sometimes resulted in the production of misogynistic tropes, decadence is also ripe for reconsideration as a basis or point of departure for an explicitly feminist practice – be it literary or performance-based.

Decadence has always been radical, but Skelly's book invites us to consider the decadent *femme fatale* as an empowered subject who speaks to feminist cultural production in our own century, shifting the 'centers of origin and gravity' of decadence, as literature scholar Dennis Denisoff puts it, 'such that one can delineate women's decadence without naturalizing and reinscribing the familiar, canonical context'.⁵¹ Moreover, the fact that the *femme fatale* can speak to us not just from the safe distance of a page, but in a shared performance space designed and choreographed by women, would seem as good a place as any to start. We might think here of artists like Lucy McCormick, as Patey-Ferguson explores in her review of McCormick's *Life: LIVE!*, Berber's dances of vice, horror and ecstasy, as Herold-Zanker sets out in her contribution, or indeed the work of artists like Lauren Barri Holstein, Ann Liv Young, Kembra Pfahler, Ivy

Monteiro, and The Uhuruverse. All of these artists demonstrate how the monstrous feminine has been re-tooled in ways that speak to the cultures and histories of decadence.⁵²

The *femme fatale* also tended to figure in decadent literature and performance of the fin de siècle as an orientalised other appealing to the male gaze – an appeal that is much more evident, and pertinent, in performance contexts. Wilde’s *Salomé* is the most famous example, but we might look not to the play itself, but to a proliferation of dancing Salomes that graced the stages of cabarets and music halls across Europe and, later, North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Maud Allan, Gertrude Hoffman, Lotta Faust, La Sylphe (Edith Lambelle Langerfeld), La Petite Adelaide (Mary Adelaide Dickey), Aida Overton Walker, and Eva Tanguay, among countless others, all built their careers off the back of ‘Salomania’ (which owed a debt to Loïe Fuller’s dance-pantomime *Salome*, performed in full in 1895),⁵³ but similarly all of them – from the clothes they wore to the gazes they solicited – subscribed to a fashion for orientalism. This fashion was in accordance with ‘the vast imperialist expansions of the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the concomitant fascination of all things Oriental’ in Europe, especially ‘those women perceived as living Salomes, the seductive, often veiled “*danseuses du ventre*” imported from the colonies’.⁵⁴ It was also in accordance with what literature scholar Hema Chari insightfully describes as a ‘double articulation, revealing simultaneously the colonizer’s deep fascination with, and paranoid anxiety about, the other’, while at the same time exposing decadence and orientalism as ‘interchangeable signifiers’⁵⁵ – that is, interchangeable on European terms at the exclusion of engaging with decadent art and literature in East Asia beyond a problematic penchant for *japonisme*, and for ‘the oriental’ more broadly (as Li Xiaorong has persuasively demonstrated, decadent poetry in China predates orientalist decadence of the European fin de siècle by at least three centuries).⁵⁶

This issue of *Volupté* responds by presenting articles that address work composed by Japanese and late-Ottoman playwrights. For instance, as Amano points out in her article, Mishima’s *Madame de Sade* (1965) inverts the appropriative dyad by situating the Marquis de Sade (himself a progenitor of literary decadence)⁵⁷ in the context of a Japanese theatrical tradition.

Dolcerocca's consideration of work by Muallim Naci Heder and Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem also challenges us to think differently about an assumed logic of equivalence between a west-European decadent 'centre' and its so-called 'peripheries' in a context where there was no comparable bourgeoisie to shock. Countless other artists and performance makers across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also shown us how orientalism can be brought into sharp critical focus in ways that are deeply and evocatively 'decadent'. I am thinking, for instance, of Morimura Yasumasa's *Futago [Portrait]* (1988) and George Chakravarthi's *Olympia* (2003), both of which subject Édouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863) to a queerly appropriative *détournement* (appropriating Manet's own art-historical interventions).⁵⁸ Works like these make clear that decadent aesthetics, like so many cultural histories, have frequently referenced, re-contextualized or evinced orientalism, but they also suggest how these histories might be reimagined by reclaiming that 'one duty we owe to history' lauded by Wilde: to rewrite it.⁵⁹

Alongside misogyny, orientalism, and various forms of inherited privilege, decadence has also been folded into nationalistic agendas. On the one hand, right-wing politicians and critics have made rhetorical use of decadence, sickness, and degeneracy in a number of attacks condemning queer art and performance, as I address in my own exploration of work by contemporary performance makers who embrace and stage queer sexual practices as a means of working through their own lived experience of chronic illness. On the other hand, a few authors and playwrights associated with decadence chose to align themselves with nationalism in various guises, ranging from the Italian playwright Gabriele d'Annunzio who went so far as to lead a rogue army in the invasion and occupation of Fiume (now Rijeka, in Croatia), to Mishima's nationalistic grandstanding. However, a lesser-known example can be found in the Late Ottoman Empire. As Dolcerocca explains, the so-called 'decadence controversy' was initiated by the morally conservative author Ahmet Midhat's article titled 'Dekadanlar' (1897), in which Midhat condemns 'over-westernized' novelists and dramatists associated with the journal *Servet-i Fünun [Wealth of Knowledge]*. For Midhat, their work was merely imitating decadent authors in Paris, which he also

believed to be at odds with a more cautious approach to modernizing Ottoman-Islamic identity (Midhat was not against engagement with western culture; only the extent of its influence).⁶⁰ There is also no shortage of disparaging references to decadence from the political Left, with twentieth-century Marxism serving up some of the most prominent examples that pertain to processes of state formation, such as G. V. Plekhanov's critique of 'decadent tendencies' in Russian art and literature, which he saw as a symptom of societal decline, and György Lukács's scathing condemnation of 'decadent bourgeois' intelligentsia and artistic and literary elites.⁶¹ Anticolonial critiques of empire also targeted the 'decadence' of colonial power and its literary and artistic traditions as the basis for founding more politically and socially engaged cultural practices. Examples can be found in the work of Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka. For instance, in the stage directions set out in Scene 4 of his play *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Soyinka describes the opulence of a British Residency in colonial Nigeria as being 'redolent of the tawdry decadence of a far-flung but key imperial frontier', although, like Walcott, this did not stop him from appropriating 'the masks of decadence and aestheticism to satirize postcolonial civil society', as Robert Stilling points out.⁶²

Decadence is shadowed by associations such as those explored in this section: at times orientalist, at times misogynist, or bound up with various kinds of inherited privilege. However, as the articles in this issue go some way toward demonstrating, this only tells a part of the story – a part that risks detracting from a much more interesting staging of decadence as an alteration or inversion of character, composition or directionality. Decadence, like queerness, lends itself to reclamation, and often those who do the reclaiming do so in ways that are emphatically queer, not least because of how decadence is performed as a mode of alteration. Decadence is a process (just like decay or decline are processes), and theatre and performance – as art forms that unfold through time in a shared space – lend themselves to exploring decadence as a process.

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In addressing why it is worth turning to decadence as a critical concept and practice in the 2020s, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, I am put in mind of debates about the value of the arts and humanities and the rationales put forward by governments in times of crisis to justify the erosion of support that would otherwise aid their continued viability. We can expect a familiar rhetoric to unfold, and familiar questions. Is funding for the arts – especially resource-intensive art forms like theatre and performance – a luxury we can ill afford in times of economic crisis, or a form of ‘middle-class decadence’?⁶³

The articles included in this issue invite us to acknowledge decadence as a complex notion, not least when realized in practice. But that very complexity is also what makes it such a valuable frame for exposing the prejudices of those who deploy its rhetorical bite, as well as those who embrace the aesthetics and politics of decadence as a tactic of choice – informed by an ‘uncommon sense’, perhaps, and the reduction of things, people, and practices to their instrumental value and capacity to contribute ‘productively’ to society. This is pertinent in those contexts that undermine the value of the arts and humanities, and that position arts funding as a form of profligacy or wasteful expenditure. However, it is also pertinent in a much wider range of contexts, including within the very communities that have a stake in the poetics and aesthetics of decadence.

The conjunction of decadence and politics, or ethical sympathy, may well be ‘an unpardonable mannerism of style’ for some of its most important exponents, but that need not deter us from assessing what decadence reveals about the politics of its contexts, the policing of pleasure, the channelling of desire, the disciplining of the body and its draperies, and why utility and instrumentality seem so often to be drivers in the establishment of the worthwhile and the valuable. Decadent performance invites us to experience uncommon tastes and impulses and to catch a glimpse of where they might lead us: to decline, perhaps – perhaps the decline of that which ruins – or to a sensibility that recognizes desire as a wild thing that unsettles stultifying conventions, that is resistant to the forward march of techno-science and industry, and that recognizes the body as the ground of a transgressive or transformational sensibility. This is what

the articles that follow invite us to consider – subject, of course, to the disposition and taste of the reader.

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² David Weir, ‘Afterword: Decadent Taste’, in *Decadence and the Senses*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 219–28 (p. 219).

³ Sos Eltis, ‘Theatre and Decadence’, in *Decadence: A Literary History*, ed. by Alex Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 201–17 (p. 205). Due to the breadth of contexts addressed in this issue, the lower-case spelling of ‘decadence’ is used throughout. The capitalization of ‘Decadence’ is usually used to denote its manifestations in art and literature of the west-European fin de siècle. ‘Symbolism’ is capitalized throughout as it refers to a movement.

⁴ As Yvonne Ivory points out, ‘[t]his was not the first time Wilde’s play had been performed for a German audience, although it is often referred to as such. *Salome* had been produced by the Munich Akademisch-dramatischer Verein [Academic-Dramatic Club] on 4 March 1901, with the Wiesbaden-based actress Jenny Rauch (1878-1904) in the title role; and by the Lobetheater in Breslau on 12 May 1901, where Marie Wendt (1876-1961) took on the role of *Salome*’. Yvonne Ivory, ‘Gertrud Eysoldt and the Persistence of Decadence on the German Avant-Garde Stage’, *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2.1 (2019), 16–38 (p. 34, n5).

⁵ Very little is known about Montez’s performance, although it does receive a tantalizing but cursory reference in David Kaufman’s biography of Charles Ludlam. See David Kaufman, *Ridiculous!: The Theatrical Life and Times of Charles Ludlam* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002), p. 55.

⁶ Mel Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin*, 2nd ed. (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2006), p. ix.

⁷ Giulia Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor, and Leisure in 1960s New York* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 76.

⁸ See, for instance, Wole Soyinka, *Opera Wonyosi*, in *Wole Soyinka: Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1998), pp. 295–404 (p. 298). Also, note that Japanese name order has been used throughout this issue. What we call the surname or family name occurs first in a Japanese name with the first or given name second (although with Mishima Yukio you sometimes see both full names in Western order).

⁹ David Hoyle, quoted in Ben Walters, ‘David Hoyle aka the Divine David’, *Time Out*, 3 July 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110607122141/http://www.timeout.com/london/gay/features/1626/David_Hoyle_aka_the_Divine_David.html> [accessed 15 April 2021].

¹⁰ ‘La Pocha Nostra is The Paseo Project’s 2019 Artist in Residence’, *The Paseo Project*, <<https://paseoproject.org/portfolio/la-pocha-nostra/>> [accessed 22 April 2021].

¹¹ Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic*, p. 129; Fritz Kaiser, *Degenerate Art: The Exhibition Guide in German and English*, trans. anon. (1937; NC: Ostara Publications, 2018), p. 66. Note that Hitler references Dadaism, Cubism, and Futurism, and not Weimar dance specifically. Note also that Ostara Publications is an alt-right publisher with links to the British National Party.

¹² Patrick Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002). ‘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 10 February 2020].

¹³ Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020).

¹⁴ Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky, eds, *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). See also Diemo Landgraf, ed., *Decadence in Literature and Intellectual Debate since 1945* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 32.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Arthur Symons, ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 87 (November 1893), 858–67. Gilman’s book also takes a more expansive approach to the study of decadence than now canonical works like Holbrook Jackson’s *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913) and Mario Praz’s *The Romantic Agony* (1933), which played important roles in establishing this period’s mythology in the early twentieth century.

¹⁷ See, for instance John R. Reed's *Decadent Style* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985); Jennifer Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France 1870-1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1986); Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky, eds, *Perennial Decay*; Michael St. John, ed., *Romancing Decay: Ideas of Decadence in European Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). St. John's *Romancing Decay* includes essays on Gabriele d'Annunzio and Pierre Quillard.

¹⁸ 'Women Writing Decadence, 1880-1920', University of Oxford, 7–8 July 2018; 'Decadence, Magic(k) and the Occult', Goldsmiths, University of London, 19–20 July 2018; 'Exoticism, Colonialism and Decadence around the fin de siècle', University of Oxford, 25–26 September 2018; 'The Aesthetics of Decay: Ghost Stories and Mysteries', Birkbeck, University of London, 23 February 2019; 'Aesthetic Time, Decadent Archives', Goldsmiths, University of London, 18–19 July 2019; 'Patterns of Decadence', The British Association for Victorian Studies Annual Conference, University of Exeter, 30 August 2018; 'Decadence and Translation', University of Oxford, 2 November 2018; 'Publishing Decadence in Translation', Senate House, London, 12 February 2019; 'International Perspectives on Decadence in Translation', University of Strasbourg, 13–14 June 2019; Madeleine LeDespencer, 'Félicien Rops and Evil Women: Art of a Decadent Demoniac', Treadwell's Bookshop, London, 7 December 2018; 'La Maladie Fin de Siècle: Decadence and Disease', Birkbeck, University of London, 26 June 2019.

¹⁹ Jane Desmarais and David Weir, eds, *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jane Desmarais and David Weir, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190066956.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190066956>> [accessed 19 December 2021]; Kristin Mahoney and Dustin Friedman, *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). See also Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky, eds, *Perennial Decay*; Landgraf, *Decadence in Literature*; Murray, *Decadence*. Kate Hext and Alex Murray's *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (2019) touches on drama, although its primary focus is on literature. See Kate Hext and Alex Murray, eds, *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). For relevant cross-disciplinary collections adjacent to the study of decadence, see Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter, eds, *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds, *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gail Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Leire Barrera-Medrano, "'Inarticulate cries": Arthur Symons and the Primitivist Modernity of Flamenco', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1.1 (2018), 1–18; Ivory, 'Gertrud Eysoldt'.

²¹ See, for instance, Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Dennis Denisoff, 'Posing a Threat: Queensberry, Wilde, and the Portrayal of Decadence', in *Perennial Decay*, pp. 83–100.

²² See, for instance, Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Petra Dierkes–Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); John Stokes, 'The Legend of Duse', in *Decadence and the 1890s*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp. 151–71; Lucia Re, 'D'Annunzio, Duse, Wilde, Bernhardt: Author and Actress Between Decadence and Modernity', in *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture Between Decadentism and Avant-Garde*, ed. by Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), pp. 86–129. Joseph Bristow's scholarship on and around the work and legacy of Oscar Wilde is also noteworthy. See Joseph Bristow, ed., *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).

²³ Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Another Renaissance: The Decadent Poetic Drama of A. C. Swinburne and Michael Field', in *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Jason Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 116–140 (pp. 136–37). For an example, see Angeliki Papoulia's 2019 production of Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations. A Present-Day Morality* (1915) presented at the Villa il Palmerino in Florence (Lee's home at the time). It was produced by Federica Parretti and directed by Papoulia with the assistance of Sally Blackburn-Daniels. See Elisa Bizzotto, 'Vernon Lee, Walter Pater, and the Revival of Medieval Theatre', *Staging Decadence Blog*, 12 April 2021, <<https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/vernon-lee-walter-pater-and-the-revival-of-medieval-theatre>> [accessed 23 July 2021].

²⁴ See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). Barish includes commentary on playwrights associated with Symbolism and decadence in this totemic volume. For more on these 'intellectual assumptions', see Catherine Hindson, *Female performance practice on the fin-de-siècle popular stages of London and Paris: Experiment and advertisement* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 43.

²⁵ See Shushma Malik, 'Nero, or Rome's first actor-emperor', *Staging Decadence Blog*, 7 July 2021, <<https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/nero-or-romes-first-actor-emperor>> [accessed 23 July 2021].

²⁶ See Frantisek Deak's brief commentary on Baju's *L'École décadente* [*School of Decadence*] (1887). Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 22–23.

²⁷ Octave Mirbeau, *Gens de théâtre* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1924), pp. 110–17; see also Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, pp. 340–41.

²⁸ Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, p. 340.

- ²⁹ Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter, 'Introduction', in *Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Teich and Porter, pp. 1–9, pp. 1–2.
- ³⁰ Arthur Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906); Arthur Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1903).
- ³¹ There are some extreme cases in which the 'fleshiness' of books was demanded of entrepreneurial book binders by dandies. See, for instance, Holbrook Jackson's writing on books bound in human skin in *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 402.
- ³² Kostas Boyiopoulos, "Use my body like the pages of a book": Decadence and the Eroticized Text', in *Decadence and the Senses*, ed. by Desmarais and Condé, pp. 101–20 (p. 101).
- ³³ Paul Bourget, 'The Example of Baudelaire', trans. by Nancy O'Connor, *New England Review*, 30.2 (2009), no pagination. Available at <<http://cat.middlebury.edu/~nereview/30-2/Bourget.htm>> [accessed 20 April 2021].
- ³⁴ See, for instance, Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- ³⁵ Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardesley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 1.
- ³⁶ Frazer Lively, 'Introduction', in Rachilde, *Madame La Mort and Other Plays*, trans. and ed. by Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 3–53 (pp. 7–8).
- ³⁷ Lively, 'Introduction', p. 46.
- ³⁸ Eltis, 'Theatre and Decadence', p. 203.
- ³⁹ There is no shortage of scholarship addressing the close intersections between Symbolism and decadence. See especially the section titled 'Displacements' in Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 4–14. If a distinction is to be made between decadence and Symbolism, it is that Symbolism was primarily concerned with idealism, essences and the metaphysical, whereas decadence was focused more on the materialistic, ornamental, and corporeal. Where literary prose and especially poetry lend themselves to the former, I contend that theatre and performance lend themselves most readily to the latter.
- ⁴⁰ Théophile Gautier, 'Preface', *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. by Helen Constantine (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 3–37 (p. 23).
- ⁴¹ See Dave Beech, *Art and Postcapitalism: Aesthetic Labour, Automation and Value Production* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), pp. 86–88.
- ⁴² Oscar Wilde, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray: Preface', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 3 vols (London: Heron, 1966), I, p. 17.
- ⁴³ Weir, 'Afterword', p. 221.
- ⁴⁴ See Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 12–13.
- ⁴⁵ Jennie Livingston (dir.), *Paris is Burning*, Off White Productions/Academy Entertainment (1990). My thinking here was inspired by Natalie Wynne. See ContraPoints, 'Opulence', *YouTube*, 12 October 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD-PbF3ywGo>> [accessed 14 April 2021].
- ⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kwan-Hsing Chen (New York: Autonomedia, 1996), p. 473.
- ⁴⁷ Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 11. See also José Esteban Muñoz's influential writing on 'disidentification' in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 31.
- ⁴⁸ Katharina Herold and Leire Barrera-Medrano, eds, 'Women Writing Decadence', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2.1 (Spring 2019).
- ⁴⁹ Rachilde, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (Paris: Éditions de France, 1928).
- ⁵⁰ Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 101. Skelly's work might be seen as a feminist re-reading of what John R. Reed has described elsewhere as 'decadent style'. See Reed, *Decadent Style*.
- ⁵¹ Dennis Denisoff, 'Feminist global decadence', *Feminist Modernist Studies*, 4.2 (2021), 137–45 (p. 142).
- ⁵² For more on the 'decadence' of work by McCormick, Young, and Holstein, see Adam Alston, "'Burn the witch": Decadence and the occult in contemporary feminist performance', *Theatre Research International*, 46.3 (2021), 285–302.
- ⁵³ Garelick, *Electric Salome*, p. 103. See also Megan Girdwood's recently published *Modernism and the Choreographic Imagination: Salome's Dance After 1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).
- ⁵⁴ Garelick, *Electric Salome*, p. 92.
- ⁵⁵ Hema Chari, 'Imperial Dependency, Addiction, and the Decadent Body', in *Perennial Decay*, pp. 215–32 (p. 216).
- ⁵⁶ Li Xiaorong, "'I sliced my flesh into paper, and ground my liver into ink": Wang Cihui's (1593-1642) sensualist poetry as an alternative route to self-realization', *Ming Studies*, 67 (2013), 30–53. See also Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization*; Gagnier, 'The Global Circulation of the Literatures of Decadence', *Literature Compass*, 10.1 (2013), 70–81.
- ⁵⁷ A. E. Carter argues that 'the whole theory of decadence' and '[m]ost subsequent developments' can be traced to the work of the Marquis de Sade. A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 5.

⁵⁸ Manet's painting was itself a subversive re-working and melding of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1534), Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *Odalisque with Slave* (1839), and Francisco Goya's *La maja desnuda* [*The Nude Maja*] (1797-1800).

⁵⁹ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 3 vols (London: Heron Books, 1966), III, pp. 301–51 (p. 315).

⁶⁰ See also Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, 'Ottoman Tanzimat and the Decadence of Empire', in *The Oxford Handbook of Decadence*, <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190066956.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190066956>>.

⁶¹ G. V. Plekhanov, 'Art and Social Life', trans. by Eleanor Fox, in *Art and Social Life* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957), pp. 166–228 (pp. 223–24); György Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 7.

⁶² Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, ed. by Simon Gikandi (New York: Norton, 2003), p. 37; Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 141.

⁶³ Assed Baig, 'During Times of Austerity Art is Just Middle-Class Decadence', *Huffington Post*, 20 February 2013, <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/assed-baig/during-times-of-austerity_b_2349132.html> [accessed 22 July 2021].