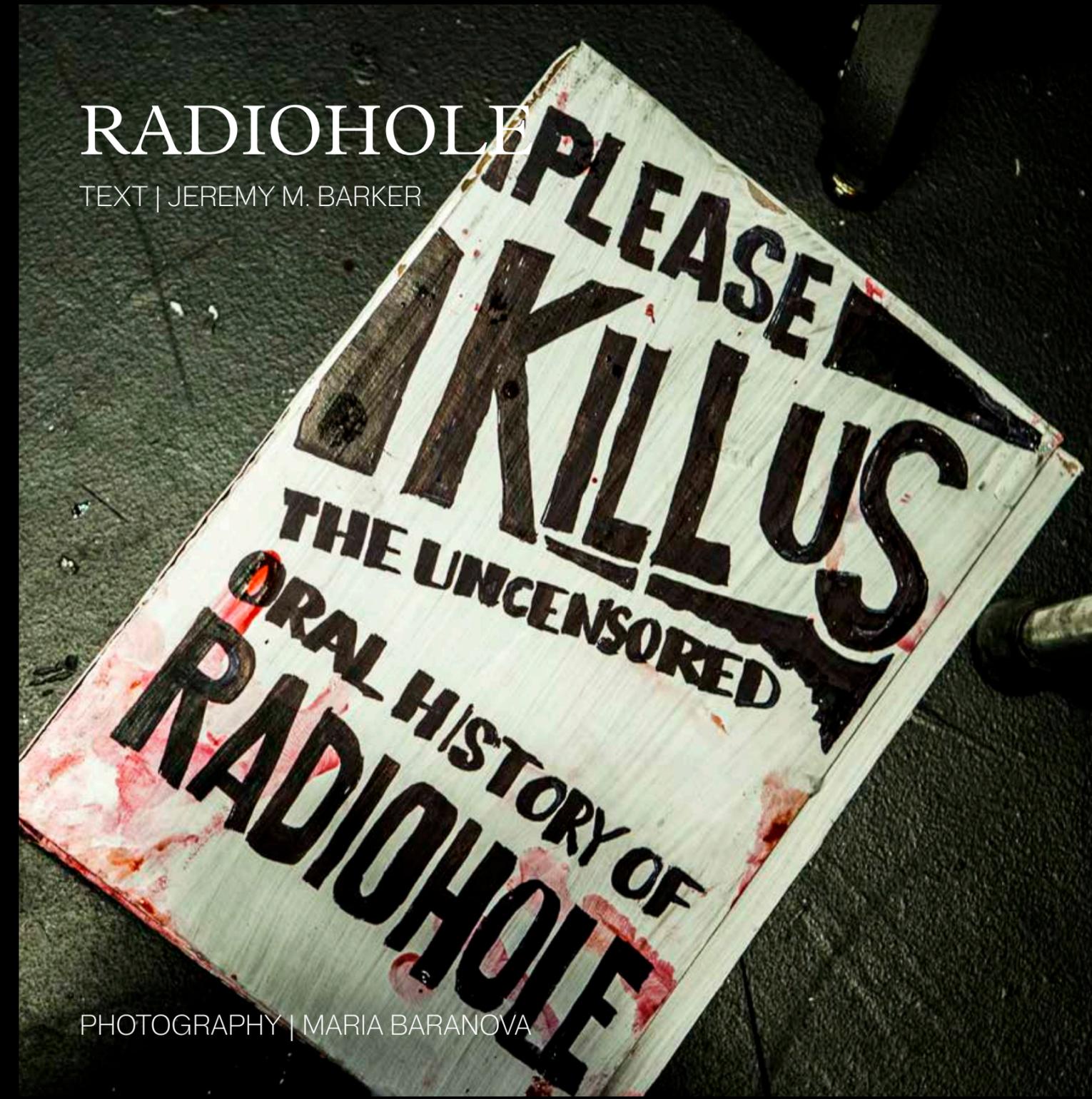


RADIOHOLE

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| DOCUMENT

In early September 2013, an email started making its way throughout New York's downtown theater community reporting that after 13 years, the Collapsable Hole in Williamsburg, Brooklyn was closing, driven out by rent increases.

A converted garage at 146 Metropolitan Avenue, the venue was named after the two companies that came together in 2000 to rent the space – the Collapsable Giraffe (Amy Huggans and brothers Jim and Iver Findlay) and Radiohole (Maggie Hoffman, Eric Dyer, Erin Douglass and Scott Halvorsen Gillette). The Hole, as everyone simply called it, wasn't exactly a performance space. It was a rehearsal studio and development shop for a pair of theater companies with a tendency towards the elaborate and technological.

Nevertheless, it did host plenty of performances, and not just by the resident companies. Over the years, the Hole had hosted works by Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar's Big Dance Theater, Cynthia Hopkins and Sibyl Kempson. Some came to make use of its unique space. Obie winner Alec Duffy (Three Pianos) staged a version of John Cassavetes' 1959 film *Shadows* with a live jazz band and the audience seated as though in a jazz loft, in which the garage door opened during the climactic fist-fight, letting it spill out onto the street to the bewilderment of

passersby. Others used it for more complicated reasons. Elevator Repair Service's lauded production *Gatz* famously took years and the intervention of the Public Theater to bring to New York City, due to conflicts over the theatrical rights to F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel. The Hole had hosted early showings of the piece before those issues were addressed.

Mainly, however, the space was an incubator for the companies that called it home. While they shared with the Wooster Group a fascination with design – you would find scenographic Rube Goldberg devices that mixed cutting-edge video and sound with elaborate sculptural installations – what set them apart was a chaotic and anarchic approach to performances in which seemingly anything could happen. Ilan Bachrach, the artistic director of the summer performance festival Mass Live Arts in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, was a struggling actor and improv comedy performer when he first visited the Hole for a notorious Collapsable Giraffe performance in 2005 that he credits with helping inspire his now successful career

in contemporary experimental performance.

"There were a lot of parts of that show which were really about the audience," he recalled recently. "When you walk in there's this Teletype based on who walks in, gossiping about them. There's a part of the show where they announce, 'Someone has to leave right now, you know who you are!' And it got really fucking awkward. I didn't know anyone there, I didn't know the people in the scene, so I was like, this is fucking real. This is terrifying. I hope this person leaves, whoever you are!" For a bewildered Bachrach, that was the magic of it. In all the chaos, it was impossible to tell what was real and what was staged.

So the scene was set for the anything-goes funeral for the Collapsable Hole on September 14, 2013.

Arriving at the nondescript garage front pinched between hipster bars and restaurants and a garish cinema down the block, mourners entered a packed space. In the middle of the wooden floor, a coffin-shaped hole was





filled with soil and decorated with flowers. Early on, children freely played in it. It was a BYOB affair, but both Eric Dyer and Jim Findlay were wandering around with liter bottles of bourbon to share swigs with old friends. Findlay wore a leopard-print blazer. Huggans, Dyer, Hoffman, and Douglass were dressed alike in black funeral dresses, some with veils. As the night progressed, the space became more and more packed and raucous.

Finally, the core company members gathered around the grave and screamed some toasts before plunging into the mound of dirt, some to ululate, some to fuck the very ground. Scott Halvorsen Gillette was at this point completely naked. The crowd showered the mourners with beer, and mud began to fly.

Then the garage doors opened, a makeshift New Orleans funeral band formed, and the beer-and-mud covered celebrants in varying stages of undress took to the busy streets of gentrified Brooklyn on a Saturday night, blocking traffic and dancing in the streets. After looping around the block, we took over the intersection of Berry Street and Metropol-





itan, playing “The Saints Go Marching In.” Some people formed a dancing circle as taxi horns blared; others of us started a call and response chant of: “Who died? Williamsburg died!”

The Collapsible Hole was dead. Long live the Collapsible Hole.

“Joe Silovsky and I were bantering that about in undergrad. I can’t remember which of us started using the term,” Eric Dyer explained over coffee recently. “I think it was me. And I did make a bad show called Radiohole starring David Cote as a spaceman. David Cote strapped to a chair spouting Samuel Beckett and, like, some girls dancing around.”

Dyer and Erin Douglass, who was sitting next to him in the Brooklyn restaurant, started laughing heavily at the thought of Cote, currently the theater editor of Time Out New York, caught up in an early Dyer piece.

Dyer explained that for “radiohole” there’s “a real definition, and then there are two fake definitions. And I’ll let you figure out the actual one for yourself. But Joe’s definition of a ‘radiohole’ is a hole in heaven that angels yell at each other through. And my definition is much less poetic – or it’s poetic in a differ-

ent way – but it’s that it’s all the noise in the universe that’s possible, heard at once.”

“Wait, and then there’s the other definition,” Douglass added, “which is the point at which, on the moon, where you can’t hear radio waves [broadcast from Earth].”

The group that would eventually become Radiohole began to come together in the mid-1990s. Eric Dyer was then an emerging theater-maker and working theater technician who wanted to produce a play he’d written called Bender. Dyer met Maggie Hoffman through a close friend from his undergraduate days at Bard College. Joseph Silovsky is today a well-regarded theater-maker in his own right and an occasional Radiohole collaborator. After they graduated

from Bard in 1991, Silovsky moved to Chicago to continue his studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), and Dyer went to work in New York where, after stints as an artist assistant and a welder, he wound up working as Technical Director for the Wooster Group. Silovsky and Hoffman worked together in Chicago when Hoffman was an undergraduate at SAIC. Silovsky and Hoffman stayed with Dyer when they came to New York to perform their show *The Death of Dr. Duppertuto* at the Ontological Hysterical Theater at St. Mark’s.

Silovsky and Hoffman soon moved to New York, and Dyer asked Hoffman to work with him on Bender. Hoffman, who played the lead Alice, also composed and performed the score for the show on Theremin. She

“We all drank well together,” said Maggie Hoffman about the group’s formation. We met in the East Village, not far from where she was performing at New York Theatre Workshop in Elevator Repair Service’s Fondly, Collette Richland. “I know that sounds stupid, but we enjoyed each other’s company and didn’t take things seriously in the same way that other people do that I think is annoying.”

ANGER/
NATION (2008)
effects an unholy
marriage between
the transgressive
filmmaker Kenneth
Anger and the public
performance protests
of noted Prohibitionist
Carrie Nation.

suggested to Dyer that her boyfriend Scott Halvorsen Gillette help with sound. Gillette agreed, eventually performing too. After two actors playing the male lead Bender left the production and with Dyer ready to quit in frustration, Hoffman and Gillette convinced Dyer to play the role himself.

Bender premiered at the Red Room, a small theater on East 4th Street, in August 1998. A year or so later, the trio were developing their next show, A History of Heen, as part of the Wooster Group's "Emerging Artist" series at the Performing Garage, the company's longtime home in New York's Soho neighborhood. Erin Douglass, an intern with the Wooster Group at the time, worked with

Radiohole on the piece. This completed the central quartet of Radiohole at the same time that they gave themselves a company name.

Today, the Radiohole crew is more subdued. Douglass, Hoffman, and Halvorsen Gillette are all parents, and Dyer is extremely close to them in a way that only a group of people whose lives became so tightly intertwined over such an extended period can be. But all of them share a certain off-beat wry sense of humor. Dyer is the most jokey, though he frequently retreats into elaborate discussions of aesthetics. Hoffman is quite forceful, though she is more than happy to indulge an

In Fluke (2007),
Herman Melville's
Moby Dick becomes
a reference point
in an exploration
of America's
schizophrenic
embrace of both
transformational
progress and deep-
seated conservatism.

off-color joke. Douglass is the most understated, though in banter with the others she more than holds her own. Scott Halvorsen Gillette, who now lives outside New York City, was not interviewed for this article, but conversations with him following performances of Tarzana during the 2015 Mass Live Arts Festival inform this piece.

Inflatable
Frankenstein (2012)
appropriates Mary
Shelley's classic as an
existential reflection
on art-making as a
way-of-life.

Despite their formation around an original play by Dyer, Radiohole has been known primarily as a company that devises shows through a complicated and often quite long process. Creating a new work involves bringing various ideas to the table, which may relate to performance, content, text or simple physical elements to manipulate and play with onstage. Dyer often speaks of himself in terms of visual art, characterizing his work as a form of "sculpture" placed onstage. His background in technically sophisticated work

Given the collective approach, the subject matter, realized through a mixture of scenography and textual content, is a sort of mash-up of ideas and concepts plumbing the depths of the American collective imagination.





– including as a contributing artist with the Wooster Group – is often instrumental in realizing elaborate design concepts. Halvorsen Gillette is an accomplished designer and technician. Hoffman, a driven performer, often contributes to visual elements that double as challenges to confront in live performance. Douglass, with a background in dance, often tackles movement within performance as well as the overall pacing and rhythm of the shows. Thus, the company collectively conceptualizes, designs, executes and performs their shows, with a group of constantly changing collaborators.

The experience of a Radiohole show almost always includes nudity, drinking, and ribald humor. Scenographically, their productions are often breathtaking. In *Fluke*, Hoffman spends the performance suspended near center-stage off of an elaborate set piece like a ship's figurehead, from where she delivers ominous referential "weather reports," her eyes closed but her eyelids painted to look like human eyes. In *Inflatable Frankenstein*, Dyer enters the space via an incredibly slow descent from the rafters on a platform, like Frankenstein's monster after lightning has reanimated him. Long sheets of viscous green slime slowly peel off the platform, audibly plopping to the stage below. Dozens of inflatable creations dot the stage, leading up to the centerpiece: a massive "body without organs" plastic inflatable nearly envelops the stage, from within which they perform the

In their production of Tom Murrin's 1969 play *Myth or Meth* (2014), an enormous Italian dinner is mashed across the stage for the performers to slip about in. As part of the dinner-bacchanal that leads to intermission, performer Michael Casselli is led onstage in a lobster costume, thrown down on the table, and to exclamations of "Roe! Roe!" Casselli's costume loins are torn open, from which green Jell-O "roe" is consumed.

show's conclusion.

Despite the elaborate details – three hand-made sea crafts painstakingly made from marine plywood and fiberglass rocking on curved water skis, or dozens of hand-painted mechanical fish floundering on the stage, or a design for "liquid lamps" that was featured as a do-it-at-home project in *Popular Science* magazine – Radiohole productions are probably best known for the sheer mess of it all. Chaos figures heavily in the company's aesthetic, from the slime in *Inflatable Frankenstein* to Jell-O shots (for both consumption and dispersal around the stage and onto the audience) in *Whatever, Heaven Allows* (2010).

"I feel there's a misunderstanding sometimes that we're not rigorous or that we don't give a shit, or that we're just being crazy," Hoffman said. "There is precision."

Radiohole defines precision in a particular way. Whereas some performance groups might belabor creating tightly wrought works with exacting precision, Radiohole has always allowed for a slightly more chaotic framework in which chance plays a role. As Dyer put it in a January 2013 interview a few years ago in *Cuturebot*, "We set up a situation and let it rip. And it doesn't always go by the book, but we're not going to come in for days and days to try to pin every little thing down because it's not interesting to me."

The general messiness of their productions serves a purpose. Hoffman is credited by other company members for pushing the mess so far and offered some explanation to Chance.

“To me, it’s always been about wanting something real, and that was the easiest way for something to have an actual situation. You can’t act your way out of being covered in slime. It’s something you have to experience in a real way.”

The company achieves a level of “liveness” in performance that is one of their most remarked-upon qualities. Several years ago, Ariana Smart Truman, the long-time producer of Elevator Repair Service and an

associate of the Wooster Group, remarked informally that Radiohole produced three of the ten most remarkable live performance moments she’d experienced in her career. Radiohole’s art feels like barely constrained anarchy onstage. Yet it’s anything but chance or coincidence, but rather it’s the result of a rigorous approach to creating work that many theater artists would rather avoid.

In a reprise of *Myth or Meth* at the WFMU radio station’s performance space Monty Hall in New Jersey during the 2015 January festival season – a trade-show for national and international curators to present shows at their venues – Ilan Bachrach became audibly sick inside a costume, among many over-the-top moments in the performance. During *Tarzana*, Hoffman urinates on fellow performer Ryan Holsopple.

The Collapsible Hole played a profound role in shaping Radiohole’s work, though not necessarily in the way one might expect. The company rebuffs the idea that their stage creations were in any way limited to or specifically constructed for the relatively small space of the Hole. As Dyer put it, “We’ll fill any space we’re spilled in.” And many shows were specifically created for larger theaters, like the *Kitchen* in New York’s Chelsea neighborhood where *Inflatable Frankenstein* played, which contain elements far too large for their small space at the Hole.

“Even the scene where I pee on Ryan was a problem-solving thing,” Hoffman explained. “We set ourselves up to do a work-in-progress, and we didn’t know what anything meant yet, and I was just supposed to be doing something mean to Ryan and I ran out of paint to spray on him, so I did that. And I remember thinking next time we do the show I will think of something way better to do to Ryan than that. And I never did.”







The Hole did help them to focus intensely on a pair of tendencies: pushing material elements employed in performance to their utmost, and the aesthetic and philosophical development of an intimate performance style that blurs the boundaries of performance and audience spaces to create an almost communal experience.

The first problem a company like Radiohole faces isn't access to space to develop work, but rather how to begin making sense of space in the first place. They typically start with no traditional text or character identities, let alone a concrete dramatic setting to realize onstage. The question becomes: how to start using space to develop the physical installations that will be employed? The earliest shows – like *Bender*, *History of Heen* and *Rodan* (1999) – made use of a large table which could variously serve as a staging place for props, a playing space, and the location of performance instruments (often various microphones and sound effects), since Radiohole creates performances in which tech is operated by the performers onstage. In *Whatever, Heaven Allows* performers began triggering fairly elaborate computer samplers, lighting effects and video through iPhone apps while performing.

Eventually, the use of a table became too constricting. “We came away from always having these tight sets that were all around a table,” Erin Douglass explained, “and wanting to break out from there, we started having these different smaller stations.”

These stations, essentially elaborate podiums, permitted a more dynamic use of space. While they retained their utilitarian function of marking place and housing tech equipment, the stations became increasingly elaborate stage constructions.

In *Whatever, Heaven Allows* the central station consisted of a large circle made of $\frac{3}{4}$ " steel pipe suspended from a track that ran upstage-downstage at center stage. The bottom of the circle was joined in the torso of a wire-frame female mannequin, lit with a hidden strip of LED. Aesthetically, the piece referenced Douglas Sirk's use of mirrors in

his 1955 film *All That Heaven Allows*, and the station was primarily used by Hoffman, whose role was based on Jane Wyman's character in the film. In *Inflatable Frankenstein*, these stations, used by Hoffman (as Mary Shelley) and Douglass (as Claire Clairmont) were constructed from old sewing machines that inscribed text on long sheets of plastic that inflated.

As these devices onstage became more elaborate, the company pushed the use of other materials in their work. As Dyer noted, “For years we worked specifically in three-quarter-inch black steel pipe and one-by- dimension lumber, so one-by-four and one-by-six. Specifically that stuff. And it was the basis of our sets. There would be other things added in, but that was it. And I think part of it was an engineering thing. How far we can push structural integrity with this stuff but putting mass on it in *Fluke*, say, where people climb on it. Or in *Heen* or *Rodan*, we built these edifices that were these performing machines that were like jungle gyms; we pushed that material to its maximum.”

The Hole offered the space and time to explore how far these materials could be pushed, which influenced the company's process even when their work was developed for spaces too large for the Hole to host. With *Inflatable Frankenstein*, the largest inflatables had to be constructed in a residency at the Experimental Music and Performing Arts





Center at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York, but the learning process of how to construct them and manage the complex air pumps was developed at the Hole.

A second effect of the Hole was the intense, intimate experience with the audience that became a hallmark of the company's work. For Radiohole, it's impossible to rehearse without an audience. Hoffman commented that, for her, the first rehearsal of *Tarzana* was opening night. Hoffman and Dyer likewise explained that few of their shows felt truly "done" except shows like *Fluke* and *Radiohole is Still My Name* (2004) which toured widely and had exceptionally long lives.

"I think that comes from the way that we make shows," Douglass explained. "Probably even going back to *Bender* being performed in bars and basements and backyards and stuff. But also having the Hole and having people come see the show and then stay. That's one of the ways we get an outside eye, by talking with the audience. So having everyone stay and drink beer, it's more of an experience than just: well now I'm seeing a show, oh now I'm leavin'."

Even on tour, she added, "We're always trying to make it feel like you're encompassed in the show in the whole theater because that's what it feels like at the Hole. So when we

went to Norway [with *Radiohole is Still My Name*], we were moving couches from offices and the green room into the theater. So even though the risers had this huge rake, we were trying to create a more intimate feeling, so you still get that 'Radiohole is right on top of you' experience."

Radiohole has long maintained a tradition of giving away beer and drinks at their shows as part of the experience, which has occasionally led them to be characterized as less-than-serious. Ben Brantley, reviewing *Whatever, Heaven Allows*, opens with a three-paragraph commentary on the availability of specific types of beer before comparing the experience to "a frat house made up of maverick members of Phi Beta Kappa." While a generally positive review, it avoids grappling with the use of content – Douglas Sirk melodramas mashed up with Milton's *Paradise Lost* – and focuses instead on a vague commentary on the sociology of beer choice.

The loss of the Hole inspired a drastic change in how the company created work. After 15 years of working together, there was a sense that the company might be ready to throw in the towel. Several years earlier, Halvorsen Gillette moved out of the City to rural Vermont and was no longer as active with the group. Dyer and Hoffman started performing with others. Even *Inflatable Frankenstein*, their last completed work before the closing of the Hole, felt like a swansong. In

"I think there's such a misunderstanding about the beer," Hoffman lamented.

"For us, it's always been a way for inviting people in. Making it more open to people, so that it's not 'oh, this is pretentious you'll never understand it.'"

It's theater. It's for your enjoyment, and we want you to feel appreciated as an audience member. And it always makes people take us not seriously in a bad way."

The company's resurgence occurred with *Myth or Meth*, which they were invited to present in April 2014 at La Mama ETC in New York as part of a festival celebrating the life and work of Tom Murrin. Widely known as the "Alien Comic," Murrin was a long-time fixture in downtown performance world in New York. A playwright and performance artist, he was also the organizer of *Howl at the Moon*, a long-time series of mixed-bill performances timed to the full moon.

this work, Dyer played the role of the monster, isolated physically and philosophically from his fellow performers who spend a long section of the show acting out an audience talkback where they explain thematic conceits from Mary Shelley's novel and her personal life. This scene read as complete double-entendre involving the challenge of balancing art-making and the impact of having children, as three of the four leading company members were parents by this point. It felt as though Radiohole was offering a fond farewell to the manic art scene from which they emerged.

"Every show feels like the last show," Douglass commented. "We were just working on a grant application, and it was like, 'How can we keep doing this?'"

When the Hole closed, the company's future was further in doubt. Having a permanent space in which to build shows leisurely from the ground up over the course of two or more years was crucial to their approach. Without a home in which to set up Dyer's portable workshop and mess around for weeks at a time, the idea of starting a new work seemed daunting if not impossible.

In his later years, he wrote about the performance scene for *Paper* magazine. His death in March 2012 affected several generations of artists, who came together in 2014 to host a festival of work celebrating his career.

Offered their choice of play text from his oeuvre, Radiohole selected 1969's *Myth (or Maybe Meth)*, an absurdist spectacle of the politics of American consumption, the title of which was simplified to *Myth or Meth* for their production. With neither Hoffman nor Douglass available to work on the production, Dyer retreated to Vermont to work with Halvorsen Gillette, longtime collaborators Jim Findlay, Ryan Holsopple, Ilan Bachrach and Jon Okabayashi, and new collaborators Andrea Mincic and Amanda Bender. The performance was developed in a few weeks. In place of their usual elaborate metal and wood sets with complex technical aspects, the design was cardboard, giving the play the appearance of an extremely messy and perverse Kindergarten production. Scatological and obscene, the play was well received, and the company arranged to reprise it for a pair of performances the following January during the Association of Performing Arts Presenters' annual conference in New York. Translated to a far smaller stage of Monty Hall, the performance was anarchic, verged on the disastrous, and reclaimed the sort of energy that, for all its accomplishments, works like *Inflatable Frankenstein* lacked.

It also inspired Hoffman and Douglass. "Maggie and I had this great experience of just being able to see it," Douglass recalled. "The boys went up to Scott's place in Vermont and made this piece, and we got to watch it and were like: 'Wow! You got this done in three weeks!' And of course, they had their own time of it. Then



when the three of us – Eric and Maggie and I – got together again, it seemed like the obvious answer.”

The answer was to forgo the long process of hashing out content and to produce someone else’s play. For text, they turned to writer Jason Grote, who they’d met during a residency some years before.

“With the Tom Murrin show, they knew they couldn’t change any of the text,” Hoffman said. “With Jason’s play, we had no money, so we wanted to try to streamline our process and make it shorter. So we thought, oh if Jason writes something, it’ll be like the Tom Murrin show. But the fact that Jason’s pretty cool and willing to let us play with it, we couldn’t do it. We had to put our stamp on it.”

Grote is an accomplished playwright with a variety of Off-Broadway and regional theater credits, who’s lately turned to screenwriting in Hollywood, contributing to television shows like *Smash* and *Mad Men*. *Radiohole* reached out to commission him to create a new play.

“I think all we said was four people,” Douglass said of their request to Grote. “Write a play for four people. He kept wanting to know, ‘Well, do you want this?’ and it was Maggie and me on the phone with him and we tried to answer his questions without giving too much information, because we really wanted him to write it for us based on what he wanted to give us,

and the challenge of what that would be.” Dyer added, “We wanted this happy birthday moment where we got this script and didn’t know what it was until we opened it.”

The result was *Tarzana*, presented in July 2015 at Mass Live Arts, a festival organized by their occasional collaborator Ilan Bachrach. As it turned out, working with a pre-existing text wasn’t as easy as they imagined. Grote, in Douglass’s telling, had given them not so much a play but his version of a *Radiohole* show, a mashed-up text that Grote himself called “word salad.”

Once receiving the script, Dyer, Douglass, Hoffman, and Ryan Holsopple – a performer and theater technologist who’d collaborated with them over the years – each drew a character name from a hat before starting a cold read of the text. They made it about “six pages,” in Douglass’s telling before they had to reset and figure out how to approach it.

“Having somebody write something for us is totally different,” Douglass explained. “When we first got the script we had a hard time trying to figure out our way in, whereas when you read a script that wasn’t written with you in mind, it’s its own thing. But we got this script from Jason and had to make our way in. And we decided we had to rewrite it or reorganize it – put what we call ‘the rhythm’ into it – ourselves. So we each took pieces and rearranged. I think we spent two weeks doing that.”

The result, while abstract and referential, isn’t impenetrable. At its heart, Grote’s text is grappling with cities and change, the desire to preserve versus the straight-jacket that history can place on residents. While it might generally be said to be about “gentrification,” it’s a little more complicated than that.

The title refers to a real place, *Tarzana*, an affluent neighborhood in Los Angeles. The land the community is built on was purchased in 1919 by the novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs with money made primarily from his most famous character, *Tarzan*. Burroughs subdivided the land and sold off plots to construct the neighborhood, but the deeds contained a rather regressive and racist clause: the deed holder would not permit the later sale of the land to non-whites.

From the title alone, the desire to preserve a community from change takes on dark overtones. The play is mostly set in reference to the *Kandor* story from the *Superman* comics. Holsopple took on the role of *Superman*. *Kandor* is the city on *Superman*’s home world of *Krypton*; long thought destroyed with the rest of planet. A comic series from the 1950s revealed that one of *Superman*’s villains, *Brainiac*, had secretly shrunk *Kandor* and preserved it and its inhabitants from destruction.

This produced a fascinating dramatic irony in the *Superman* comics. Although the hero eventually seizes *Kandor* from *Brainiac*, he’s unable

to reverse the shrinking nor liberate the inhabitants from the container that holds them in stasis, rendering *Superman* the impotent defender of a city he cannot liberate, the champion of people whose freedom he cannot restore.

The story of *Kandor* likewise inspired the visual artist Mike Kelley, whose work Grote credits with helping inspire the text of *Tarzana*. Kelley’s work often explored the relationship between memory and space. In *Educational Complex* (1995), for instance, Kelley created a 3-D architectural model of his school from memory, letting the areas with which he was unfamiliar or forgot to blur into oblivion. Inspired by the image of *Kandor* – a beautiful, futuristic city hermetically sealed in a bottle, fed by canisters of preserving gas – Kelley created more than 100 sculptural installations of the city. While each is beautiful and slightly sad in its own right, together they form an elaborate tapestry. Each is based on different artists’ renderings of *Kandor* from decades of *Superman* comics. *Kandor* is both frozen in time and always changing.

These notions of stasis and change and freedom all come together in Grote’s script as realized by *Radiohole*.

“When we started discovering what the show was about for us, that meant several things,” Douglas explained. “When it became about this idea of the city and gentrification and the bottle city being here and us, and the death of

the *Hole*, when we found that for ourselves in the script, all that self-referential stuff came in.”

“I think Jason’s text became more like *Radiohole*’s traditional process,” added Dyer, “where we encountered material or a theme and transformed it.”

From *Myth or Meth*, *Radiohole* preserved the cardboard aesthetic, heightened with stronger black outlining which rendered the stage a sort of 3-D comic book. Digging into their own experiences, the show morphed into a radical take on gentrification and change. The hero of sorts is Hoffman’s character *Robespierre*, who rails against the stultifying conditions of on-going preservation, and referencing the history of punk rock. Legs McNeil’s remarkable oral history of punk, *Please Kill Me*, is here recast as a cardboard prop bearing the subtitle “the uncensored oral history of *Radiohole*.”

In keeping with the imperative to make the audience “feel like you’re encompassed in the show,” the performance at Mass Live Arts used a wide variety of spaces afforded by the festival’s home at Bard College. The audience enjoyed drinks outside the stage doors, behind the theater complex, before the show. Holsopple, in costume as *Superman*, tended to the lawns on a riding lawnmower, guzzling milk from a gallon jug, as his doppelgänger Halvorsen Gillette trailed him, scowling. In addition to the prerequisite beers, custom-made “vampire cupcakes” were served. Concocted by performer

and former Jean-Georges pastry chef Kristin Worrall for the show, the cupcakes earned their own profile in the *Times* before the show opened. Dyer took pride in his claim that, “We’re the only experimental theater company that’s been published in both *Popular Science* and the food section of the *New York Times*.”

Once the doors to the theater opened and the audience filed in, Holsopple shut off his lawnmower and wandered into the frame. After a costume change into another *Superman* outfit and guzzling a second gallon of milk, the show set off. Dyer and Douglass played vaguely effete and slightly insane denizens of the static city. Hoffman, in French Revolutionary costume as *Robespierre*, railed. Suicides and murders were committed with varying degrees of success with paper-and-cardboard objects decorated with ever more blood red paint thrown about the space. The impotent defender of the status quo, *Superman*, became the object of *Robespierre*’s ire, who subjected him to countless acts of violence and humiliation, culminating in a brief bit of onstage urination.

When the *Collapsible Hole* succumbed in 2013 to price hikes in *Williamsburg*, almost everyone involved resisted the cookie-cutter story of “another arts organization pushed out by developers.” The artists who visited or called the *Hole* home accepted that change is inevitable, and saw the 13-year-run as a success story rather than a tragedy.

“Thirteen years is a damn good run,” Jim Findlay told Artforum’s Claudia La Rocco the night of the funeral. “People saw things here that changed what they thought was possible. Thirteen years in New York and we never spent a dime on admin. Blow that out your hat, New York Theatre Workshop.”

When the stage is reduced to shreds of torn paper, and several gallons of blood spilled about the space, eventually, a group of interns and extras entered as a chaotic New Orleans-style funeral band playing a dirge, carrying with them a carefully tended, coffin-shaped platter of soil to lay center stage.

Two years after their long-time home was lost and nearly two decades into a chaotic career of making art, Radiohole adapted the moment when their existence was most called into question and turned it into the denouement of their latest work. It was a moment wholly consistent with their ethos. The funeral for the Collapsible Hole was a singular moment, and they’d come up with a way – however small – to share it with their audiences. 1

SOURCES

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“I think there’s a need for people to feel invited into things and to feel like they’re supposed to be there,” Hoffman said shortly before running off to New York Theatre Workshop for a matinee performance.

“I hate going to a show where I feel like it’s been made for the benefit of the people making it.”

