As I walk through Kilmartin Glen, Argyll, Scotland and confront physical remnants of the work of its Neolithic inhabitants, the title of NVA’s ongoing project here, *Half Life*, spirals out from the environmental arts company’s own eroding installations. Since “half-life” denotes the duration of a substance’s natural decay to half of its initial value, this project asks me to consider how the bones of previous inhabitants and the stones of their (and the earth’s) activity break down and commingle to comprise the site’s geology. From the concept of half-life and its artistic rendering by NVA, I infer an alternate meaning: an intermediary stage between life and death. This meaning invites a continued reflection on and exploration of the terrain where NVA’s visual interventions stand as enigmatic markers of a creative “dialogue with the dead” (Fisher 2007a).

NVA stands for *nacionale vitae activa*, a Roman phrase meaning the “right to influence public affairs.” Creative Director Angus Farquhar formed NVA in 1992 in part, as their mission states, to “champion an emerging form of collaborative art practice that aims to galvanise public partners and bridge the gap between political strategy and practical implementation through temporary and permanent works” (NVA n.d.). For the company, who maintain an administrative hub in Glasgow but work throughout Scotland (and recently internationally), art should move people physically and affectively; stimulate provocative questions and substantial debate; bolster communities based on their needs; and take place on both a large scale and in intimate settings. *Half Life: Journey into the Neolithic*, created in September 2007 in Argyll, is a compelling example of the cross-disciplinary nature of NVA’s artistic praxis. Although the project began in 2007, in June 2012 I went in search of the project’s visual installations or, in NVA’s words, “permanent landworks,” which remain even after their audio components have been removed. Given NVA’s desire for the piece to enact a dialogue with those who occupied Argyll centuries ago, I was curious about what kind of dialogue I might invoke by investigating these landworks five years after their installation. What would “permanent” mean in the here and now? What might *Half Life*’s ongoing ecological performance entail?

*Half Life* combined some aesthetic and participatory features of NVA’s past and current environmental and artistic acts. Their projects have included group walks within a landscape altered by audio-visual installations in works such as *The Path* (2000) and *The Storr: Unfolding Landscape* (2005), urban gardening projects such as *Hidden Gardens* (2003) and *Glasgow Harvest* (2010, 2011, 2012), a cross-disciplinary arts center in progress at...
St. Peter’s Seminary (2010–present), and events for runners and walkers called Speed of Light (Edinburgh, 2012; Yokohama, 2012; and Manchester, 2013). Each event, whether unfolding over the course of one evening or several years, positions its participant-audiences as constitutive elements of the performance.

NVA encourages its audiences and visitors to reflect on their physical and psychological relationships to a given environment: a city park, a glen, woodlands, a hill, etc. They point to the interconnectivity between environments and those who inhabit them, whether that period of residence spans minutes, months, or millennia. They aim to engage directly with and, in some instances, reanimate the distant and more recent histories (socio-cultural, geological, ecological) of each place in which they work. Given the archaeological significance of Kilmartin Glen, Argyll, which includes the ruins of a fort at Dunadd where Gaelic-speaking Dalriada kings are believed to have been inaugurated beginning around 600 CE, it is not surprising that NVA would turn its creative attention to enlivening this part of Scotland.

Kilmartin Glen abounds with historical curiosities: cairns, forts, stone circles, burial cists, and less discernible monuments of a distant Neolithic past. Here people hunted and gathered, constructed tools, gave birth, and buried their dead. Circles, spirals, and straight lines were carved onto many of these structures, which often stand near what appear to be gateways or “entrances” in the natural terrain (Bradley 1997:123). In surveying the glen, archaeologist Graham Ritchie proposes, “The concentration of [Neolithic] sites and the intervisibility of many within the confined valley floor allow us to conjure notions of a numinous landscape with an importance that might extend beyond the immediate locality” (1997:79). “Intervisibility” denotes how the adorned sides of the stones face one another across the glen’s hills and valleys. This “rock art,” including spirals and cup-and-ring (a mark surrounded by concentric circles) designs embedded in many of the stones, Richard Bradley suggests, could have acted as signs to Neolithic communities, indicating pathways and directions since the markings seem to represent land features (1997:120–24). Stan Beckensall notes, “walking the routes from one panel to another gives a sense of markers being offered, without our being able to understand what those particular symbols mean” (2005:122). Walking in Kilmartin Glen reactivates a latent history where geological and topographical features inspired human artistry and communication. As I reanimated the latent history of Kilmartin Glen through my footsteps, I considered NVA’s installations as nodes that looked toward one another, generating a circuit of intervisibility that paralleled the area’s Neolithic past.

Angus Farquhar and his team used this rich terrain as inspiration for Half Life. The project occurred during Highland 2007, a Scottish government-backed initiative that encompassed a series of events involving art, sport, the natural environment, and the cultural heritage of this wide swathe of the country. The idea for

3. The nighttime walks (The Path in Glen Lyon, Perthshire) and The Storr (near Portree, Isle of Skye) highlighted geological and topographical features of the locale through live and recorded sound, installed lights, and live performers. In connecting Glen Lyon to the spirituality of the Himalayas and the Storr to the German landscapes that inspired Romantic poetry, NVA invited participants to see and hear anew the land beneath their feet. The Hidden Gardens, located beside the Tramway Arts Centre, and Glasgow Harvest events, celebrated at garden sites across the city, aimed to reconfigure urban spaces into gardens that nourish bodies and souls with events programming that emphasized learning, community exchange, and creative expression. NVA is slowly transforming the ruins of St. Peter’s Seminary and Kilmahew Estate into a field station—an educational and artistic venue—through collaborations with artists, social activists, gardeners, architects, local residents, and geographers. The inaugural Speed of Light took place in Edinburgh during the 2012 London Olympics. Over the course of three weeks, it featured hundreds of walkers carrying lighted walking sticks and runners fitted with light suits. Framed as a “fusion of public art and sporting endeavor” (NVA 2012) the event also included public talks, blogs, and web portraits.


5. For more information on Highland 2007, see www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2007/01/12113611.
this large-scale investment in and celebration of the Scottish Highlands followed the failed bid by Inverness/The Highlands to become the 2008 European Capital of Culture.

Half Life, concurrent with Highland 2007, featured two very different kinds of performance events. For two weeks, NVA staged a nightly theatrical performance, coproduced with the National Theatre of Scotland, called Half Life. This play, written by Thomas Legendre, took place on an NVA-designed and constructed stage in the Achnabreck Woods. Legendre’s one-act play centered on the ambitions and personal losses of an archaeologist caught up in the language, symbols, and labors of his work. Fragmentary and repetitious, the play’s dramaturgy recalled the spirals featured in the Neolithic rock art. The protagonist’s memory lapses concerning what happened to his daughter (who appears to have wandered away from his dig site and, presumably, has died) aligned with a partial understanding of the purpose and meaning of the Neolithic monuments. Beyond the three named characters, two silent figures appeared occasionally, suggesting an ongoing mystery surrounding the activities of past inhabitants (Legendre 2012). While the play provoked questions about the relationship between place, memory, violence, and kinship, the daytime wanderings encouraged by NVA and the artistic remnants left behind (continue to) invite physical encounters with and explorations of ambiguous markers of past labors and creative expressions that slowly erode into the future.

Half Life invited participants in its diurnal performance to explore an area of over 100 square miles that contains dozens of Neolithic and Bronze Age remains. NVA installed audiovisual components alongside some of these sites, including the more recent ruins of Mill Cottage and an adorned rock face called Creag Mhos Diagonal. The arts group made available to visitors a map of the area that they had published, with directions to and minimal descriptions of the sites. The map also acted as a book cover for a collection of essays about Kilmartin and archaeology, which visitors could pick up at the Kilmartin House Museum within the glen as they began their walk.

My explorations took me to both of the sites. I began at the Mill Cottage (fig. 1), really fragments of four stone walls—today a home for insects, wildlife, and vegetation. NVA installed audiovisual components alongside some of these sites, including the more recent ruins of Mill Cottage and an adorned rock face called Creag Mhos Diagonal. The arts group made available to visitors a map of the area that they had published, with directions to and minimal descriptions of the sites. The map also acted as a book cover for a collection of essays about Kilmartin and archaeology, which visitors could pick up at the Kilmartin House Museum within the glen as they began their walk.

The inverted tree asks its viewer to reimage up and down; the tree’s relationship to the wheel that encircles it, and looks to be made of stone, invites observers to question notions of containment and order. In scrutinizing this installation five years after its placement, I see that the wheel is, in fact, painted Styrofoam, or a similar substance. On the wheel’s underside a thin circle of material—intended to

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6. Liverpool won the 2008 bid to become the European Capital of Culture.

7. Although this collaboration intrigues me because of the differing notions of “national” at play in the work of these artistic companies, I have chosen to focus on the installations for this essay. For more information about the play, see Thomas Legendre (2011; article also available on Legendre’s website, www.thomaslegendre.com/landscape-mindscape).


9. Legendre’s play references the sacred and secular implications of this spatial relationship.
hide the designer’s measurements—hangs limply (fig. 2). Circles and straight lines adorn this “hyperobject,” Timothy Morton’s term for materials such as Styrofoam that transcend localization. Lightweight and durable, this hyperobject exceeds its site. The facsimile of stone yields a mystical quality that represents “permanence” as it gradually erodes over centuries in the future. As the Styrofoam breaks down into ever-smaller particles, the wind and rain will carry it out of its current context; its pieces will, on the one hand, pollute and, on the other hand, intertwine with other habitats. The apparatus and its constituent elements make visible (and tangible if, like me, you clamber over the waist-high stone wall to root around in the cottage ruins) the variable relationships between humans and non-humans that pervade this site. As its green color indicates, this man-made object slowly, if partially, succumbs to the surrounding ecosystem. The sense of time that manifests in this artistic performance envelops me during my visit five years after its commencement. Subtle signs of decay reframe contemporaneity as a temporal continuum: a half-life.

The Mill Cottage, constructed much more recently than many of the other sites in Argyll, points toward another node in NVA’s artistic network. Striding northwest of the Mill, I venture to Creag Mhos Diagonal (Cliff or Crag Diagonal), an upraised carved slab of rock tucked away behind conifers that line a gravel pathway wide enough for forestry commission trucks to drive through. This rock has stood here for millennia and was initially shaped by glacial activity and exposure to the elements. NVA observes, “Much of the surface patterning [on the slab] has been created by the natural scourging movement of ice and water containing small stones playing over the surface” (NVA 2007). This account emphasizes that what may appear as a timeless landscape contains evidence of change, decay, and erosion. Etched into the rock are several spiral cir-

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11. NVA created a separate website for Half Life. The site includes information regarding the nature of the overall project, their permanent landworks in Argyll, walking directions to the sites, and a downloadable version of the map that accompanied the event: www.halflife.org.uk.
cles. This Neolithic artistry marks the site as an important element of the intervisible network that intrigues archaeologists. NVA has constructed a wooden walkway leading from the gravel road to the rock face (fig. 3). They view this landwork as “a new dramatic entrance to the rock surface amplifying the importance of route as well as final location” (NVA 2007). As with their installation at the Mill Cottage, the designers bring into dialogue wood, metal, and stone: materials with varying compositions, functions, and decompositional durations.

The boardwalk changes the perspective of and access to this enigmatic site. Rebecca Solnit contends that:

Part of what makes roads, trails, and paths so unique as built structures is that they cannot be perceived as a whole all at once by a sedentary onlooker. They unfold in time as one travels along them, just as a story does as one listens or reads [...] Just as writing allows one to read the words of someone who is absent, so roads make it possible to trace the route of the absent. (2000:72)

Solnit’s sense of duration relates to the enduring Neolithic markers as well as to the Half Life landworks that evidence a wearing away. “[I]n walking, corporeal rhythms are juxtaposed with visual elements” (Pearson 2010:94) and with a habitat’s soundscape. The sound of my footsteps changes when I step off the gravel path and onto the wooden walkway. Becoming attuned to my embodied participation (the weight of my feet, my gait, how my shoulders adjust to my backpack), as well as to the swaying trees, flying insects, swooping birds, and dripping water, makes me sense how a visitor here contributes to the ongoing performances of the particular ecosystem that now includes this built structure. I collaborate with the installation to enact the inspiring, perplexing narratives of the imprinted marks on the stone. I recognize that eventually human footsteps—combined with rain, snow, ice, wind, and animal contact—will wear away this path too. The installation’s performance continues day after day through its own decay. As such, its duration enacts “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey 2005:9), an embedded multilayered history partially released through interaction today.

Both the Mill Cottage and Creag Mhos Diagonal make present the absence that Solnit senses, as does the rock art that seems both whimsical and fundamental. These sites radiate a “pulse of ancient energy” (Jamie 2012:46). The mill’s tree and stones play with a cosmological understanding of human industry. The peeling material on the Styrofoam suggests the limits of human agency. Meanwhile, the wooden path (fig. 4) invokes the aforementioned geological “entrances” in Argyll left in the aftermath of glacial activity. Interacting with the boardwalk by walking upon it repurposes the constructed path and places the walker at a confluence of dialogues regarding forestry, accessibility, and perspective.

Returning to the intervisible field created by these sites, I consider how NVA taps into the materials and histories of Argyll. Their installations—absent atmospheric audio recordings of the glen and present implanted organic and inorganic objects—extend from the extant ecosystems. The published compilations of NVA’s research (the Half Life map and essay collection) demonstrate an exploration of an ecos, a home: one small area within the geographical and geological contours of Scotland. Their work does not obscure the centuries of human intervention here. Instead, NVA aims to dismantle perceived divisions between nature-culture, subject-object, and possibly...
inside-outside by emphasizing the placeness of a site: the interrelationality of its physical features and its inhabitants. With these landworks NVA materializes the collective creation of multiple perspectives generated, dissolved, and reanimated over long periods of time.

If ecology begins at/with home, the home that NVA tends with Half Life has contemporary significance. Art historian Rachel DeLue argues, “I see land as an agent in its own right, itself a kind of subjectivity, that forms relations with us and with which we form relations. [...] it is one of the variables or subjects in this network of relationality” (2010:74–75). The Neolithic and more recent archaeological sites across Argyll, and the geographical and geological currents that comprise this region, act upon us; as agents they invite, draw attention, perplex, amuse, and challenge. Their invisible field demands recognition of its power and changes over a span of time that extends beyond the historical periods usually analyzed by theatre historians and performance scholars. Through Half Life, NVA tacitly and tactically stipulates that participants continually change perspective as they walk from point to point, creating lines, circles, and spirals in their wake.

**References**


Staging the Twitter War
Toneelgroep Amsterdam’s Roman Tragedies

James R. Ball III

On 14 November 2012, following an intensification in rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip targeting Israel, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) made their first formal announcement that military operations against Gaza had recommenced: at 9:29 AM eastern standard time, @IDFSpokesperson (the IDF’s official Twitter presence) tweeted, “The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #Gaza Strip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets” (2012a). Minutes later @IDFSpokesperson tweeted their first target, the Hamas leader Ahmed al-Jabari, and within an hour had given what would become a week-long war its name: “The IDF has embarked on Operation Pillar of Defense” (2012b). The IDF Twitter feed soon became its own front in the battle as a locus for many of the speech acts that compose and surround war. Included in the declarations tweeted that morning: “All options are on the table. If necessary, the IDF is ready to initiate a ground operation in Gaza.” “We recommend that no Hamas operatives, whether low level or senior leaders, show their faces above ground in the days ahead” (2012c; 2012d).

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Hamas, the Palestinian political organization that has administered Gaza since 2007, returned fire in cyberspace via the Twitter account of its military wing, the Al Qassam Brigades. @AlqassamBrigade matched threat for threat, tweeting “Liberation of occupied Palestine started...we are coming #IDF” (2012a) and challenged the IDF’s characterization of events whenever it could. Responding to @IDFSpokesperson’s “Warning to reporters in Gaza: Stay away from Hamas operatives & facilities. Hamas, a terrorist group, will use you as human shields” (2012e), @AlqassamBrigade offered, “Warning to Israelis: Stay away from Israeli #IDF = #IOF [Israel Occupation Forces] and bases. IDF, a terrorist army, will use you as human shields” (2012b). Commentators would soon describe these discursive and narrative battles, playing out in volleys of 140 characters or less, as the world’s first Twitter war (see Schachter 2012; Sutter 2012).

From 16 to 18 November 2012, a different Twitter war could be found onstage at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM): Toneelgroep Amsterdam’s Roman Tragedies, directed by Ivo van Hove. The nearly six-hour long, intermission-free spectacle cut together three of Shakespeare’s Rome-set tragedies: Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, and Antony and Cleopatra. By reducing each play to as few as 90 minutes, van Hove emphasized interpersonal conflict and human intrigue (for instance, Coriolanus’s fraught relationships with his mother, wife, and son, and Antony and Cleopatra’s romance), allowing each play’s political plots to emerge in abstractions (drums and strobe lights to indicate war), allusions (a uniform of suits and ties to suggest 21st-century political classes), and the structures by which each spectator’s gaze, body, and engagement were managed. A handy flyer distributed to playgoers at the outset contained a scene schedule marking the times at which each of the three plays’ scenes (in their original sequence) would occur. It also featured the call to (digital) action, “You are encouraged to take pictures and tweet using the hashtag #RomanTragedies.” Audience members could then follow the new media commentary from their devices or on an LED ticker that broadcast curated selections to those seated in the house. Many had already entered into this form of digital participation before receiving the production’s blessing: as the audience waited for doors to open, user @cynthiayang tweeted “Even the lobby experience is immersive: general admission can turn sextigenerians into gladiators #RomanTragedies” (Yang 2012).

The flyer further identified set changes between certain scenes denoting the moments in which audience members could circulate from house to stage or back again, finding new vantages among the couches, televisions, and risers that were set on the stage. When the audience was first allowed onto the stage (soon after Coriolanus returned triumphant to Rome), the twitterati marveled at their access, “@natty_ijs we’re on stage! Come to Rome! #RomanTragedies” (Frisbie 2012), and bemoaned the new conflicts it sparked,
@planetaclaire apparently there’s no more space in Rome #RomanTragedies (natty_ijs 2012). Those with the best views took on certain journalistic responsibilities, as did tweeter @sbishopstone who captured the “End of Coriolanus #RomanTragedies pic.twitter.com/KOVZ99iU” (Bishop-Stone 2012a). As the carnage mounted, photographic evidence proliferated.

Twitter also became a venue for reflection and analysis. As Marc Antony wept over Caesar’s corpse (a scene staged as a 21st-century press conference), tweeters waxed philosophical: “Lessons Julius Caesar taught me: Don’t try to be a god and people won’t try to stab you. #RomanTragedies” (Lorenzetti 2012). For some spectators, Twitter provided opportunities for Roman Tragedies to stitch itself into the fabric of the wider world. A few dutifully reported the moment the show spilled out beyond the opera house walls, Enobarbus running out through the audience onto Lafayette Avenue—“The cast literally moved out onto the street #romantragedies. Brilliant” (Verkerk 2012)—or offered their own analysis of the gesture—“Poor Enobarbus. It just wouldn’t be Ivo van Hove if an actor didn’t run out into traffic followed by a camera. #RomanTragedies” (Bishop-Stone 2012c). Still others on twitter drew attention to the ways the outside world encroached upon the staged history, as contemporary news briefs would also be featured on the LED ticker above the stage: “#RomanTragedies live news of Israel/Hamas during Coriolanus” (Kanthou 2012).

Geoffrey Way identifies three primary modes in which social media have been integrated into live performance: “social media as a means for access, social media as a means for participation, and social media as platforms for dramatic performances” (2011:403–4). Way’s categories mark several opportunities for theatre artists to use social media to encourage engagement with an audience—from providing views of a rehearsal process, to promoting interaction between audiences and performers...
or characters, to serving as venue. Nonetheless, Way’s examples offer scant evidence that the incorporation of such new media into live, stage dramas is or will become anything more than fad. Yet for *Roman Tragedies* Twitter proved essential: the play modeled a particular form of 21st-century spectatorship by incorporating the microblogging service, and by deftly navigating between the modes Way identifies. These modes further offer a conceptual apparatus that can clarify the formal similarities between the use of Twitter in war and in theatre. The IDF Twitter feed had long shown glimpses of the forces that would deploy in Operation Pillar of Defense and each tweet invited participation by others who could re-tweet or respond. Once Hamas responded, Twitter became a venue for the verbal spectacle produced by two political actors, and those following the feeds were once more spectators. As spectator to *Roman Tragedies*, I found myself a theatrical analog to this audience for global politics—an audience with fractured access to the spectacle of world affairs and an oscillating engagement with its players and events. Such spectators play a crucial role in piecing together the narratives that render geopolitical events meaningful, but feel largely powerless in spite of this capacity; I am immersed in the drama though I participate in it only rarely.

This effect is not solely a function of the ways in which *Roman Tragedies* extends itself into digital realms. As the dramas onstage oscillated between an intimate private sphere and a broadly figured public sphere, so too did the audience’s physical proximity with and visual access to those spheres. At *Roman Tragedies*, this public sphere was figured by a stage space cluttered with low-slung couches in minimalist Scandinavian styles of the sort preferred by the planners and policy makers who furnish institutional spaces in Europe and North America. Once the audience was allowed onto the stage, their bodies filled this space, and produced a new intimacy that suggested more private scenes. The plays were acted naturalistically in the same spaces the audience occupied, though the production also took pains to foreground its theatrical apparatus: makeup stations and concession stands were accessible and visible from the stage, serving the immediate needs of both actors and spectators and gesturing towards the work that goes into making real-world politicians camera-ready.

The intimacy allowed spectators did not always bring greater clarity or access: since the stage featured dozens of flat-screen televisions and was embellished with a few well-placed ferns, one’s view was often partial or indirect. The televisions offered live video of the play from several stationary cameras installed throughout the opera house and hand-held cameras whose operators followed the major players. The action I was trying to see might be blocked by other audience members or some furniture, or indeed be behind me entirely, requiring me to watch events happening inches from my back on a television a few feet ahead of me. When the televisions were not abstracting and doubling the audience’s gaze, they served as breaches where the history of the 20th and 21st centuries invaded that of Rome: historical and contemporary news footage (of John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, the Olympics, etc.) complemented or contrasted individual scenes, cueing particular interpretations. Each new obstruction or mediation further alienated the spectator, ultimately materializing her acts of spectatorship onstage and submitting those acts to theatrical scrutiny.

Every 20 to 30 minutes the scene would change again and many audience members would shift to seek new vantage points onstage or back in the house. With each shift the politics of engagement evolved as well; the form of spectatorship modeled by the *Roman Tragedies* was not solely visual and the play’s representations went beyond the usual critique that contemporary politics has lost substance and authenticity as it has become increasingly mediated and theatrical. Being a spectator to the *Roman Tragedies* required physical choices and so had bodily effects. A particularly insidious game of musical chairs developed as audience members staked out their territory onstage. Some found an agreeable couch and refused to budge from it for the duration. Others became strategic, closely watching the countdown clocks that marked each scene change, waiting for an open seat to appear. Territorial maneuvering began to occupy more
and more of the spectator’s energy, and a zero-sum game of maintaining one’s hold on a spot of turf developed: many shifted in place to optimize a changing view of the scene without relinquishing a claim to space or property. The political conflicts depicted found physical analogs in an audience that grew increasingly restless and divisive, clashing in subtle ways over an extremely limited resource. For the audience onstage, spectatorship became a battle: it required each spectator to stake her territory, assert a particular view, and maintain that view in the face of forces who would take it from her.

The onstage audience was returned to the house for the final hour of the proceedings. To those gazing at the stage from the plush seats of the house throughout the event, the audience onstage formed the mass of Roman citizenry, dynamic scenery installing itself within the proscenium. Astute observers may have sensed their machinations, but the onstage micro-events were of little import alongside the macrocosmic views the house afforded. A projection above the stage space, and equal to it in size, gave the house-bound audience the same view available on each of the television screens onstage, and between the two an LED ticker, like those delivering news snippets to Times Square, offered context, history, and commentary for each of the plays (in between the contemporary news updates noted above). Key historical events not captured by Shakespeare (or cut by Toneelgroep) tracked quickly across the ticker whenever war engulfed Rome. Data and statistics took prime place here: each character’s death was marked, dated, and recorded in the ticker’s zooming historical record. The ticker also made tweeting spectators into participants in the construction of the historical narrative: select tweets were displayed regularly among the historical and contemporary updates. The Twitter activities of those onstage filled out the comprehensive view for those watching from the house. As certain observations passed across the ticker (such as my
own jotting, “From the audience/house politics is history...#romantragedies” [Ball 2012]), the house view allowed for a moment of critical distance to actively construct the play’s meanings as it proceeded. This, too, modeled a form of spectatorship that increasingly characterizes contemporary politics: the expert observer offering varying degrees of punditry, from professional analysts in peer-reviewed publications, to televised talking heads of dubious pedigree, to citizen bloggers interpreting for smaller constituencies. Such efforts also gestured toward the play’s integration with contemporary politics, an effect made more explicit when the LED ticker would turn again to headlines from the news of November 2012, allowing Operation Pillar of Defense to make its way onto the stage at BAM.

Toneelgroep has been performing *Roman Tragedies* since 2007. The production is thus nearly as old as Twitter itself, though email was used in place of Twitter prior to May 2010 (there are still internet stations onstage where spectators can send emails but I did not see much activity at these). As a spectator in November 2012 I have trouble imagining a performance as loaded with specific resonances as those available that weekend. Certain world historical events immediately come to mind as corollaries to the intrigues represented: Coriolanus’s wrangling with populism reiterated many themes of the US presidential election recently past, while Antony and Cleopatra’s private decadence conjured up the sex scandal that had toppled CIA Director David Petraeus the same month. And, of course, there was also Gaza. My research into the United Nations Security Council had led me to spend that week glued to my Twitter feed, to news reports, to live video of Council media events, and the like. I had engaged precisely the form of contemporary political and historical spectatorship that Toneelgroep would model onstage at BAM. Having my own life reflected so immediately in art forced me to take stock of the ways in which my acts of everyday spectatorship form a constituent part of the contemporary political sphere. Finding myself staged as audience member shed new light on the ethics and efficacies of being an observer to global political violence.

*Roman Tragedies* was largely bloodless: deaths were marked by an actor falling onto a rolling platform (“Excellent use of Ekkyklema,” one observer tweeted [Bishop-Stone 2012b]) and hastily photographed from above, like documentary evidence of a war crime. Between this bloodlessness and the gray, institutional space the set evoked, *Roman Tragedies* proved to be primarily interested in the antiseptic spaces where war is fought beyond the battlefield—in 2012 these are as much the Security Council chamber as the twitterverse. Far from “dramatiz[ing] the dangers of (and desire for) distraction in a hypermediated world” (Corbett and Zaiontz 2011:117), as some critical takes on the production suggest, *Roman Tragedies* in fact demonstrates the centrality of mediated spaces (old and new) in the increasingly theatricalized milieu of global politics. Neither dangerous nor safe, desirable nor undesirable, media like Twitter extend the space in which war is fought while amplifying the theatrical strategies of those who wage it. The actions of the IDF, as Operation Pillar of Defense spilled out onto Twitter’s servers, demonstrated that such digital technologies are not distractions but fronts in their own right. Twitter has become one place where words and images can first be con-
tested — a particular battle that extends beyond the official cessation of hostilities. That the IDF indicated and recorded some of the bloody effects of the war in tweets also demonstrates that this front is not divorced from, or an erasure of, the physical battlefield.

_Roman Tragedies _deftly incorporates social media, specifically Twitter, to reflect back on its audience their place in a digital theatre of war. The audience of _Roman Tragedies _was neither invited nor authorized to intervene in the history it watched — this audience was not empowered to participate in the events as they unfolded. Rather, digital, photographic, and spectatorial engagements rendered material the usually invisible forms of participation that attend all theatre, be it on a stage in Elizabethan England or on a news broadcast from 21st-century Gaza. Spectatorship requires the active production of meaning by the spectator; in all theatre the audience must make sense of the narrative from the material immediately available to it. The integration of Twitter in the _Roman Tragedies _not only brought contemporary historical and political events onto the stage to be incorporated into the meanings made, but charged the audience with the work of writing that history in the moment.

A Twitter history is exceedingly ephemeral. On 18 November 2012, at 6:00 pm when the show began again at BAM, I logged into my Twitter account at home to experience the production once more. Following live updates of the #romantragedies hashtag, I retraced the history I had lived a day earlier, as new spectators wrote the show for me from Coriolanus’s rise, to Brutus’s betrayal, to the fall of Antony and Cleopatra. On 19 November, I would be back at work on my research, following Twitter now to see what end to the Gaza conflict might be in sight. Agreement was reached on a ceasefire on 21 November, and my view became historical once more — from the house — composing a comprehensive view of the scene. As an active process of making meaning, spectatorship is much the same in theatre as in war, and the lessons from each realm apply to the other. _Roman Tragedies _’ reflections on the forms of spectatorship available to 21st-century global citizens suggest that how, where, and why we watch world historical events establishes our political relationship with those events and so our integration into the history they will become. Staging the Twitter war offers new ways to use theatre to do politics and write history.

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