

## **Performing labour in Look Left Look Right's *Above and Beyond***

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This article looks at the theme of 'performing labour' in Look Left Look Right's *Above and Beyond* (2013). In this performance, individual audience members participate as a generic staff member in a fully-functioning five star hotel in London. I consider three modes of performing labour in *Above and Beyond*: audiences role-playing as staff; theatre workers role-playing as staff; and hotel staff performing care and attentiveness. The aesthetics of performing labour is considered as being noticeably theatrical in each of these three modes, prompting evaluation of what it means to 'reveal' labour both inside and outside of explicit theatre contexts. The article concludes by focusing on the bourgeois qualities of this revelation: to be attended to, either as audience or guest, as one who pays for the craft of care.

Keywords: performing labour; labour and performance; Look Left Look Right; Above and Beyond; thrice-behaved behaviour; immersive theatre; audience participation

A little over a decade ago I worked front of house in a small restaurant in North Norfolk. The head chef, amid a great number of aphorisms, allegories and metaphors, encouraged me to believe that working front of house was like working in the theatre. I was there to perform, but in a particular mode: to perform labour. Sunday roasts were paraded through the restaurant during lunch service. Crockery was meticulously placed and re-placed on tables that were oh-so-slightly too small. My job was to attend to each customer and to *demonstrate* attending to them. If the level of attention was sufficiently heightened – if it was acknowledged as being especially representative of the kind of care that the customer expected – then my pay packet would be made a little more heartening as a few extra coins jangled their way onto a steel dish at the end of their meal.

In this article I look at what it means to perform labour. While my own experiences of working as a waiter at this restaurant and elsewhere in North Norfolk throughout my teenage years undoubtedly have a hand in the thinking behind this research, I choose to focus on participating as an audience member playing a waiter in Look Left Look Right's *Above and Beyond* (2013). This was a one-on-one performance created as part of an 'Artist in Residence' programme at Corinthia London, a luxury hotel in London's Whitehall Place. Participating audience members took on the role of a new member of staff in a fully-functioning hotel. What interests me about *Above and Beyond* are the intersections between three forms of performed labour: audience members who participate in role as hotel staff; performers who perform in role as hotel staff; and hotel staff members who perform a very high quality of care and service. I am especially interested in the aesthetic and socio-political characteristics of these intersections and what those characteristics can tell us about performing labour.

Two contrasting perspectives that consider the performer's labour in theatre performances are engaged in what follows. The first comes from Nicholas Ridout. In *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, Ridout considers the performer as a 'labourer in the same economy as everyone else' (2006, 28). Generally, the performer's labouring status is a fact that representation would rather forget. Macbeth becomes someone other than Macbeth once lines are forgotten, or an all-too human giggle erupts from his potentially stage-affrighted medium, the actor. For Ridout, these embarrassing symptoms signal an inherent 'wrongness' at the heart of theatre that prompts theatre's other worlds, built on accident-prone resources, to lose their other-worldliness. But, for Ridout, 'it is precisely in theatre's failure, our discomfort with it, its embeddedness in capitalist leisure, its status as a bourgeois pastime that its political value is to be found' (2006, 3-4). Wrongness reveals and might jolt audiences out of a collective amnesia that otherwise smothers the

perceptibility of a performer's labour. What interests me, though, is when potential sources of theatre's wrongfulness, such as the labouring performer who generates a character, are representationally foregrounded in a theatre performance: when theatre, that is, becomes *thoroughly* and *explicitly* embedded in capitalist leisure as a bourgeois pastime.

The second perspective on the performer's labour that I want to draw on comes from Theron Schmidt, who proposes a more direct embrace of theatrical representation in an article titled 'Troublesome Professionals: On the Speculative Reality of Theatrical Labour' (2013). Schmidt focuses on 'works of art or performance that expose their own apparently peripheral structures of value and labour that support the art-event itself' which, he argues, 'shares something with the social structure of theatre' (2013, 15). The twentieth-century legacy of distancing audiences from the absorbing mysteries of representation, which owes a great deal to Bertolt Brecht, presupposes a more authentic reality beneath representation, such as the reality of work by theatre labourers. A close counterpart to this mode of thinking are the 'alienated' social relations in which capital casts its labouring subjects, famously identified by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, in contrast to the supposedly unalienated 'reality' which is meant to precede that casting. But Schmidt encourages his readers to think differently about the supposed reality underlying theatrical representation or capitalist illusion, along with the unalienated labour implied as a counterpoint to both. 'The abstraction of capital', he writes, 'is doubly abstracted by theatre, leaving us not with the real but with a copy of something for which there is no original' (2013, 25). In other words, labour is figured in theatrical terms *per se* and the theatre is treated as a fitting site for showing up this theatricality.

With reference to both these perspectives on the performer's labour – one which explores the 'wrongness' and another the 'rightness' of theatre as a representational medium – I want to ask what happens when theatre's bourgeois qualities are attended to. What happens when labour is thematised for the enjoyment of participating audience members who

play at labour alongside labourers – both theatre labourers and those in the service industry – who also play at labour, or play out labour? In focusing on performing labour, this article considers how different modes of performing labour, not just the performer’s labour, might rub up against one another. My aim is to shed further light on what it means to ‘reveal’ labour practices in theatre performances in particular contexts.

This article is split into four sections: the first describes *Above and Beyond*, paying special attention to site and the positioning of participating audiences; the other three address labour and performance, focusing on (1) audience members playing hotel staff, (2) performers acting in role as hotel staff members and (3) the hotel staff’s ‘performance’ as labourers. While there is an implicit critique of the service industry’s accommodation of theatre in what follows, I am more interested in how a theatre performance, tied into a site for service work – a hotel – can tell us something about labour and especially the aesthetics of performing labour.

### **Look Left Look Right’s *Above and Beyond***

Look Left Look Right was formed in 2005 under the artistic directorship of Mimi Poskitt and Ben Freedman. Both had worked in documentary television making and, as Poskitt put it in a personal interview, ‘the company came out of a desire to tell some of the stories that were coming out of our TV research, but that weren’t necessarily TV-friendly’ (Poskitt and Browning). Their early work, especially, such as *Yesterday Was A Weird Day*, *Reflections on July 7th 2005* (2005) and *The Caravan* (2007) were verbatim plays, while *You Once Said Yes* (2011) marked the company’s first one-on-one performance, in which audiences roamed the streets of Edinburgh in festival season as they bumped into, or were bumped into by, various characters, each with a story to tell about their life, loves, leisure and work.

*Above and Beyond* was directed by Poskitt and was the result of Look Left Look Right's having won a national competition to join Corinthia London's annual Artist in Residence programme. The programme, founded in 2011 and ongoing, aims to support emerging artists working in a range of media, while showcasing the best of Corinthia London. Corinthia London fund and market the residency, but do not directly interfere in the creative process. For *Above and Beyond*, tickets needed to be purchased and it received strong reviews as a theatre performance from theatre critics in the national press. This perhaps helped its five-week run to sell out, even after extending by five days. *Above and Beyond* was consequently framed, first and foremost, as theatre and not as a marketing event.

However, the residency was brokered by Arts Co, a production agency that liaised between Look Left and Look Right and Corinthia London, particularly with regards to financing *Above and Beyond*. Arts Co were and still are responsible for shortlisting artists before the selection of winners by a panel of celebrity and arts industry judges. They approached Corinthia and initially set up the annual residency in 2011 to create 'a situation where an artist really responded and captured the spirit of the hotel and brand to create unique experiences for guests' (Arts Co, 2013). Furthermore, the title of the piece – *Above and Beyond* – is drawn from Corinthia's labelling of its 2012 promotional activity, following the launch of seven penthouse suites during a recession, which won the 2012 Hotel Marketing Association award for Best Marketing Activity (HMA, 2012). So while framed as a theatre event, it is also clear that the residency is engineered to develop a brand identity. The residency produces both cultural products and brand experiences.

Between January and February 2013, Look Left Look Right interviewed members of hotel staff and explored the hotel. *Above and Beyond* is not verbatim theatre, but, as Poskitt explains, 'a lot of the characters are based on real people that we met, although they've obviously been theatricalised' (Poskitt and Browning 2013). It was a seventy minute

performance, specific to the hotel site and spanning thirty spaces both inside and outside of the hotel. After picking up their tickets from a temporarily installed box office next to the hotel reception desk, run by a member of Corinthia London staff, audience members were ushered into a foyer at the other end of the building. They were instructed to sit on a chair by the hotel's exit, when it soon became apparent that they were being watched by someone whose noticeable nervousness seemed out of place. Her name was Jenna and she was waiting to start her first day of work as a member of the concierge team in the hotel. She asked what department the audience member was in and, by hailing the audience in this way, clarified what it was that they were letting themselves in for; they were to join the hotel, or so the conceit ran, as a member of its staff.

After a brief walk round to the staff entrance, the role-playing audience participant met their new supervisor, Diane, who took them to the hotel laundry and asked them to put on a uniformed jacket while explaining their duties. Costumed and briefed, the participant was now ready for a series of interactions spread throughout the hotel: Henry, a waiter, guided them on how to serve in the Northhall restaurant, before leaving them to take a customer order (the couple in question were performers, a husband and his lover 'in last night's dress', engaged in an increasingly fractious argument); offering room service refreshments to a recently wedded bride on her honeymoon, set in 1935 when Corinthia London was the Metropole Hotel; a deeply odd encounter with a fictional celebrity actor called Jacob Olensen (or Ingeborg Olensen if the audience member was female – the gender roles were reversed), who asked for safe passage away from a story-hungry paparazzi intent on 'outing' a recent sex scandal; being falsely identified as Olensen, taking on his role first as a case of mistaken identity (which led to 'sound therapy' in the hotel spa and being costumed prior to a videophone interview for a new role) and, later, as a decoy to draw the attention of screaming fans and an annoyingly intrusive reporter for *The Daily Mail*; and an encounter

with Mervyn, the penthouse butler (based on a real member of hotel staff), who introduced the audience to the stunning view of the Thames from the suite's own balcony. While this only lists a limited number of scenes in the performance, my focus in what follows will be firmly on those in which the performance of labour seems most prominent.

In what ways is *Above and Beyond* 'thoroughly and explicitly embedded in capitalist leisure as a bourgeois pastime' and how is this thematised? The performance venue operates as a materialistic mecca for the contemporary bourgeoisie. In the hotel's Lobby Lounge, for instance, a chandelier designed by Chafik Gasmi hangs from the ceiling, which features 1000 crystal baubles reflecting natural light onto a highly polished marble floor. This provides a venue for afternoon tea and champagne in the hotel, although it stands as only one instance, among many, of gobsmackingly decadent design conducive to indulgent consumption. Along with a molecular cocktail bar, an Art Deco-style oyster bar and restaurant, an award-winning luxury spa and many other leisure facilities, Corinthia London surely epitomises a thorough embedding in bourgeois, perhaps even aristocratic leisure. Guests at the hotel, much like the performance's audiences, are there to be served by labouring workforces: one from the hotel industry, the other from theatre. These relations are not overturned, but supported by both the site and the performance integrated within it. And these relations are further concretised by the financing of the performance, which sees Corinthia London as the paymaster – even if, as Poskitt claims, Corinthia London 'were absolutely not in any way prescriptive of what we were allowed to make' (Poskitt and Browning 2013).

*Above and Beyond*'s embedding in capitalist leisure functions as a theme in two ways: first, as an integration of theatre into the thematic concerns of the hotel, where the performance is absorbed into the site as a deictive feature, not unlike Gasmi's chandelier; second, as an integration of Corinthia London into the thematic concerns of the performance. Both will be addressed, with three different foci, in what remains of this article: first, the

audience participant's playing of a staff member in the hotel; second, the performers' playing of hotel staff members; and third, how the hotel's actual staff members perform labour.

### **Performing labour: audiences**

From their first encounter with the character Jenna, audiences are interpellated, to borrow from Louis Althusser, by an ideological command in which a subject recognises him- or herself (2008, 48). Audiences – mostly fans of *Look Left Look Right* and immersive theatre, theatre critics and, importantly, hotel guests – are recruited, or 'hailed', into a role-play. All being well, the audience member recognises that they have a part to play and the nature of the role. The audience is both an audience *and* a role and that doubleness impacts on the kind of interpellation which takes place. The audience is not hailed as a staff member, but as a role-playing subject position with different social standing. Critics aside, the audience pays to play at labour; they do not get paid to play out labour.

What is being opened up here is an aesthetic address of performing labour as an audience participant in *Above and Beyond*. First of all, the positioning of an audience member as staff serves a practical role: it suggests how audiences should participate; it may make their participation feel more appropriate; and it sets up the conditions for confident participation. This positioning offers what Josephine Machon calls a 'contract for participation', understood as a form of licencing, or 'permission to behave in an active and sentient manner within these worlds' (2013, 100). There are of course limits to this permission, which can certainly induce forms of unease when those limits go unrecognised. Nonetheless, what is invited is an investment in pretence that serves to draw audiences into a shared fictional world that is integrated into a real hotel. This is a world comprised of scripted sequences, roles, interaction, décor and the hustle and bustle of behind the scenes

communicates travelling over the airwaves from one walkie-talkie to another. Non-audiences who share the space, such as hotel staff or guests who do not directly participate in the performance, may not make the same investment, but they nonetheless *fit into the fiction*. Their presence is appropriate. Non-audiences can be cast through the aesthetic gaze as a part of the theatrical world superimposed over the existing hotel site. As such, they take on an imposed doubleness: both real and a fitting part of the fiction.

The audience, then, is complicit in *Above and Beyond*'s strategies of representation. They help to build the fiction for themselves. For the audience member, given the synergy between performance and site, everything within the hotel is potentially a part of the performance. As I go on to demonstrate below, this can be seen to emphasise a theatricality that is already implicit in the functioning of the hotel. But, for the time being, I wish only to underscore the status of participating audiences as important co-producers of the work which ends up being received.

This brings into view how representation operates in relation to audience participation. But what can the audience's doubleness – as spectator and participating role-player – tell us about performing labour? An important, but not singular, audience demographic of *Above and Beyond* are hotel guests: 'these people in dinner jackets or gorgeous dresses and heels', as *Above and Beyond*'s Associate Director Ellie Browning puts it:

as soon as you put that coat on them they stand with their hands behind their back.

[...] Five minutes ago they were the other side of that. And they love that! Because they find it fun to see the other side of the hotel. I think people are keen to have fun with that role. I'm sure they won't want to carry it on for the next few years, but they're alright doing it for now! (Poskitt and Browning 2013)

The work may indeed have the potential to be fun, but fun which is experienced in a different mode for the audience member: fun which does not act as an aid to subsistence, for instance, but as leisure. This fun may be worked for and, significantly, paid for in the cost of a ticket, which constitutes its own translation of work into money (in all likelihood), but the labour that produces this money is qualitatively different from the labour which is being experienced from ‘the other side’ of an audience at role-playing leisure.

For Shannon Jackson, an important goal of socially engaged art and her own research is to ‘provoke reflection on larger systemic assemblages [... and] to place social systems in the foreground of analysis despite the fact that they usually occupy the background of experience’ (2011, 6; see also Harvie 2013, 4). *Above and Beyond* is socially engaged to the extent that it foregrounds, through representation, the ‘systemic assemblages’ of a hotel. Audiences are taken behind the scenes into spaces that would otherwise remain invisible. And yet, these spaces, and the people within them, are theatricalised. The performance operates in a fully-functioning hotel, but the spaces encountered within that hotel, as well as the majority of people (actors) that are directly interacted with, are not *just* of that world, or of that world at all. There is a kind of class tourism at play in adopting the role of hotel worker for a short and entertaining time period. This encourages me to ask *how* the ‘social systems [... that] usually occupy the background of experience’ are encountered in performance by audience members. My feeling is that audiences do not experience life ‘on the other side’; they experience life on their own side and enjoy the temporary inhabitation of a character. The social is engaged, but in a theatrical, enjoyable and polished form.

To sum up: the audience’s participation as a member of hotel staff deploys the idea of ‘performing labour’ as a contract for participation. What arises from this contract is a clearly defined dynamic between audience and performance, characterised by role-based immersion within a theatrical world that itself closely aligns with the site in which that world operates.

This promotes the audience's status as a co-creator of a representational world, casting, through an aesthetic gaze, non-audiences into this representational world. The doubleness of the audience – as spectator and role-player – finds its counterpart in the imposed doubleness of these non-audiences and the aestheticised hotel landscape. Finally, the idea of performing labour is rendered as a source of intrigue and fun for cultural consumers at leisure. This rendering supports labour and class relations between hotel workers and a participating audience that may well be thirsty, at least in the eyes of those who devised the work, for an *enjoyable* experience of life on 'the other side'.

### **Performing labour: performers**

*Above and Beyond* thematises labour, but it does not *directly* thematise the labour of theatre workers through representation. And yet, the excellent, but not quite convincing performances of the performers – where the 'not quite' signals an audience's potentially heightened perceptivity towards looking for performers, particularly those in uncanny circumstances – encourages us to think through theatre's 'wrongness' and/or 'rightness' as a representational medium. What is so fascinating about *Above and Beyond* is that the apparent functional difference between hotel staff performing labour in line with a measure of excellence defined by the hotel industry and theatre workers performing labour as actors is, perhaps, not all that great. As Browning notes: 'I love the fact that Toby Manley, who plays Henry, the waiter in The Northall [restaurant], is now just an employed waiter. He doesn't obviously want to have to say in a five star hotel, "Sorry I'm not actually a waiter". So he waits as well when he's not acting. So he's now just serving tables' (Poskitt and Browning 2013). To clarify, Corinthia London does not employ Manley as a member of their waiting staff; rather, what Browning refers to is a conviction that he should remain sensitive to the

demands and expectations of a five star hotel. If he *appears* to work for the hotel to non-audiences and is (perhaps embarrassingly and disruptively) mistaken for a member of the hotel's staff, then it is perhaps easier and will reflect better on the hotel if he plays the role of an actual staff member.

This may call to mind Augusto Boal's 'invisible theatre', where theatre can take place covertly in a social situation to highlight and prompt debate about social relationships, such as those involved in labour, remuneration and consumption. But social relationships are not challenged here; if invisible theatre can be said to exist at all it exists un-radically and without debate. While invisible theatre goes unnoticed as theatre, the call to debate does not go unnoticed, or at least is not intended to go unnoticed. In Manley's case, though, debate does not arise, social relations are not challenged and the image of comfort and decadence is maintained. This is a performance to be enjoyed and the enjoyment of labour that is played at, in this instance, diminishes any serious challenge to the labour relations constructed through labour, paid for as work, in the service economy.

Manley's labouring as both performer and waiter exemplifies Schmidt's elaboration of a Marxist point that capital, particularly through labour relations, abstracts and that this abstraction is heightened in the theatre, *potentially* showing up that abstraction. But, of course, this potentiality may go unfulfilled. In *Above and Beyond*, the abstraction is not meant to be shown up through representation; rather, for non-audiences dining in the restaurant, Manley's masquerade as a staff member is meant to go unnoticed as pretence. He *is* functioning as a hotel staff member, even if not recognised as such by Corinthia London and paid in accordance with that particular role. For Corinthia, Manley's labour is value-added in excess of that invested in the cultural capital-building Artist in Residence initiative. Manley labours in a form that often supports actors as they take up temporary contracts, only this time his front of house waiting is not directly remunerated.

It is only when, *post factum*, Manley's work as an actual waiter is made apparent (knowledge of which, it should be underscored, only arose in interview with Poskitt and Browning) that the weird theatricality of his work is revealed. He is a performer playing the role of a waiter who subsequently functions as an actual waiter, revealing a theatrical substratum that supports an actual waiter's performing of labour in an establishment that demands excellence in this regard. Manley passes as a waiter because he performs convincingly as a waiter. Knowing about the various labour practices that the performers are engaged in certainly has the potential to show up alienated labour – labour as commodity and labour as the measure of a commodity's value – but this does not, in this performance, occur through a form of representation recognised as a theatre performance; rather, a form of theatrical representation is present that borrows from the representational strategies of theatre while operating apart from it. Representation is revealed as an extremely powerful and alluring force that, at the same time, masks Manley's labouring as both a performer *and* a waiter.

What I find so interesting about this example is how the performing labourer can at once appear to a theatre audience attending *Above and Beyond* as an almost, but not wholly convincing staff member, as well as a subject who passes as a waiter and is even interpellated as such by non-audiences who call him over to take an order. The degrees of applicability of both these observations rests on the distance one takes from what is represented and the extent to which one is immersed in performance, even if unaware that one is immersed. As it turns out, the most convincing aspect of Manley's performance is the product of 'thrice-behaved behaviour' performed to a non-theatre audience. What needs to be unpacked in more detail, then, is what constitutes 'thrice-behaved behaviour' and how that behaviour relates to its citational source.

## **Performing labour: performing as a labourer**

Rebecca Schneider has touched on what might be called ‘thrice-behaved behaviour’ in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, although she describes it in terms of twice-behaved behaviour sent into ‘reflexive hyper-drive, expanding the experience into the uncanny’ (2011, 14). As Richard Schechner put it, ‘twice-behaved behaviour’, or ‘restored behaviour’, refers to ‘Physical or verbal actions that are not-for-the-first time, prepared, or rehearsed’ (2002, 22). A ‘strip’ of behaviour, such as a soldier’s pose and poise in battle, might represent twice-behaved behaviour (Schneider 2011, 90); once re-enacted in the context of a battle reenactment, this strip might be seen to represent something more, a ‘reflexive hyperdrive’ of twice-behaved behaviour which seems to me to represent thrice-behaved behaviour. And it is thrice-behaved behaviour that I think Manley performs in *Above and Beyond*. Thrice-behaved behaviour, in this context, theatricalises performativity, re-representing something. Despite this theatricality, as the case of Manley suggests, the third element of thrice-behaved behaviour – the theatricalisation of twice-behaved behaviour – may go unnoticed. Politically, that surreptitiousness is costly for Manley, as the aesthetics of performing labour is convincing enough for him to be recognised as a waiter. As a result, he performs two roles and two jobs, but is only remunerated for one. This may be fun and amusing for a short while and may even promote pride for an actor whose job it is to pass as someone else; but there is still a political issue here which is, at the same time, an aesthetic issue.

The recognition of Manley’s behaviour as thrice-behaved demands acknowledgment of the twice-behaved behaviour that partly comprises it and this is where the theme of this final section enters the fray: performing as a labourer. In the remainder of this article, I will focus on performing labour as it applies to members of Corinthia London staff. This will involve consideration of performance as a measure of excellence.

Jon McKenzie, in *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, takes inspiration for his title from the front cover of an edition of *Forbes* magazine, published on 3 January 1994. The cover featured the command ‘Perform – or else’ superimposed over a rather sorry looking suited man with an umbrella handle menacingly wrapped around his neck, as if to pull him off a vaudeville stage in the midst of an aggressively heckling audience (2001, 4). The word ‘perform’ can be seen to refer to a hierarchical standard of achievement, with the implication that a failure to reach that standard – ‘or else’ – will result in being removed from the stage which serves as that standard’s base. In addition to participating in a form of cultural performance, I think that there is something like this measure of excellence in the labour expectations imposed on hotel staff working in an establishment like Corinthia London. Whatever department staff work in, particularly front of house, there is a sense that attentiveness to the needs and desires, perhaps as yet unrecognised, of hotel guests, must not only be engaged with, but *flaunted*. Attentiveness, as labour, must be recognised as such for it to reach its maximum impact. Perhaps best service passes unnoticed, particularly in restaurants where privacy and minimised intrusiveness are highly praised. However, recognising discrete service in the form of a generous tip, for instance, still involves acknowledging such service as praiseworthy. At Corinthia London, though, there is a much stronger sense that service is to be both visible and perfectly presented. Attentiveness must in many ways operate aesthetically, as something *noticeably* set apart from more task-oriented forms of labour that place less onus on *demonstrating* excellence in labour.

This kind of attentiveness is a form of ‘immaterial labour’, which refers to the centralised place accorded to social goods such as knowledge, creativity, emotion and social cooperation in work practices (Hardt and Negri 2000, 290). The immaterial labour concept, as Enda Brophy and Greig de Peuter point out, ‘registers the centrality of communication to value creation’ (2007, 179). So what is occurring here is a heightening of immaterial labour,

as recognisable labour, which is enjoyed in its being communicated. An impactful aspect of this kind of immaterial labour is therefore aesthetic.

Corinthia London emphasises the demonstration of excellence by coupling two especially interesting words in a marketing tagline: ‘Craftsmanship of Care’ (Corinthia London 2012). This tagline also titles a short promotional video, in which Billy Fury’s *Wondrous Place* (1960) serves as an evocative audio accompaniment to a series of shots and sequences that flaunt the best of the hotel’s features: ‘I found a place full of charms / A magic world in my baby's arms / Her soft embrace like satin and lace / Wondrous place’. Fury’s music and lyrics add to the hotel’s interiors an erotic appeal that is at once stylish and magical. This is how Corinthia attempt to position an understanding of care: in terms of an embrace, together with all the warmth and intimacy that implies. The promotional video features a range of hotel staff members – from chefs, to waiters and butlers – *attending* to their work, whether it is pouring a glass of champagne, flambéing, or shaving ice for a cocktail. These actions are mostly played in slow motion, as if to emphasise and highlight the care that goes into each in a durational format conducive to recognising that care, flaunting immaterial labour: care as craft, craft as work, care as work. While socially engaged performance practices might usefully turn to craftsmanship ‘to explore how it might help value art, labour and quality not for their financial profit, but rather for their own sakes’, as Jen Harvie rightly puts it in her inspirational and insightful book *Fair Play*, craftsmanship might also be directed towards something other than its own sake, as well as the self-interest of individuals (Harvie 2013, 95). What this binding of quality and care underscores, as well as the film medium through which it is expressed, is that these hotel staff members do not just labour: they labour for others and present their labour according to a measure of excellence. They perform labour, ‘above and beyond’ expectation. And that performance operates not just as a measure of excellence, but in cultural terms as well, as a performance of labour.

Their labour operates both productively and aesthetically. Indeed, the aesthetic functioning of their labour is part and parcel of the service which Corinthia London promotes through the ‘Craftsmanship of Care’.

Aestheticised labour practices, then, are already thoroughly bound up in service industry institutions like Corinthia London. Theatre makers such as Look Left Look Right may well impose, or integrate, explicit forms of performing labour on top of a site such as Corinthia London, but there already operates in such a site a highly theatrical mode of performing labour that is shown, but not ‘shown up’.

Earlier in the article, I explored how audience members of *Above and Beyond* might cast non-audiences into their own aesthetic experience of site. In tying up this section, it is worth pointing out that, while this co-production does indeed seem to play an important role in the audience experience of *Above and Beyond*, it nonetheless aestheticises something which is already, fundamentally, operating aesthetically. It is not *a* theatre which works as an appropriate environment for labour’s intrinsic doubleness, in this instance, together with an auditorium that lends itself to perceptive sensitivity, such as recognising labour as labour; rather, theatre practice merges, almost, but not quite imperceptibly into a materialistic paradise. The difference is that the hotel guests, even and especially those who perform labour as an audience member, know that they are there to be served and attended to. From the outset, the guest and the guest-as-audience are served and are aware of being served. Indeed, being served and excellently so and having that serving perform, either theatrically or as a standard for measuring excellence, forms the basis of both this performance and the hotel in which the performance operates. The ‘showing’ of labour in theatre performances has counterparts in the service industry. Indeed, the showing of labour is in many ways the ultimate bourgeois aspiration, or aristocratic delight: to be attended to, waited upon and to

have the knowledge at one's disposal that care and craftsmanship participate in making an experience of labour both pleasurable and delightful.

## **Conclusion**

*Above and Beyond* compliments the aesthetics and politics of performing labour in Corinthia London. *Above and Beyond* does not critique systems of service, but further invests in the 'craftmanship of care' by attending closely to the special experience of individual audience members. As an audience member, I felt that I had, in a small way, both experienced and furthered a brand identity that I had no wish to further. To recall and adapt the intentions of Arts Co, I was involved in a situation where an *audience member and potential guest* (in the unlikely event of being able to afford to stay, some day) 'really responded and captured the spirit of the hotel and brand'.

This article has not set out to pooh-pooh the extremely evocative and subversive work of countless theatre companies, directors and artists that, for many, many decades, have effectively and influentially critiqued labour practices and relations in performance. Rather, what I have looked to do is address how seemingly differing modes of performing labour – as audience role-player, as labouring performer/role-player, and as hotel staff performing to a measure of excellence – seem to have much in common. Indeed, 'showing' labour *as* labour, in the contexts of both *Above and Beyond* and the site which temporarily houses it, is a tactic that has long been functioning as a treat for the bourgeois leisure/pleasure seeker that ultimately supports the labour relations in operation between one who performs labour and one who is performed to. It is worth reflecting on where else the aestheticisation of labour might be operable and how that aestheticisation might, in turn, impact on how we think about the 'revealing' of labour practices in performance. There are undoubtedly circumstances

where this revealing can be particularly effective and affective; indeed, disquieting experiences of affect or critical distance have both served as bountiful resources for theatre makers to exploit in setting themselves this task. But we should also question what it means to ‘reveal’ labour, particularly when that revealing is itself an aesthetic process. We ought to ask not just how labourers perform, but where and, significantly, for whom they perform, for it is this more complete picture that will enable us to understand more comprehensively the aesthetics and politics of performing labour.

### **Works Cited**

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