

Discussion of the Papers by Christopher Chiasson, Miguel Arango
Calle, and Andrei Molotiu

Andrei Molotiu (AM): Shall we reply in the order of the papers?

Chris Chiasson (CC): Yes. So, at the time I submitted my abstract, I thought, “I will surely have figured out the problem of alchemy.” [Laughter]. And it turns out that Brüggeman lied to me about how simple that would be. But, I think there are two issues that are thrown together in the paper that should really be separated: that is, the actual practice of alchemy itself, or more the theory of the alchemy, which Goethe read a great deal about for two years in the early 1770s—he read very little else during those two years, and then doesn’t seem to have done a whole lot with it for a long time. But it does start seeping in with his fairy tale of 1796 and very obviously in the *Elective Affinities*. So there are many arguments about how present it is all along, especially since *Elective Affinities* is in some respects a reworking of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, from the 1770s. I think what caused him to come back to his use of alchemical symbolism is the increasing visibility of Masonic symbolism in, perhaps, *The Magic Flute*. There’s some argument about whether it’s actually there. I think the increased visibility caused him to start reverting to it as though it were a code.

The secondary issue is how much Kleist actually knew about alchemy. Which is probably much less than Goethe, but he certainly interested in the secret societies. So he seems to have patched together what he thought he should know based on some contacts he had. He may not have done all the research on alchemy.

So, in retrospect, I should have separated out alchemy, on the one hand, and secret societies, on the other hand. And how exactly they are both using them. Ultimately the argument they are having is about guilt, and its place in modern society. In the *Elective Affinities* and *The Foundling* I think we can actually see them using this code. I think in the first part I’m just setting up what they were fighting about. Alright, I’ll leave it there.

Miguel Arango Calle (MAC): I am not familiar with the work *Immediacy* [by Anna Kornbluh] that you mentioned, but I think that it is right on point with the criticism of these pieces. It depends on who you ask, but the critics seem to describe a more immediate experience in the theaters. I think that what I’m trying to get at is that music is another form of mediation but one that can help the experience of immediacy—or contribute to the sense of immediacy. I think that’s what interests me about these scenes, where you have the scenic transformation, which gets embedded into the drama and highlights the artificiality of what you are watching. Although it was a convention by that point, and everyone probably was used to seeing it, the fact that it was embedded into the drama presents a moment of, at least for me, dissonance. And when I see modern productions that don’t have the old theatrical technologies, they struggle what to do at those moments, when scene changes are demanded. One of the solutions that composers are

coming up with is to write music that matches or maybe obscures some of the noises, or explains what is going on, so as not to highlight the artificiality that is going on stage. So, that's what's going on with mediation.

I am unfortunately not familiar with the *harlequinade*, but it does seem that it's very relevant.

Nush Powell (NP): It's a very weird English thing. [Laughter]. It's worth knowing about.

AM: My turn? I have about fifty different things I could talk about. I'm not sure which ones to address at this point. But there is one thing, because you quoted De Quincey: I'm pretty sure that Susanna Clarke, who wrote *Piranesi*, did not actually base it on the prints of Piranesi, but based on that passage from De Quincey. Because there's the character of the hapless guy, who gets caught in this humongous space—and that comes from the De Quincey quotation. And by the way, that's a wonderful book for the first two thirds of it. If you stop about two thirds into it, it's fantastic.

NP: Disagree!

Jesse Molesworth (JM): Totally wrong! It's a masterpiece!

NP: Jesse and I have literally never agreed on a piece of prose fiction in the twenty years that we have known each other!

AM: The last third dispels all the magic! It becomes explanatory. But the first two thirds of it are quite good.

[General murmur among the Workshop participants]

But maybe in a larger sense—and I'm not sure I'm addressing the idea of the *capriccio*—I was thinking of the Quixote scenarios we were discussing this morning. And the way the Quixote scenarios always seem to speak from the side of sanity. The characters, or the narrators, basically see these figures from the outside, and see them taken over by the madness of romance, or the madness of becoming a saint, or the madness of magic. And the characters who are taken over by this madness either end up getting over it, and leading a productive life, or dying, as we discussed. And there's this notion of always speaking from the side of sanity. And that was of course also the project of Foucault, of trying to question the idea of speaking from the side of insanity and speaking from the side of the sane, in his book. Derrida also questioned whether one could ever speak not from the place of reason, so to speak.

Sometimes I wonder whether if, in this Workshop, we don't perhaps still tend to take the role of the Enlightenment, in assuming that magic is not real. Because that's what we are supposed to do, as members of the academy, as products of the Enlightenment. We are still perhaps holding magic at arm's length. And that's where the idea of the *capriccio* comes in. The *capriccio*, in discussing it in my paper, according to the hierarchy of genres and the whole set of academic rules, has this—and we used the word earlier—“exorbitant” place in the hierarchy of genres. It

is in its own orbit. It provides a space for irrationality, provides a space that has not been structured by the strict rules of the rational academy. It offers an escape valve. It's perhaps by focusing on the *capriccio* that we can, how shall I put it, see the "exorbitant" place of magic. The perspective of the *capriccio* might help us to sidestep the view of magic that has kept it at a distance.

In discussing magic in art, one does not have to see it through the lens of truth value. When we discuss magic as historians, whether somebody actually was a witch or not, it demands that we consider its truth. The power of the magic represented in art is connected to the power of the images themselves. And I think that allows us to bypass the question of the truth value in magic.

NP: The first hand I see is from Paul.

Paul Kleber Monod (PKM): I have a question about Kleist. He served in the Prussian army, didn't he?

CC: Yes.

PKM: Do you know if he was in the Prussian army before 1797?

CC: I believe he started before 1797. He was born in 1777, and I think he went in 1795. I can't remember for sure.

PKM: I think it could be of some importance to you. Under Friedrich Wilhelm II, promotion in the Prussian army often depended on how much of a Freemason you were. And that then changed under Friedrich Wilhelm III, who was not very keen on Freemasonry. But Friedrich Wilhelm II was very keen on it. His two key advisors after the 1780s were both very active Freemason, and then he made promotion in the Prussian army very related to Freemasonry. And it would astonish me if an ambitious Prussian officer hadn't been interested in Freemasonry before 1797. And it was a type of Freemasonry that was particularly concerned with alchemy. It was actively promoted at the court. So, I don't see how Kleist could have avoided it if he were serving in the army before 1797.

MAC: I just had a quick hook since you were asking about magic and Freemasonry. Friedrich Wilhelm was one of the first who wanted to stage *The Magic Flute*, and he sent several letters to Johan Jakob Engels, who was his theater director at this point. We don't have the king's letters, but we do have the director's ones. And he doesn't want to put it on the stage because he says that the stage at Berlin is too small. It refers to many decorations and he says that we don't have the machinists to make it work. But he insists and eventually it gets put on I think in 1795, if I'm correct. I don't know if that proves or not whether it's Masonic, but it does seem that the king wanted to see it on stage.

CC: Thank you, that's helpful.

NP: OK, I have Jesse, then Reva, then Tili.

JM: Andrei, I was taken by the description of the *Scherzi* that you gave: “Rather than simply visual pictures, the Scherzi become constellations of visual signs, which, however, need not function within the linear story-telling narrativity of history painting, but within the associative logic of a poem or collage.”

That description is exactly the way that critics have described the aesthetic power of the Gothic. It’s really Horace Walpole’s founding statement on the Gothic: it’s about the avoidance of the typical, Richardsonian, realistic, mimetic form of storytelling. And in that scenario it is exactly the notion of magic—the miraculous, the superstitious—that is injected into the story to avoid the mundanity of the modern novel. So, I’m wondering if you would be willing to trace an analogy from the visual realm to the literary?

AM: Of course it can be traced. Whenever I teach this material, I actually assign parts of *The Castle of Otranto*. Yet at the same time, I think we need to keep the differences between what art and other media do in the eighteenth century. One term I’ve been using to describe art from about 1500 to 1850 is “common practice theory of art,” taken from musicology. The idea is dominant styles change: the High Renaissance looks nothing like Caravaggio, which looks nothing like the Rococo, and so on. They have the same ideas as to how paint is supposed to function, how narrative is supposed to function, so that Bouguereau in the nineteenth century and Raphael could have taught each other. In the same way that someone in the early “common practice” period of music could have taught someone in the nineteenth century, because they agree on some basic elements of music theory.

What’s interesting about painting is that the most valued painting was based on preexisting stories. Even claiming to be inventing something—a new story for a painting—that went completely out of the orbit of academic art. Obviously, you could do something like that in the “lower” genres, such as scenes of everyday life, and so on. But in terms of the “high” genres, you could simply not create an image based on nothing. You’d have to look back to another text. So that there was a totally logocentric domination. This is what Barbara Maria Stafford talks about in terms of the *capriccio* being anti-logocentric, because it allows for the pure imagination of the artist, basically the freedom from his own mind to make up stories...

John Cowan (JC): There’s the same analogy in music, with the musical *fantasias* of C. P. E. Bach or even Mozart.

AM: Precisely! As a matter of fact, in the class I teach on the *capriccio*, I play them C. P. E. Bach! So you have, in different modes, different assertions of freedom from rules. But these assertions function within the different expectations of each art. One thing you notice when you read *Tristram Shandy*, or even the Gothic, is that Laurence Sterne uses the term “whim” all the time! And even the beginning says, “I’m not supposed to start *ab Ovo*, but I will start *ab Ovo*...” So, all of them have to do with the rejection of the rules.

JM: It's actually more interesting than that. Tristram starts "ab Ovo" because he thinks that's what he's supposed to do. It's based on a mistranslation or a misapprehension of Horace.

Anyway, to me, that's the thing that tied these three papers together: the avoidance of mimesis, the avoidance of realism. The way that magic exposes the artifice of the artwork. I'll just leave it at that.

AM: May I ask my question now? I have two questions for Miguel. I'm looking at one quotation, but you write about this many times in your paper. You write, "By writing mimicking music for the transformation scene, Mozart increased the staging challenges. But he might also have come close to satisfying Eschenberg's illusionistic demands." So, my first question: is that really illusion? I'm not sure that "illusion" is the right word. Because I'm thinking of the times when I have seen such transformations on stage, even at the IU opera. And it's not so much that stagecraft adds to illusion, but that you are aware of the satisfaction of spectacle. In a way it's strangely Brechtian, but without the ending element of Brecht, where you are fully aware that you are witnessing the element of stagecraft, with sets moving, and music, and lights changing. I did a lot theater in college. It's a willing participation in a spectacle that never stops being an act of spectacle. You never fully get caught up in the illusion, but it's still magical, it's still marvelous. That's my first question.

My second question was the extent to which there are scene transformations in music that are not connected to vision. I'm thinking of, for example, Haydn's *Creation*. In Hadyn's *Creation*, there's the scene of "Then there was light." And you go from dissonance to C major. And the whole audience shines with that C major. It's gorgeous. And you are perceiving the change in the story without it actually happening in front of you. Another example is Jean-Féry Rebel's *Les Éléments*, the first movement of which is "Chaos." It actually begins very famously in 1737 with all twelve notes being played at the same time—you had never heard this in the eighteenth century. Then slowly it becomes more harmonic, so that you are literally seeing this transformation as you are listening to the music. I know it was made for a ballet, but I've never seen it as a ballet. Another example I can think of, from the nineteenth century, is the "Great Gate of Kiev," by Mussorgsky. All of a sudden it breaks into the chorale at the end. Literally, there is a musical transformation that is a scene change—a magical scene change.

I was also thinking of K516, Mozart's string quartet in G minor. The last two movements, I think they are both adagios, so it has this depressing, sad minor key. Then the fourth movement starts with another slow, minor key, adagio introduction, and all of a sudden it changes. It breaks to become a beautiful major key, with a much happier part of the final movement. In purely abstract music it creates that magical transformation.

Miguel: Thanks. I'll respond to the first question first. I do think that Eschenberg does get in a little bit of trouble. I'm trying to handle this dialectic of perspectives by putting him on the more radical side and putting people like Schröder on the other, the more practical side. I don't believe that people are completely entrapped by illusion. This is a problem that is well-discussed

in the eighteenth century: if you think that what you are watching onstage is real, why don't you stop people from killing one another? So I'm using it more as a counterpart. To reply to the quote that you read, I do think music does help sustain the illusion, or contribute to it, even spectators may be fully aware because, at least on Eschenberg's theory, medial integration contributes and is fundamental to sustained illusion. So, when you think about what music does in scenes like that, as opposed to others—when pretty much everything needs to stop, the scene change needs to happen, and then we resume—there is one that is more overtly disruptive than the other. At least I think so. I've scenes productions of both types, and when you have to wait ten or fifteen seconds for the scene to change, while nothing is happening onstage, you are much more immediately made aware that what you are watching is completely artificial.

AM: I guess I'm wondering whether "absorption" or maybe "fascination" might be better than "illusion" in this case?

MAC: Yes, but I'm trying to stick to the terms that they are using. They keep referring to the the German word *Täuschung*, which can be translated as "illusion" or "deception." And when you see it in French, they use the term *illusion*. But perhaps I need to make it clearer in the paper what Eschenberg is proposing and what I believe to be true.

And then, on the other hand, all the musical transformations. I think there are some distinctions to be made. Because many of the examples you bring up come from different historical periods, and it matters to me to be historically precise.

AM: Well, you can forget about Mussorgsky then!

MAC: But the Haydn *Creation* was, from what I understand, wasn't staged. And your point was that there was a musical transformation nevertheless.

AM: There's a musical transformation that obviously is not accompanied by a natural stage transformation. But I think as viewers, or as listeners, we still don't fully perceive it that way because we get so caught up...

MAC: Yeah, I mean that moment is glorious. I love it. I'm not sure what I would have in mind in terms of the comparison to stage transformation. But obviously the techniques that Mozart is using to accompany the stage transformation are techniques that he is using in other pieces. I wouldn't make the claim that those musical techniques, outside of the theatrical context, would signal to audiences, or conjure up to everyone, the same sort of scenic transformation. I don't know. And I don't know how one would go about proving such a thing.

NP: We've got a hook here and a fairly robust queue. There's a lot of absorption happening.

AM: Wait, just one thing. OK I lost it. [Laughter]

MAC: We'll finish up later.

NP: Go ahead, John.

JC: It almost seems that it's being suggested that the scenic transformation comes to be a sort of "topic." Something that occurs in one musical medium being introduced in another, in a different context but which retains its meaning, given its frequent usage.

AM: Well, maybe what I mean—I think I remember what I was thinking—is that the transformation described in *Die Zauberflöte* is not only the transformation of two scenes but of two affects, from one to another. Whether they are descriptive, as in the *Creation*, or purely musical, they are still a transformation of affect. It almost seems to evoke the scenic transformations you describe.

NP: OK, we have Reva, Tili, Will, and David. Reva, please take it away.

Reva Wolf (RW): I probably should have used a hook because what I wanted to talk about related to point that were already raised. They have to do not only with Freemasonry but also Andrei's paper. You mentioned Tiepolo's friend and major patron, Algarotti. I know that he was in fact a Freemason. And so the question, of course, arises that there's maybe a connection between that and these weird prints. Making a connection between Algarotti and these prints would also lead into the speculative territory at the end of your paper. I just wonder if it would be worth it for someone to spend the time wondering what it was that Algarotti was up to, and what kind of Freemason he was, and whether that could shed some light at all on some of these images. It's a question worth asking.

AM: I have a very quick and then a longer answer to that. On the one hand, I think that no matter what you did, it would never be more than speculative.

RW: How do you know unless you investigate it?

AM: I ninety-nine percent assume that it is, to the extent that it might be for somebody else but not for me. But, let me give an example. I don't know if anyone has the movie—it's a French TV movie from 1978 called *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*. It's extraordinary! Written by Pierre Klossowski...

NP: I heard it was great for the first two thirds...

[Uproarious laughter]

AM: But it's the story of a collector, who collects all of the paintings that were exhibited by this nineteenth-century academic artist named Tonnerre. Presumably Tonnerre exhibited seven paintings at the salon but only six have survived. And this guy who collects them all gets involved in a conspiracy theory and to what is supposed to have happened in the paintings. And he thinks that the characters in the painting are part of a plot. I think it actually gets Masonic as one point, this conspiracy theory between these six paintings. But the collector can never fully prove it. Whenever he is asked, "How do you make this connection?" he says, "Well, I'm going to make a hypothesis about the stolen painting, because whatever I can't explain, that must have been in the stolen painting." And, I'm sorry, but sometimes I think Freemasonry is the

hypothesis of the stolen painting of the nineteenth century. It's like, if we can't explain it, it must be Masonic.

RW: Yes, but that doesn't mean it's not. [Laughter]

AM: But... yeah.

Rebecca Spang [RS]: Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean people aren't out to get you. [Laughter]

NP: Paul, is that a hook? No. So unless anyone else wants to respond on the Great Stonecutters Conspiracy, we'll have Tili.

Tili Boon Cuillé [TBC]: So I have a question for Chris and a hook. Is that possible? Do I have to choose?

NP: Let's go for it and see how things evolve.

TBC: Let me elaborate on what I saw as two lines of argument, one about guilt and one about alchemy. Right? I was wondering whether the one relies on and uses the other, or to what extent you see them as being inextricably linked? Or, is one of those more important to you, ultimately? That is to say, it seems to me that you have an argument about guilt, that I found compelling and that you could make more integral. You tie them together in terms of a dialogue, but I'm sure that I found them equally integrated.

CC: So, Brüggeman is convinced that Goethe puts alchemical symbols into the "Faust Fragment" of 1790. Kleist reads and understands how to respond, using it in *Der zerbrochne Krug* [*The Broken Jug*]. You will note that I have not included Brüggeman's argumentation about that because I cannot follow what he's saying. [Laughter]. I don't buy the alchemy argument for that particular bit—though it's clear enough that Kleist was responding to him and that it has to do with the question of a young woman's guilt.

I do think that the alchemy is definitely there in *Elective Affinities*. It's important insofar as Otto, the child who is the result of a double adultery and who dies, is clearly set to be the philosopher's stone. It's only Ottilie's guilt that prevents things from ending—well, the novel could clearly be seen as very scandalous but you could get a happy ending if she would just agree to marry Edward if he divorces Charlotte. It's her insistence on her own guilt that prevents that storyline from working out. And that seems like something that would follow very naturally from the destruction of the philosopher's stone. Instead we have this much more ambiguous ending, where we have a different promise that maybe in the future there will be a reset instead. I think that Kleist in *The Foundling* is responding directly to the *Elective Affinities* by setting up this weird scene of a young woman fleeing from a burning house, about to jump into the ocean. So we get the alchemical wedding again in this very weird form.

TBC: So, in that case, do you find that the unsuccessful aspect of the alchemical wedding, the delayed satisfaction of finding the philosopher's stone, hinges on the fate of the alchemy? Are they sacrificing the one for the greater good of the other?

CC: We know so little of what she actually thinks in *Elective Affinities*. That seems to be an argument that hinges on what she understands she's doing.

TBC: But in terms of the authors, I guess I want to know what they thought they were arguing about, or what Kleist thought he was doing. In his send-up of the alchemy, is the inspiration about guilt, or is he just trying to undermine Goethe?

CC: As I mentioned, his first impulse was to duel with Goethe when the play didn't go well. And three years later—he's not happy with Goethe at this point—I think he's parodying the alchemy bit to suggest that Goethe is wrong to leave this ambiguous future hope in play. I think Kleist is very committed to a pessimistic view of the world.

TBC: So his work is an act of parody?

CC: Yes.

NP: Do you have a question for Miguel?

TBC: Yes, Miguel, I was fascinated by your paper. And because you invoked the French operatic tradition I can't resist asking you about that. I wanted to know if you could define for me "magical opera" in and of itself? Can you just recap its defining features? What sets "magical opera" off from any other kind of opera? And, the "transformation" scene: how many components are necessary? Because I got the impression that the transformation is actually a scene change that happens during the scene, as opposed to during the intermission, before the eyes of the audience? Is that correct?

MAC: That's correct. About the definition of "magical opera," I think that's an excellent question. It's something that I've been struggling a lot with in my dissertation because it so easily moves to anything like ghost stories to things like *The Magic Flute*, which until recently was thought of as "Masonic opera." So I don't know. I don't have a good answer for that now but I'm trying to keep my eyes open. I'm always afraid that if I make a category call, or make distinctions, I'll be missing connections to other types of opera.

The sense that I have is that the visual component is one way that we can group together these types of operas, through things like the staging. Some will have mythological themes, some will have stories of knighthood, some will be "rescue operas." But I don't have a set of guidelines to say this is and this isn't. In the end, I don't want to be an arbiter of what is and what isn't. I'd rather illuminate a few things that I think these pieces have in common.

TBC: So I think you could focus your essay to say that it is about things like the way that the stage machinery is designed for the purpose of bringing the supernatural onto the stage. I was

really interested when you were making connections between the magical opera and the *merveilleux* in France. You built that up through some references to Rameau's *Zoroastre*, in particular. But then you state that it's unlikely these Viennese transformations came from Rameau, or from his successors in French opera. And you seem to base that upon which operas are being performed in Vienna. I just wanted to suggest that that's a two-way street. The other way you could ask that question, perhaps, is who's going to Paris? Because all the operas are going to Paris, and all the composers and all of the librettists are going to Paris. There was the *guerre des bouffons*, when Rousseau threw down the gauntlet and said that the French don't know how to write good music. Gluck read Rousseau and redesigned how he composed his operas and how he had his librettists write the libretto informed by what was being written in France. And I don't know the connections between Eschenberg and Diderot, for example, but his works were being published in translation. So, there was an awareness about what people were fighting about, and it involves a lot of these aesthetic principles. There is the question of the "shock value" and the enjoyment of the spectacle in the final transformations, but also a sense of how believable they are made, in terms of the design of the stagecraft.

So I would encourage you to look a little bit more at that very fruitful exchange between the creations of the Viennese and France. Especially since Mozart himself went to Paris, at the moment when Beaumarchais was writing *The Marriage of Figaro*, which he's going to pick up on very soon thereafter. Then, Beaumarchais is going to write the libretto for *Tarare*, which was composed by Salieri. So, there's really a dialogue between different scenes.

MAC: Yeah, I completely agree with you. You're right, I definitely need to look a little more at who is going to Paris. But to me it is really surprising that even if those people are going to Paris, those Parisian operas and Parisian spectacles are not being performed in Vienna. The last time that they performed Gluck was in, I think, 1767. And there are a couple of performances at the Auersperg's palace in the 1780s—but this is done at basically a suburban theater.

NP: OK, Andrei did have a hook here. I don't think want to get too intensely into a back-and-forth...

TBC: I would just specifically say that Gluck's *Armide* came out the year before Mozart went to Paris, and that has a tremendous series of transformations.

AM: That was going to be one of my comments. It has an extraordinary final transformation. It's gorgeous.

But my other comment: can we think of the "magical opera" as simply another category added to the already existing categories of *opera buffa* and *opera seria*? But one that is specifically influenced by spectacle, so that it is neither *seria* nor *buffa*. And so, in a way it becomes a third category?

MAC: But many of them [magical operas] come from *opéra comique*.

JC: More from *opera buffa*, I would say.

MAC: Yeah, many are translations from French comic opera.

NP: OK. So we have Will, David, Paul, and Luke.

Will: I'm going to try to make sense of things that are not very clear in my head. I had a question about performance. It seems to me that "performance" is a rich word in the context of magic. It has a lot of interesting resonances—and I think that is partly to do with when we're confused about success and failure. I just get literal-minded about what that looks like. The examples that we're talking about—and Miguel, I think your paper is clearest on this—have to do with what people were feeling at the time makes for a successful magical performance.

This is going to take a minute to get to, but I wanted to tie it to Andrei's question about what we're doing here at the Workshop, and whether we always assume that magic is not real, and whether we always take the position of Enlightenment skepticism. A phrase that hasn't come up yet, which has to do with performance, is "suspension of disbelief." And I would actually say it's not "suspension of disbelief" but "suspension of the categories of belief." Because people don't go in thinking, "I'm definitely going to believe it because I'm sitting in the theater." They are not playing the same game as you would play if you are actually worrying about, say, the wife dying. Or something like that.

When we talk about these things, when literary historians or art historians talk about this stuff, our position about what magic is doing is very often a false practicing of magic, because we're mostly interested in the effect. So, that bracketing is usually fairly standard for historians, to say, "I'm not going to tell you whether or not I believe in magic, all of time." Well, not all of them. I take that back, because I can think of some of them that do. But that bracket: what's the lesson? Magic is about audiences of ordinary people. And Miguel, I like that you talk about popular culture, not just the author and the works. Let's give them the credit of imagining that they can also have a complex attitude. And the example I can give is Evans-Pritchard's classic anthropology of witchcraft, which is a direct response to Andrei's comment that, "Here we are, interested in Enlightenment rationalism and magic isn't rational." That's wrong ontologically and it's wrong socially. In Evans-Pritchard's book about the anthropology of witchcraft, his point is that magic is an excess of rationalism. We see reasons for everything. Everything has an explanation.

AM: But from the point of view of the Enlightenment, they would not have called that "rationality."

WP: Fair enough, but we're allowed to have our own categories! [Laughter]. One of the other key points made by Evans-Pritchard is that communities that have an important place for witchcraft—so that it's central to the social structure and how their communities work—are shot through with fraudulence. They accept that a large proportion of the magic that people do is

nonsense. So even though they fundamentally believe in magical explanations, it becomes more a question about the performance of magic.

NP: Miguel, do you want to respond?

MAC: No, I think that's wonderful.

NP: Then we'll have David.

David Brewer (DB): I have what may be a small question. I'm really interested in the abrupt stop in the *L'arbore di Diana* that you [Miguel] describe. I like the idea that there are these frozen figures, but you can still hear the wings sliding and the machines under the stage, and such. But you can also hear the audience. And I think of the one time I've been at a performance of John Cage's "4'33"," how hyper-conscious I became of my own throat clearing, and of the weird thing that person over there is doing. Because eighteenth-century theaters are such places to see and be seen, because the house lights never go fully down, I guess I'm wondering what place do the ambient sounds of the audience play during these moments of transformation?

MAC: I guess the first thing that comes to mind is that I have just one piece of evidence—but it's one that I cherish—of audiences clapping when those effects happen. And so, I wonder sometimes if that's what might have happened when they changed those scenes. But I can only imagine the kind of noises you would hear in an eighteenth-century theater when everything has stopped.

DB: The term "absorption" came up earlier. I'm just wondering if this moment might be one that would promote this deep kind of absorption, or whether it would be one of utter distraction?

MAC: A little bit of both, I suppose? [Laughter]

NP: I'm going to call on my own hook. One of the things I was having trouble wrapping my head around was what makes these scene changes more "extra" than any other scene change? Because every dramatic performance has complicated stagecraft surrounding a scene change. The moment that David is pointing to was the moment when I thought about the pantomime and the *harlequinade*. What happens there—and I'm not trying to pick on you because you said you haven't come across this freakishly weird English thing—is that you would start with the pantomime, which usually involved some common story from the *commedia dell'arte*. And then, all of a sudden, everyone would freeze. And harlequin, who had a sword or a club—literally a slapstick—would go around and hit the scenery and the objects, and they would transform onstage. And that was part of the show! And then he would hit the characters, and they would become the harlequin characters. And then, they would do *Dr. Faustus*, or whatever the hell they were doing.

They would often do this as the third act to an opera, or a longer, more serious entertainment. And after that, they would have this weird thing that was all about the stage machinery. That

was provocative to me, because there they really were trying to show that the magic transformation was something that the little magic fairy guy is doing versus most of the time, when they just have to change the scenery. Usually the audience is primed for that and will probably behave fairly well—unless they are in a bad mood, in which case they won't.

MAC: Yes, I think what makes it “extra” is specifically the fact that the scene change is embedded in the plot.

NP: So it matters that magic is driving the scene change?

MAC: Yeah, one of the things I didn't include in the paper is that it often goes under-explained who the author of the magic is. So, the scene changes abruptly, and then you see the god. But it's not a god or somebody with a wand saying “Hocus pocus!”

NP: Paul?

PKM: I initially wanted to pick up on Reva's point about Freemasonry. But that got me thinking about something else. What you [Miguel] are really describing is wonderment or awe, which is the byproduct of magic—but at least for those who study it historically, is not the only byproduct. An audience can believe in it when it sees it on stage, but I'm not sure that that's the same as believing in magic. And I do think that maybe we might want to draw some distinctions. I realize that that might not be what you are doing in your dissertation, but you might want to consider some distinctions there between the aim of this type of machinery onstage, to help distinguish it from other types of magic.

TBC: Can I reply to that, just very briefly? From the perspective of those of us who study art, specifically the history of special effects, the aim of the special effects is to induce us to believe, even momentarily, in something that otherwise would be unbelievable. So, be it on the operatic stage, or in science fiction, or the illusionists who turn magic into magical display or trickery. Nevertheless, the aesthetics underpinning all of these is successfully tricking ourselves.

PKM: But it's not supernatural.

TBC: Right. But if you say, “What's the difference between believing in magic [in the two scenarios]”? We're deriving enjoyment? Or playing on people's fears? The question is where do we draw the line between magic as such, magic as illusion, magic as conspiracy theory, or magic as, you know, anything? What's the flavor? What's the pain? What's the fear?

PKM: I think a lot of historians would argue that it [magic] has to be operationalist. It's there not just to awe you. It has to do something.

TBC: Transform something?

PKM: Transform something. Make it better, yeah. And convince you that it's true. That it really happened. That aspect of it is completely missing in a performance. There does seem to be a distinction there, between feeling awe or wonderment and feeling that what you have seen goes

beyond the boundaries of the natural—or is something that could be used in some way for some purpose. I just don't think that they are that closely related. There's a parallel in the effect—in the immediate effect—but I think anybody in the eighteenth century would immediately have recognized, "I may have felt the same thing, but it doesn't have the same consequences. And I don't have to believe in it, if I don't want to."

Could I just ask...?

NP: Well, hold on because we have three hooks, and then we'll go back. Reva, go ahead, very quickly.

RW: Very quickly, as we are thinking about how to define magic, I'm wondering if anyone has ever done a study of dictionary definitions of "magic" in different countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? That could be really interesting.

AM: Actually, I have one quick answer to that. I looked up "magie" in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* by Flaubert, and his entry is very short. He says, "magie: se moquer," "to be made fun of," "to be mocked." So there's one dictionary answer!

NP: Rebekah, I think you're next.

Rebekah Sheldon (RS): Thank you. I just was struck that this conversation, which began with performance, replicates J. L. Austin's distinction in *How to Do Things with Words*. You know, the one thing that is excluded from the possibility of making with words, in other words the "performative," is fiction. But, in fact, the whole history of queer theory suggests that that distinction doesn't hold up. In fact, the reading of the lectures winds up breaking down those distinctions, so that the contexts in which words do things is actually much expanded from the original articulation. So, I just thought I might bring that into the conversation.

NP: Paul, did you want to ask your remaining question?

PKM: No, I can talk in private.

AM: Well, if I may, I feel that my answer about Freemasonry was too glib. I just want to pick up on that for a second, if I may. On the one hand, I want to say that a lot of people have been trying to figure for a very long time what the subject matter of these [Tiepolo] prints is. And I imagine many have tried to make the connection with Freemasonry, because it's one of the first things you'd do, in this case. So, I'm pretty sure that that's one of the reasons I don't think that line of inquiry would be fruitful. But more important than that: these images have existed for over two and a half centuries without being attached to Freemasonry. Whether one ultimately attached them to that, it does not negate what they have been for all this time. I think that would, so to speak, take away some of their magic, if we actually found some kind of answer to that. For example, what ends up being done by Brian Aldiss in *The Galician Tapestry*, and so on.

So I think it's an incredibly infinitesimal chance. But even if they are connected to Freemasonry, that does not deny their historical existence for over two and a half centuries as these mysterious objects, which I think are theoretically more interesting than if they were connected to a specific iconographic program. If that ever happened, I would continue to study them in terms of what they have meant for all this time.

RW: But you never know what kinds of other mysteries might emerge by making those other connections. I don't think it would take away from the mystery, necessarily.

NP: Johannes has a hook.

Johannes Türk (JT): I had one small hook about what actually is different about magic and performance. I think magic is about being apparently able to make something real, when we assume that someone is usually unable to do something. So the part of the illusion is not in what is produced, necessarily at least. There is a strong difference between impossible things, or futuristic things, and illusionistic things. I think that illusion lies in the power of being able to do. And so I think there's a big difference between illusion, inversion, and performance. I think that relates it to, in a sense, the arcanum of power, in a very strange way.

I think that's also what's interesting about the link between Freemasonry and these things. Because we assume that society is capable of making things real, of influencing events.

NP: OK. Paul, you had a hook? But then we're going to hear from Luke, who has been waiting with the patience of a saint.

PKM: I agree with Andrei's account, with his second answer. But also, it would have been very dangerous for Tiepolo to have been a Freemason in Italy in the 1770s. The Pope had declared himself against Freemasonry. Algarotti was a Freemason mainly outside of Italy. He didn't practice it when he was in Italy. It's not until the 1780s and 90s that you get the weird *réapparition* of lodges. I just don't think that Tiepolo would have been a very successful painter. He wouldn't have wanted to endanger his success. Because they put a Freemason to death in Florence earlier and he would have been putting his life in jeopardy if he were to use his paintings to reveal the secrets of Freemasonry.

Luke Rylander (LR): So, unsurprisingly I have a question for Chris, and it's building from Tili's question about the relation between guilt and the alchemical process. Personally, one of the things I find persuasive about Brüggeman's argument for the alchemical understanding, specifically with the Goethe, is that it does allow us to explain and understand the weird relationships characters have to these dead children, if you understand them as a philosopher's stone, or the *nigredo*, or something like that. Something that is a product, or that is used to position the players in the alchemical marriage into certain positions. For example, Faust and Gretchen's child is nameless, and genderless, and although Gretchen cries about it, Faust seems to never acknowledge that it existed, or that a pregnancy happened, both in Part I and in Part II.

Then in the *Elective Affinities*, you get the strange situation where the actual mother—“actual” in the biological sense, not in the alchemical sense—of the young Otto ends up consoling Otilie, rather than the other way around. In that sense, there is a very strong argument that you bring up, that this alchemical process is used to negotiate questions of guilt and affiliations through guilt. But then I’m wondering about Kleist: while guilt plays a role, authority becomes a much more central question, with these game-like relations, and family relations, and relations of exchange.

So, I’m wondering how you see authority in Kleist, and its presence and absence in Goethe? Because actual paternity is constantly being obfuscated in Goethe, but authority is unquestionably important.

CC: OK. Thank you. Let me see. [Laughter]. I think that one of the weirdest things about—I think that no one has brought up Todorov? I’m not sure how to pronounce his name. Maybe that’s why no one has.

TBC: We talked about him over dinner last night.

CC: Ah, I missed that. Goethe is never included as a “fantastical” author. And I think an argument could be made that the relationships in his fiction are weird enough that you have to ask: these can’t possibly be meant to be psychologically realistic individuals, in a Richardsonian sense? In that sense, the alchemical approach to Goethe helps to explain that.

For anyone who hasn’t read Otto’s death scene in *Elective Affinities*, Goethe never wrote anything funnier. It’s the funniest two paragraphs in all of Goethe’s works. It’s this horrific, slapstick death, where Otilie is trying to get the child, and the book she is reading, and the oars into the boat, and everything slips, and then Otto ends up in the water. It’s a Charlie Chaplin sequence. The narrator is clearly given license to kill Otto off in this extremely undignified way. I don’t think it’s just the characters; the narrator, perhaps even Goethe himself has this weird distance from everything that’s happening. And so, we should probably be treating this as not a realistic depiction, but a playing out of forces.

Kleist and authority? That takes up back to the question of whether magic is something that happens when sovereignty fails. And so much of Kleist occurs in the space where some public authority has just failed in some notable fashion, due to illness, or earthquake, or military defeat. Something like that. Or, parental authority has been disastrous. Kleist is interested in authority, but he’s not ultimately interested in assigning blame. This gets back to the question of how does Kleist feel about guilt? He doesn’t really care who’s guilty. He’s just interested in asking about how things have broken down. And he wants to have an explanation of why things have broken down, to find out who’s responsible. But is that the same thing as guilt? He doesn’t care so much about that.

NP: So, Mike has a hook.

Michael Lynn (ML): This may be off-topic by now. Getting back to the question of magic: what it is and what is isn't? I think it needs to be a question of where you are: on a street, on a stage? It's alone and private, if you are an alchemist. Who is the audience? Did they pay to be there? Is the audience paying you for something specifically? I think you have to figure out all of those things. You could do the same act in four different places, and it would mean four different things.

I worry a bit that things are complicated already—but it gets even more complicated by asking these questions. To me, those things then link up with other things. You could have a theatrical performance on a stage, and then the next night you could have a magical performance on that same stage. The next night it could have a scientific popularization performance. Which one is magic? Which one is theater? It all gets kind of messy. Which I find delightful, but now that I say it out loud maybe doesn't really seem helpful. [Laughter].

NP: Johannes?

JT: I have a hook about guilt. [Laughter]. Because now we've had these many different conversations about it. I think it's a really great insight that in Goethe there is something that insists on guilt because usually in the history of modernization, we say that we get rid of guilt when we have moral consensus. So in a way we are freed from it. Or it simply becomes a religious category. There are all these accounts.

When you say that many of these narratives rely on guilt and claim, in a sense, that without guilt there is no knowledge, and nothing to learn, I think that is something deeply felt in Goethe. If you look at *Wilhelm Meister*, for example, he leaves his home because he falls in love with Mariane. He joins the theatre, then he realizes that he's a rival. So there's not the option of having a positive love relationship. But then, later on, the father dies before he can punish him. So you could say that the guilt remains—the positional guilt toward experience—but there's no authority or binding morality that would sanction that or objectify it or turn it into a socially valid thing. But the individual remains with the guilt, and without it, there would be really nothing to learn or to know. Which is something very strange and interesting. It's a guilt without authority and without sanctions. And that's maybe the sign of this transformation period that he writes about, from *Faust* to *Wilhelm Meister* to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. They are all about big transformations, social transformations, which I find to be a totally interesting question. But that's not related to magic. [Laughter].

CC: There is one very brief thing I want to say to that. We've brought up Weber's disenchantment a couple of times, but in *Science as Vocation*, in the final couple of pages, he doesn't say that this is an inevitable thing. People can always choose to opt out of this kind of specialization of knowledge.

TBC: I think he's encouraging up to opt out. He's saying that it's a shame that this has transpired.

CC: And he relies there on Lukács's reading of Goethe and the issue of the demonic that starts to come out in the *Elective Affinities*. And that's big, but we don't need to open that now.

NP: So, just a note on guilt and *Wilhelm Meister*. In 2019 there was a K-drama called *Rookie Historian*—which is pretty good if you like K-dramas. I think it's early nineteenth century, and it opens with a protagonist whose job is to read romance novels to wealthy ladies. And the opening scene is her reading *Wilhelm Meister* to these aristocratic Korean ladies. They basically get to the disastrous end, and they say, I paraphrase, "What the hell was that!" [Laughter]. And she's very offended! She's an intellectual, and they fire her. So with that... [laughter] any last thoughts? Richard, please.

Richard Nash [RN]: I have two hooks. One hook I'm going to defer...

NP: What happens to a hook deferred? [Laughter].

RN: The other one comes back to your comment about Goethe and the *Elective Affinities*, which I have never read. I look forward to reading those two paragraphs. [Laughter]. But I do remember one of the important, formative experiences of my life, when I was a child of about eight or ten, was reading. And it seems appropriate because I'm thinking about mystery, magic, and mechanics. And the way in which magic is one of those things that operates in such a way that the mysterious can be rendered mechanical in ways that retain the power of mystery, while at same time punctuating it with a mechanical understanding of the operation. For me, that experience came—I don't know how many of you have seen the old movie *Lifeboat*? It was a tense, taught melodrama. I never saw it. [Laughter]. I did, however, read the brilliant, classical *Mad* magazine parody of it. [Laughter]. At one point, where I learned the sublime for the first time, and how close it borders on the ridiculous, someone is invited to say a few words, as they bury someone. And the words are these: "Out of the boat, into the dark. Goodbye, whoever it was. Hello, shark." [Laughter]. And your recounting of that death in the *Elective Affinities* struck me as combining that mixture of the sublime and punctuating it with the ridiculous. It made me think about how magic has that peculiar property of uniting those two—and giving us both the sense of the power of the sublime, which we can't attain, but also the illusion that we can attain it, through some imitative act. That's a powerful combination.

NP: Oz has a hook.

Oz Kenshur [OK]: When Richard brings in the power of the mechanical, one notion of magical that we haven't discussed is prestidigitation, which seems to suggest a form of magic that goes beyond our own human capabilities. Nobody thought Houdini had supernatural powers. He was somehow supernatural in a different way.

NP: Even after the long discussion about stagecraft, what a lot of this boils down to is, "How the hell did they do that?" [Laughter]. Rebecca?

Rebecca L. Spang [RLS]: I can't think who it was—it was just an hour ago—who said that “magic is what happens when sovereignty fails.” Who said that?

CC: I did. But I was just quoting someone from this morning. [Laughter]

RLS: But I keep thinking that it's a sovereignty where the sovereign is perceived as legitimate. So that you don't even have to think about how it does its work. It just does. Magic, then, is the thing that forces you to think, “How does that work?” It poses that question, and then if it can't be answered, it must really be magic. And if it can be answered, then “Oh, it's just mechanics.”

NP: So, what happens when the king's touch cures your scrofula?

RLS: Right. Then I realize that I'm not really a proper early modernist. [Laughter].

NP: Let's give a hand to our three wonderful panelists. [Applause]