



Photograph: Lachlan Woods © 2014

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THE MOTION OF LIGHT IN WATER

PROGRAM

Created by Elbow Room

LA BOITE INDIE

LOVINGLY HANDMADE

INDEPENDENT THEATRE IN BRISBANE



SCIENCE FICTION & THEATRE

If science fiction has any use at all, it is that among all its various and variegated future landscapes it gives us images for our future.

— Samuel R. Delany, *The Necessity of Tomorrows*

What you're about to see is a work of science fiction. When we began to create it, we had very little idea what 'science fiction' meant to us, let alone to others. Although inspired by real and still-living people, this work is, more than anything else, a performative document of how our collective sense of possibility has expanded and deepened, upon our encounter with the work of two remarkable individuals.

Samuel R. Delany was born in Harlem, New York, in 1941, the son of a funeral director, and the grandson of a man - his namesake - born into slavery. Marilyn Hacker was born shortly afterwards, in the same city, to a working-class Jewish couple. Delany and Hacker attended the selective Bronx High School of Science together; a heterosexual 'experiment', by two young people who both experienced same-sex attraction in a society that criminalised it, resulted in pregnancy, and - in 1960 - their marriage in Michigan. This much is fact, as is this: the young Hacker and Delany were both writers of prodigious gifts.

The bottom line is this: You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it.

— James Baldwin

In 1966, Delany received the Nebula Award for *Babel-17*, his sixth science-fiction publication. (That the novel's protagonist, Rydra Wong, is a woman of colour is, unfortunately, still remarkable to this day.) Hacker's first published book of poetry, *Presentation Piece*, which includes 'The Navigators', received the National Book Award in 1974. In 1987, Delany published *The Motion of Light in Water*, an account of his life roughly up until the completion of *Empire Star*, a short novel which he wrote down immediately after *Babel-17*,

which exists 'in the world' of that book, and which he had originally intended to be published in the same volume.

Bailed out too soon, back in our den of exiles, he dreams of ships, and speaks to us in code; learns music from you, teaches me prisoner's games,

reads novels about glorious escapes...

— Marilyn Hacker, 'The Navigators'

In early 2014, in a shed in Albury, NSW, at the height of summer, a group of people gathered to read all of these books, and to share our responses. Through discussion, improvisation, and imaginative provocation, these six actors and I attempted to refine our collective sense that science fiction, like theatre, might be a way of reading the world, and - moreover - one that exists first as a question: What if...?

I am spacious, singing flesh, onto which is grafted no one knows which I - masculine or feminine, more or less human, but above all, the living, because changing, I.

— H  l  ne Cixous

*What you're about to see is inspired by Delany and Hacker's work, but resembles little of it in detail. To suggest that this is a document of their lives, or even an 'adaptation' of *Babel-17*, is to do justice to no-one: we set out, rather, to create a work that captures the sense of courage and possibility that we took from these books, and the cultural and personal struggles that gave rise to them. In doing so, we have been able - like *Jewel*, the narrator of *Empire Star* - to move back and forth between past and future, drawing not only from Delany's novel and biography, but from those, like *William Gibson*, upon whom he has been an avowed influence. If we provoke your curiosity to read these amazing books - and Marilyn Hacker's poetry - for yourself, our work is well and truly done.*

The future is already here. It's just unevenly distributed.

— William Gibson

At the inception of this project, Ray Chong Nee, Emily Tomlins and I were its co-creators. In the course of this work's development, Ray's immense contribution came to be matched by the contribution of Paul Blenheim, Tom Dent, Laura Maitland and Jacinta Yelland, who have been generous and fearless in bringing their experiences to bear on this material. The credit of 'co-creator' belongs, properly, to them all.

On this production, we also acknowledge the contribution of our latest collaborators, Ryan Forbes, Olivia Monticciolo, and Ngoc Phan, and thank them for their courage and generosity.

- Marcel Dorney, Artistic Director

CAST AND CREW

Directed by **Marcel Dorney**

Sound Design & Composer **THE SWEATS**

Production Designer **Matthew Adey**

Costume Designer **Zo   Rouse**

AV Designer **Andre Vanderwert**

Lighting Design **Kris Chainey**

Producer **Dean Cartmel**

Assistant Producer **Nathan Booth**

Starring **Ray Chong-Nee, Tom Dent, Ryan Forbes, Olivia Monticciolo, Ngoc Phan and Emily Tomlins**



ELBOW ROOM

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