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## Marathon Theater as Anti-Monument: The Curious Case of *Gatz*

**Abstract:** The most critically acclaimed production of New York’s 2010 theater season was *Gatz*, a seven-hour-long adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* by the experimental company Elevator Repair Service. *Gatz* was an anomaly in the wave of marathon-length theater events that has occurred in Europe and America in recent decades. Most theatrical marathons are monumental, made in the venerable romantic spirit of sweeping magisterial statement that dates back to Goethe’s *Faust* and includes contemporary works such as Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* and Robert Wilson and Philip Glass’ *Einstein on the Beach*. *Gatz*, in contrast, was deliberately anti-monumental, pointedly questioning the values of epic grandeur and heroic stature that magisterial theatrical marathons propound. Moreover, the work was anti-monumental as that concept is understood in the art world: referring to reactions against monumentalism in public spaces that question representations of power and elite points of view. As the first adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* to include ordinary theatergoers as its subject and adopt interpretive openness as its grounding tenet, *Gatz* implicitly critiqued the iconic status of its celebrated source novel.

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In recent decades, marathon theater has become a persistent feature of the Euro-American cultural landscape. Few theater seasons have passed since the 1980s without a major PR push for one or more productions significantly longer in duration than the Western ‘full evening’ norm of two to three hours. Marathon playgoing is obviously nothing new. Our dramatic tradition began in ancient Athenian festival performances that lasted from dawn until dusk. Whole-day or multi-day productions are a sporadic occurrence throughout history with different social and artistic causes at different times.

What distinguishes the current wave is its defiance of the maddening information-age imperative towards ever-increasing brevity, rush and trivialization. Today’s theater marathons, by which I mean any production longer than four hours, are various, ranging from new work (e.g. Robert Lepage’s *The Seven*

*Streams of the River Ota* and Robert Wilson and Philip Glass' *Einstein on the Beach*) to revivals of classics (e.g. Olivier Py's *Le soulier de satin* and Le Theatre du Soleil's *Les Atrides*), from commercial and opulent (e.g. Peter Stein's *Faust I + II*) to simple and frugal (e.g. Nature Theatre of Oklahoma's *Life and Times*), and their length is never a guarantee of quality. What binds the best of these diverse works together is the experience they provide of sustained meditation amid the endemic "hurry sickness" of the media era. Such works are antidotes to the image-swarm, split-screens, quick-cuts, bullet-lists and call-waiting that keep the Western theaterati caffeinated. This class of spectator tends to be busy, distracted and regretful about lacking the time and patience to read long books, and it finds in lengthily immersive theater experiences akin to reading those books. So much in our contemporary world is perforce distilled and fragmented that many thoughtful spectators long for the fullness of comprehensively conceived worlds, long to lose themselves in elaborate and epic story arcs, savor panoramic vistas and ponder quixotic concepts of the monumental. Theatrical marathons satisfy this abiding hunger. They are the 'slow food' of theatrical art, offering not just extended imaginative experiences but also – due to the interactions with strangers that inevitably occur during long performances and multiple intermissions – the chance to savor rare feelings of public communion.

Most theatrical marathons are monumental – conceived in the venerable romantic tradition of sweeping magisterial statement, such as Goethe's *Faust*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Karl Kraus' *The Last Days of Mankind*, Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* and *Einstein on the Beach*. The dominant Western convention of art-making has long been that of heroic achievement, with greatness measured via noble and grandiose achievement, valiant vision and unique expression. At least since the 1990s, however, extremely long theatrical works have been made in pointed reaction to this valorous tradition by various continental European director-auteurs and by British and American experimental companies such as Forced Entertainment, Nature Theater of Oklahoma and Elevator Repair Service. The latter companies share a John Cage-esque indifference to heroic stature, epic grandeur, definitive statement and whatever passes for great acting and playwriting around them. Their art is forged from the unlikely material of the hapless, the accidental, the awkward and the ordinary, courting accusations of failure, arbitrariness and tedium in pursuit of an elusive theatrical alchemy that can operate only at the tenuous boundary of art and life. My book *Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater* (2011) examines two extraordinary examples in this vein, both by Forced Entertainment. This essay explores another: *Gatz*, Elevator Repair Service's much-acclaimed seven-hour theatricalization of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*.

Elevator Repair Service [ERS] was founded in New York City in 1991 by director John Collins and a group of young actors. The early core members were Rinne Groff, James Hannaham, Katherine Profeta, Colleen Werthman, Steve Bodow, Susie Sokol, Bradley Glenn and Scott Shepherd. The ensemble membership has changed and widely expanded over time, but the tone and general approach of the company's work has been fairly consistent. As Sarah Jane Bailes puts it, ERS "makes theatre out of making theatre".<sup>1</sup> It regards all its performers' discovery processes, personal quirks, tics, preferences, on- and offstage relationships as well as all available theatrical resources as material to be mined, manipulated and aesthetically shaped. Self-consciously humble and avowedly awkward, the group's early works, each workshopped for one to three years, were oddball dramatic organisms grown improvisationally from whimsical seeds, including found and original writing, isolated behavioral vignettes, fragments of sound, music, film and impish choreography. Later, they began to explore canonical American literary texts by such authors as Fitzgerald, Henry James, Jack Kerouac, William F. Buckley, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, staging their process of discovering the famous source texts while also exploring how theater could, in Bailes' words, "translate the solitary intimacy and interiority of the literary imagination".<sup>2</sup>

*Gatz* was the first literary production that Collins considered a "serious engagement" with the source text and for that reason he thinks of it as "a turning point for the company".<sup>3</sup> Begun in 1999 and developed on and off for seven years, *Gatz*' New York opening was delayed four years due to objections by the Fitzgerald estate (which had authorized another *Gatsby* stage adaptation and wanted to minimize competition with it). After work-in-progress showings in 2004 and 2005, *Gatz* opened at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis in 2006, toured to various European cities to great critical acclaim and finally arrived at New York's Public Theater in 2010 after the estate lifted its restriction.

What primarily distinguishes *Gatz* from the many other dramatic adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* that have been made is that it includes all of the novel's 47,000-odd words, without emendation. On a shabby office set, a pleasantly nondescript dogsbody (Scott Shepherd) arrives for the day, cannot get his 1990s-vintage computer booted, extracts a paperback copy of *Gatsby* from inside a rolodex and begins reading aloud. At first his reading is crude and uninflected. Then, it grows more interested, articulate and animated. At a certain

<sup>1</sup> Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service* (London: Routledge, 2011) 174.

<sup>2</sup> Bailes 2011, 150.

<sup>3</sup> John Collins, Interview with Jonathan Kalb, New York City, 10 September 2012.

point, the man's office co-workers stop giving him funny looks and start pitching in to help enact and narrate the story. Their enactments remain rough and unpretentious at all times, their impersonations approximate and deliberately half-baked, as if acting were really just a game to them to distract from the droning misery of their daily office grind. In the end, the story has nevertheless come meaningfully into focus and powerfully alive, as the strangely circumscribed game of simulation feels more significant and invested than any process of literal theatrical illustration could. *Gatz* ends up delivering a surprisingly intense emotional punch in no small measure because of its mimetic dubiousness and low-tech, DIY humility.

Staging the entirety of Fitzgerald's book, Collins says, was a fallback position arrived at after other approaches had failed:

When we first worked on the piece in 1999, we started trying to adapt it. Then it started to feel impossible, as the more time I spent with the text the more I realized that it was perfectly constructed. I didn't see a way to start picking it apart. I've always been attracted to material that's not dramatic as material for theatre. I like things that weren't imagined for the stage, that are going to give us problems we have to solve. So, put the book on stage and keep it a book.<sup>4</sup>

The office setting, he adds, similarly sprang from an impulse to use all available means for the purpose of keeping the imagination awake and engaged.

Early on we happened to be rehearsing, just by accident, in a little office, ERS has always made a virtue of working with found resources, so I thought we may as well use that as the idea. It seemed to set up a sort of canvas for the whole show. You are witnessing the transition as it's happening and that's always more interesting to me than when you go and you sit down and a curtain comes up and the transformation's already happened and you better just be able to believe this one that we already imagined for you.<sup>5</sup>

As I will explain, the texture and flexibility of the office 'canvas', and the way the production went about filling it, are the mainsprings of *Gatz*' unique affect.

*Gatsby* is narrated by a young Midwesterner named Nick Carraway who, as a Yale graduate and veteran of World War I, comes to New York to work as a bond trader and decides to commute to the city from the north shore of Long Island. His modest rented cottage there is flanked by millionaires' mansions, one of which belongs to the extravagant and mysterious Jay Gatsby (née Jimmy Gatz). The tale Nick tells focuses on the disastrous romantic reunion of nouveau riche Gatsby and Nick's married cousin Daisy Buchanan, an old-money society

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<sup>4</sup> Maryann Mallett & Fiona Mountford, "Fancy an Eight-Hour Show, Old Sport?", *The Evening Standard* (London), 15 May 2012, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Mallett & Mountford 2012, 35.

beauty whom Gatsby loved before he too went off to war. This is the tragic surface story, whose resonance mushrooms to include critical visions of materialism, capitalism, modernity and the American dream.

Running parallel with the Gatsby tale is what amounts to a subtextual *Bildungsroman* about Nick's development and maturation – a sort of mystery within the mystery whose nexus is the glaring incongruity between the banal profile Nick cuts with his mercantile, unimaginative job and the sparkling imaginativeness, perceptiveness and eloquence of his storytelling. Nick is a question mark from the outset, an implausibly honey-tongued, lynx-eyed fellow remembering the novel's events with cool dispassion – until his poise momentarily cracks when he bids farewell to Gatsby. Nick's verbal prowess has prompted copious comparisons with Fitzgerald, of limited value. ERS' crucial perception was that the unreliability of and uncertainties surrounding the narrator were inherently theatrical.

When Scott Shepherd enters, he comes off as unassumingly conventional with his crew cut, dress shoes, plain slacks and blue shirt and tie. Even his voice – steady, crisp, unexcitable beyond mild amusement – is a stamp of Rotarian normalcy and routine. In the early minutes of *Gatz*, a flurry of stage business establishes him, Jim Fletcher (who will play Gatsby), Susie Sokol (who will play the golf pro Jordan Baker), Gary Wilmes (who will play Tom, Daisy's oafish husband) and others as bored and hassled yet competent company employees attending responsibly to documents, folders and ringing phones. The first time Shepherd imitates the voice of a character other than Nick, he looks self-consciously behind him, as if afraid of being caught. Soon after, he acts surprised when Wilmes and Sokol speak some of Tom and Jordan's lines from memory, after which Sokol gets an audience laugh pointing at the *Gatz* paperback as if to prove she got the words right. Sokol had until this point been loafing on the office couch (reading *Golf* magazine), and Wilmes, a sort of hulking maintenance man, had been idly jangling a cluster of keys. That the story lures them out of their lassitude implies that it has been irresistible to them.

The magnetic appeal of the performance – evidently for the actors as well as the audience – rests on its scrappy improvisation-based humor. The actors create the mess of a drunken party, for instance, by deliberately tossing papers, cups, pencils and other objects onto the floor, after which a stagehand adds to the chaos by flicking playing cards at the actors. The actress Kate Scelsa plays an overweight, passive-aggressive office manager who repeatedly conveys peevish exasperation at having to clean up everyone's messes. Daisy's flustered toilette before her tryst with Gatsby culminates with a colleague spraying her fingernails with a plant-mister, and Gatsby and Daisy's nervousness during the tryst involves slapstick inanity with plasticware. Sound effects inject occasional

illustration and pseudo-realism: caper music, suspense music, jazz, screeching tires, rain. But the delightful inventiveness of the stage business sets the tone, which is consistently respectful of Fitzgerald because the gags are never arbitrary; they always serve the story. For the same reason, the comedy never slants toward satire because it rests on the earnest ground of the office workers' enjoyment of their escapist game.

Shepherd has a unique role. He retains more dignity and decorum than everyone else, coming away unmussed from the chaotic party (the one at Myrtle's apartment), for instance, and calmly continuing to read as the rest of the cast cleans up. His ability to keep his head, press on and dissect complex situations sets him apart. He never takes on airs. On the contrary, he often recedes, even appearing asleep in his swivel chair at one point and literally disappearing at another when he narrates a passage from offstage. He, more than Gatsby, is the day's durable mystery, a man hiding in plain sight. He exerts a proprietary hold over the performance through his imaginative power over others, but his independent identity is never wholly clear. When he speaks the book's elegiac final chapter, his voice rising melodically to give Fitzgerald's rueful panoramic view of America its due, he does so from memory. The paperback has by then become a prop, its story his – whoever he is.

Gatsby, for his part, lies dead on the forestage during that chapter, an enigma whose force is spent. He is played in *Gatz* by an actor whose reputation has been built on fascinating ciphers. Jim Fletcher has been in high demand over two decades with experimental companies like ERS, Forced Entertainment and the New York City Players, because his distinctive, unflappable air of vagueness and insularity is ideal for indistinct roles. Tall, bald, deep-voiced, slow-tongued and relentlessly deadpan, he can project enormous strength and authority without ever verifying his motivation or the nature of his connections with other characters. When he enters in *Gatz*, he is dressed almost identically to Shepherd, another office grunt who might be Shepherd's supervisor, yet he commands a unique, diffuse authority that others defer to. As the show proceeds, he grows ever more anomalous and vague, appearing in an immaculate white suit during the Daisy reunion, for instance, and later in a ridiculously eccentric pink suit that no one reacts to. By the time Gatsby dies, his isolation and self-sufficiency seem like facts of life in Fletcher's hands, neither remarkable nor unremarkable. He has by then become everyone and no one – spectator and star actor, clueless sap and alpha male, ragamuffin Jimmy Gatz and magnate Jay Gatsby rolled into one.

On one level, *Gatz* is a tribute to the pleasure of reading, and ERS deserves much credit for endorsing that cause in an age of epidemic attention-deficit disorder and mass isolation behind flickering screens. The show's strongest emo-

tional pull, however, comes from its theatrical qualities and its choice of material. *Gatsby* is not a difficult book; it can be listened to with ease. Moreover, its central theme is the dream of American self-invention, that perennial, optimistic conviction we ‘New Worlders’ harbor that, with a little pluck and luck, we can do anything, become anything, because we are liberated from the shackles of rank and class-prejudice that doomed our European predecessors to gloom and stasis. Fitzgerald recognized the defects in that dream, perceiving the rigid lines of reinvented privilege and class that arose in the great new democracy. Many have construed that as the main agon in *Gatsby*, no less pertinent today than in 1925.

ERS’ pivotal perception was that this agon could be clarified and amplified by projecting (or overlaying) Fitzgerald’s Jazz Age story onto a run-of-the-mill contemporary circumstance. Millions of office workers go to work every day in the information age certain that they are better than what they do, and they fantasize about being self-made tycoons like *Gatsby*, elegant heirs and heiresses like the Buchanans, or nascent writers like Nick. *Gatz* exploits that living reality – the office-worker-as-dreamer turned office-worker-as-actor. When I asked Collins in an interview why the show was titled *Gatz*, he offered this answer:

‘*Gatz*’ is from the book. It’s Jay Gatsby’s real name, and to me it was a way of pointing to the less glamorous underside of the character. I felt like that was something we were doing with the show as well – setting it in this unglamorous location, looking for some larger truths in that story that were more associated with what you see when the glamorous façade falls away.<sup>6</sup>

The title, in other words, emphasizes the point in time when the tycoon was truly “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (Tom’s withering remark at their showdown), as all *Gatz*’ office characters are nobodies dreaming of being somebodies.<sup>7</sup> A huge lode of frustrated emotion lies beneath that circumstance, which ERS sensitively taps.

In a conventional *Gatsby* adaptation, few of the thirteen *Gatz* company members – charismatic and talented as they are in their ways – would likely be cast in the *Gatsby* roles they take on. In *Gatz* they play quasi-neutral screens onto which the audience freely projects the personalities and behaviors Fitzgerald describes. Similarly, the grimy and cluttered office set (designed by Louisa Thompson) operates as a neutral space for fantasies of place. With only tiny adjustments that are accomplished in seconds by the actors, the office morphs into a mansion, a seedy apartment, a greasy garage and much more, while the

<sup>6</sup> Collins, Interview with Jonathan Kalb.

<sup>7</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Harper/Collins, 2010) 99.

actors transform into errant wives, elusive husbands, jealous lovers, nosy neighbors, pert train conductors and much more. All this bright energy of transformation is the sustaining sun of the long day, and it is all the more moving in the end for having lasted for seven hours.

The actors and audience of *Gatz* spend the duration of an entire workday together, after which they collectively breathe a sigh of mutual satisfaction, having accomplished a highly improbable endurance feat together. This sigh is the residue of the communal experience referred to earlier, which the best contemporary marathon theater always surprises by fostering. *Gatz*, which begins with a malfunctioning computer, ends up leading its audience to perceive awesome grandeur within the modest, non-mediated office environment. It bestows anomalous, humble monumentalism on the all-too-familiar and commonplace.

In his invaluable 2011 book, *American Icon: Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby in Critical and Cultural Context*, Robert Beuka describes the different phases of critical/scholarly reaction to the novel that have occurred over eight and a half decades, along with some aspects of the book's larger cultural presence. Following its early dismissal by journalistic critics (including H. L. Mencken) as a shallow, glittery picture of high society life, the book was canonized as a masterpiece during the Fitzgerald revival that followed his death in 1940. Beuka chronicles the major critical readings from this period that established general awareness of *Gatsby's* essential seriousness and depth. Charles Weir, for example, argued that it was "the tragedy of a capitalist society".<sup>8</sup> Andrews Wanning described it as Fitzgerald's "judgment as to the worthlessness of the ornament and the corruptibility of the beauty" in life.<sup>9</sup> And Arthur Mizener focused on its Conradian "symbolic geography", which represented "the east [as] the exemplar of urban sophistication and corruption, and the west, 'the bored sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio', [as] the exemplar of simple virtue".<sup>10</sup>

These early scholarly celebrations generally recognized the triumph of *Gatsby's* narrative technique. As Beuka puts it,

[T]he shift away from the intrusive third-person narrative perspective Fitzgerald used in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned* is crucial to the aesthetic achievement of *The Great Gatsby*. In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald employed a first-person participant-observer mode, or what [Henry] James liked to call the 'central fine intelligence'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Beuka, *American Icon: Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby in Critical and Cultural Context* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011) 31.

<sup>9</sup> Beuka 2011, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Beuka 2011, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Beuka 2011, 18.

All the early applause for Nick's "central fine intelligence", however, blinded many critics to his nuances. The character was generally read as a proxy for Fitzgerald, whose book was presumed to be a straightforward moral homily: i.e. a critique of capitalism, vulgarity, the American dream, etc. Even the Marxist readings of the 1930s that called Fitzgerald to task for paying insufficient attention to the harsh realities of American life shared this moral presumption, for the complaints were really protests that the novel lacked the clear social moral the critics wished to see. Interestingly enough, all the popular stage and film adaptations of *Gatsby* that Beuka describes also share this presumption; for they invariably present the tale as an allegory of comeuppance in which Gatsby gets what is coming to him because (as Nick's voice eloquently assures us) he epitomizes the excesses of his environment.

More recently – with occasional glimmerings dating back to the 1950s – a more sophisticated view of Nick has taken root among serious critics, if not among adaptors. Scholars today generally accept that Nick has little moral authority, as he is, in one critic's words, "all artifice" despite being "the scorners of artifice in others".<sup>12</sup> He tolerates bigotry, adultery and criminality among his friends, despite being something of a prig in his private judgments of them. Peter Lisca writes: "Although [Nick] is not a 'hypocrite' and spiritual bankrupt neither is he an acceptable moral norm. He acts as if he were, but the moral center remains, as always, in the reader, who must judge not only the story of *Gatsby*, but also the judgment of that story by the narrator himself".<sup>13</sup> Robert Wooster Stallman is more severe: "That Nick is to be seen as the moral center of the book ... is a notion possible only to the duped reader who has been beguiled by the deceptive flow of Nick's words to take them at their face-value. At the center of the book what is there but a moral and temporal hole? Not Nick but Time is the true moralist".<sup>14</sup>

This contention that the novel amounts to a document of moral relativism is exaggerated. There is too much earnest gravity in Nick's sweeping historical statements near the end to justify such a claim; the circumspection of the final chapter is an earnest exhortation to the reader to think critically. Stallman nevertheless makes a perceptive point about time being the work's "true moralist", because the precise contours of the critique Nick urges (cultural? national? economic? epochal?) are impossible to pin down precisely and have been the subject of vigorous debate for decades. This ambiguity reaches to the heart of what distinguishes *Gatz* from all previous *Gatsby* adaptations. *Gatz* is, to my

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<sup>12</sup> Beuka 2011, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Beuka 2011, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Beuka 2011, 54.

knowledge, the first *Gatsby* dramatization to take the book's hermeneutic openness as its grounding tenet. The show studiously avoids any definitive interpretation of the novel – a point that Collins says consciously guided him when developing Shepherd's character:

What I needed of that character, and what I needed of the whole production in the very beginning, was that it didn't try to own the story right away. I needed a distance. I needed a way of speaking the story aloud that had built-in distance from it. And the way we found to do that was ... to look at that relationship between a reader and a book. It was just practical at first. I needed there to be some reason, some theatrical justification for hearing every word, something that didn't require an immediate suspension of disbelief, something that was grounded in just what it was. Because we wanted to preserve somehow the bookness of it. Having that background and this somewhat disinterested reader was a way of creating a space for the book to exist on its own before we started making decisions about what we would do to interpret or stage it. ... It was a way of giving the novel some authority.<sup>15</sup>

Open-ended "authority" established by performative "distance" and tactical "disinterest": These terms would have made Bertolt Brecht smile. The contemporary office worker Shepherd plays is self-evidently neither *Gatsby's* narrator nor its crypto-author but rather an ordinary man who stumbles on the novel and then appropriates it to enliven his daily routine. The soul-deadening nature of that routine is the sole overarching interpretive lens provided for the book, and as already mentioned, it is neutral to the extent that the office denizens are reflections of the average theatergoer. The setting is not wholly neutral, of course. No setting could be. Its humdrum atmosphere, for one thing, lends a harsh twist to the gentle irony in Fitzgerald's titular word "great". Its lasting effect is in the way it helps to foreground Nick – the passive, self-absorbed, slightly arrogant protagonist who does not know he is one – as a surrogate for us. *Gatz* is in the end as much a play about the average audience member it reflects as it is about Shepherd, Nick, Fletcher, Gatsby and all the other actors and characters on the stage.

There is a truism that the acid test of a masterpiece is whether human beings of different eras feel themselves to be meaningfully reflected in it. ERS' gambit with *Gatz* was to make this test a premise of its work. Rather than simply accepting *The Great Gatsby's* iconic status and using the magic of theatrical transformation to buff and refresh the icon – as have Jack Clayton, Francis Ford Coppola, Baz Luhrman and all the book's other prominent adaptors – this sly, humble theater company invented a vehicle that honored the work by broadening its reflective range to encompass more or less everyone who attends and by

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, Interview with Jonathan Kalb.

opening its iconicity to the widest possible critical scrutiny. These tactics are the reason why I feel the work qualifies as an anti-monument, as contemporary artists such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, Hans Haacke, Do-Ho Suh and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer have worked with that concept.

For two decades or more, anti-monumentalism has been an umbrella term used in the art world to refer to reactions against monumentalism in public spaces. It refers for the most part to actions taken by artists that question the ideological basis of monuments (often government-erected) and thereby alter the symbolism and historical narratives behind them. In Lozano-Hemmer's words,

A monument is something that represents power, or selects a piece of history and tries to materialize it, visualize it, represent it, always from the point of view of the elite. The anti-monument, on the contrary, is an action, a performance ... [that presents] an alternative to the fetish of the site, the fetish of the representation of power.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Wodiczko, in his Bunker Hill Monument Projection in 1998, projected a continuously running, nightly film of interviews against the 221-foot Revolutionary War obelisk in Charlestown, MA. The film featured footage of mothers from the downtrodden Charlestown neighborhood telling tales of their murdered children and their fears about speaking to the police – tales, in other words, that questioned whether such families truly enjoyed the constitutional rights the American Revolution represented. Suh's sculpture "Public Figures", temporarily installed in Metrotech Center Commons in downtown Brooklyn in 1998–99, was a marbelized classical pedestal, ten by seven by nine feet, held above the ground by 600 twelve-inch-tall bronze figures of both sexes and many different ethnicities and body types. The diminutive figures appeared to be walking the mountainous empty pedestal across the public lawn, calling wry attention to the countless disempowered individuals on whose backs heroism has traditionally been established.

Brecht's 1936 poem "Questions from a Worker Who Reads" would be a fitting inscription for Suh's pedestal:

The young Alexander conquered India.  
Was he alone?  
Caesar beat the Gauls.  
Did he not have even a cook with him?

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<sup>16</sup> Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, interviewed by Alex Adriaansens & Joke Brouwer, "Alien Relationships from Public Space", *Transurbanism*, ed. Joke Brouwer & Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2 Publishers/NAi Publishers, 2002) 155. Lozano-Hemmer is careful to stress that although he is a "fan" of "artists like Krzysztof Wodiczko or Hans Haacke, who make critical site-specific work" that deconstructs "grands recits", his own work focuses rather on "temporary, minor histories that can be established with relationships between the site and the public. I like micropolitics".

Phillip of Spain wept when his armada  
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?  
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War. Who  
Else won it?<sup>17</sup>

In the same anti-elitist spirit, Brecht's poem could be an apt epigraph to *Gatz*. This crowd-friendly theater piece, made with no conscious political tendency, nevertheless acquired such a tendency despite itself due to its strategy of thoroughgoing openness. Having attracted spectators on the pretext of worshipping at the shrine of a masterpiece, it surprised them with the potentially disturbing news that they were the work's true subject. More, it then opened the iconic work to such a flexible process of heuristic speculation that even the most passive and herdlike spectators had no choice but to engage (or at least dabble) in independent thought.

The strangely exhilarating effect of such a curious self-referential marathon is captured fleetingly by Nick as he reckons his accounts near the end: “[W]e drew in deep breaths [of bracing cold air] ... unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Poems: 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett & Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976) 252–253.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald 2010, 136.