

# The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 2010

## A Hitchcock Dialogue, From Screen to Stage and Back

The first sign of changing times may have been when scenes started becoming shorter. Then projections, video and animation started flashing across stage walls, and live theater became less so. That the movies were radically altering the way plays are made was once a cause of concern. Now it's just a fact, and in the experimental world, where the most sophisticated multimedia is done, it is

**THEATER  
REVIEW**  
JASON  
ZINOMAN

fully embraced.

"Gin & 'It,'" directed by a Wooster Group veteran, Reid Farrington, takes this development a step forward, recreating the Alfred Hitchcock film "Rope" onstage with the original script, stage directions and cast. That's right. Jimmy Stewart is back from the dead for a short run at Performance Space 122. He still looks grand.

Mr. Farrington accomplishes this casting coup by digitally isolating the actors in the 1948 mov-

**Gin & 'It'**  
Performance Space 122

ie — a thriller about two college students, steeped in Nietzsche, who attempt to commit the perfect murder — and projecting them onto flexible screens onstage. Actors playing a technical staff of four men race around the stage, manipulating the screens, moving them the way the characters move in the film.

Slowly, a drama emerges among the three coolly competent screen holders (Karl Allen, Keith Foster, Tim McDonough) and the weak link, played with a plaintive expression by Christopher Loar. The interplay between the live and film actors is an elegant kind of dance, and the nervousness of the characters putting on the show plays off the killers' growing anxiety about being found out. It's a marvelous technical feat but not much more than that.

You could say that the way the formal precision overshadows everything else echoes the themes of the material. After all, Hitchcock constructed the movie to appear as if it were composed in one elaborate shot in real time, and he himself called it a "stunt."

“VISUALLY  
ARRESTING”

*Featuring a live  
Jimmy Stewart (well,  
sort of, anyway).*

But he was also known to deride "Psycho" as a comedy. Directors are not their best critics, and "Rope" was more than a stunt. Arthur Laurents's script adaptation (based on Patrick Hamilton's 1929 play) added heft and moral urgency to the teasing suspense.

"Gin & 'It'" dispenses with some of the whodunit plot, and while it hints at a nuanced relationship among the live characters as well as at the sexuality of the cinematic killers (the movie was based on the Leopold and Loeb murders, but their relationship was cut out of the film), no theme is thoroughly explored. You admire this production, but you don't get wrapped up in it. It's like the image in a mirror facing another mirror: visually arresting, aesthetically complex but with the content receding into the distance.

"Gin & 'It'" continues through May 9 at Performance Space 122, 150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village; (212) 352-3101 or ps122.org.

150 First Avenue, New York, NY 10009



PHOTO © PAULA COURT

“a MARVELOUS  
TECHINICAL  
FEAT”

In "Gin & 'It,'" at Performance Space 122, characters share the stage with actors from Hitchcock's movie "Rope" (1948).



# THE NEW YORKER

## GIN & "IT"

Alfred Hitchcock, in the sound clip that prefaces Reid Farrington's hour-long multimedia piece, describes the experiment he had in mind for his 1948 film, "Rope." Hitchcock wanted to create the illusion of one continuous take, like a stage play, a feat that required excruciating technical control. Farrington reverses the formula, projecting fragments of the film onto moving screens, so that the characters look like holograms performing a play. Live actors portray the grips on the movie set, frantically trying to pull off the stunt. Combining technical prowess and cheeky humor, Farrington creates a spooky interspace between past and present, film and flesh, reminiscent of the Wooster Group's Theatrofilm-inspired "Hamlet," for which he designed the video. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through May 9.)

150 First Avenue, New York, NY 10009

“A spooky interspace  
between past and present,  
film and flesh”



Tickets: 212.352.3101

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## Gin and "It" P.S.122

Some background: In 1948 Alfred Hitchcock adapted Patrick Hamilton's 1929 play *Rope* into a movie about a couple of young gay men trying to get away with murder, which he shot on an elaborate set that pulled apart to facilitate a series of long takes designed to make the film appear almost completely unedited. It's especially interesting technically, which is why this new backstage video theater piece by Reid Farrington about four men working on Hitch's set might be better than the movie it's based on. Closes 5/9. Wed-Sat at 8pm, Sun at 6pm, 150 First Ave, 212-477-5829, \$20/\$15

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“ might be better than the movie it's based on ”

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## Gin & "It"

at Performance Space 122

Reviewed by Jason Fitzgerald

APRIL 26, 2010

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film "Rope," two college students commit the "perfect murder," which they appreciate as a "work of art," delighting in its form while remaining untouched by its substance. Based on the infamous Leopold and Loeb murders of 1924, "Rope" is a critique of aestheticism; "art for art's sake" turns up empty as a system of ethics. The murderers' mistake is restaged in "Gin & 'It,'" in which "Rope" plays continuously while four technicians manipulate a series of screens to capture, with the help of a projector, Hitchcock's actors as they appear in their scenes.

What starts as a strangely riveting dance piece turns dramatic as one technician's failure to keep up causes his friends to turn on him. As we watch the image of Jimmy Stewart (Hitchcock's star) discover the boys' grisly deed, we also watch the live actors commit a practical joke that in this context feels almost as disturbing as its filmic parallel. That the weak link, poignantly portrayed by Christopher Loar, should be punished makes sense in Farrington's stage world, just as a murder might make sense in the warped elitist minds of Hitchcock's killers.

Director Reid Farrington, whose work as video designer for the Wooster Group has similarly yielded critique through homage, has here crafted an evening that both delights and warns. The virtuosity of his company—Karl Allen, Keith Foster, Tim McDonough, and Loar—as they fulfill their choreography to the millisecond is a worthy tribute to a great film director. Even better, "Gin & 'It'" revives the moral of "Rope"—often ignored in favor of the real Leopold and Loeb's homosexual relationship in later adaptations of their story—for an age that, like Farrington's technicians, often finds itself distracted by the shimmering beauty of video screens.

*Presented by and at Performance Space 122, 150 First Ave., NYC. April 24–May 9. Wed.–Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 8 and 10:30 p.m.; Sun., 6 p.m. (212) 352-3101, (866) 811-4111, [www.theatermania.com](http://www.theatermania.com), or [www.ps122.org](http://www.ps122.org).*

150 First Avenue, New York, NY 10009



## Gin & "It" Is Gorgeous But Safe

By James Hannaham Tuesday, May 4 2010

If director Reid Farrington's multimedia *Gin & "It"* resembles the Wooster Group's meta-*Hamlet* somewhat, he has an excuse—he's created video for much recent Wooster fare. Instead of Shakespeare, his piece samples Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope*, famed for a technical concept—the director shot each roll in one elaborate take.

To imitate Hitch's crew, Farrington employs a group of white guys in black jumpsuits who manipulate lots of wooden boxes and scrims, upon which multiple collaged video sequences from the film appear and disappear. This approach, heavy on technical wizardry, creates a surplus of gorgeous, improbable stage pictures, though without shedding light on its source material. Occasionally, the stage business transcends its concept and delightfully blurs between blocking and dance. More often, the performers' banter and droll efforts to stand in for the movie stars feel like a bland episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, starving the audience of theatricality.

It doesn't help to have seen Radiohole's *Whatever, Heaven Allows* in the same space recently. That group (also including Wooster tech vets) turned Douglas Sirk's movies bacchanalian, slathering on spectacle and psychotic chutzpah—the kind of challenging trouble Farrington has avoided.

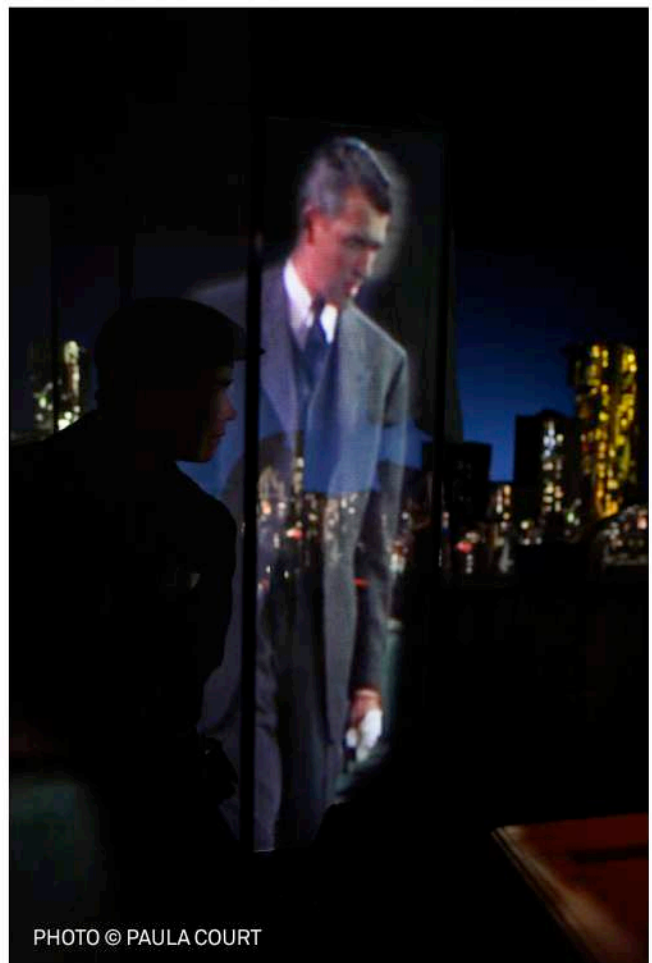


PHOTO © PAULA COURT



offoff  
online  
what's on on off-off

**Dance of Death**

by Charles Bales

*Gin & 'It'* reviewed April 28, 2009

There's a lot to admire in the dazzling *Gin & 'It'*, now playing at P.S. 122 in the East Village. Created and directed by Reid Farrington, a former video designer for The Wooster Group, this multimedia production shares a similar aesthetic with that boundary-pushing ensemble, melding film installation and live performance in spectacular fashion.



Photo Credit: Paula Court

Farrington's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* from 2008 (also at P.S. 122) was his directorial debut. *Gin & 'It'* reaches further than that visually stunning solo performance of Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 silent film masterpiece with four live performers onstage recreating Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. The actors from the master of suspense's 1948 thriller starring Jimmy Stewart and Farley Granger have been digitally isolated and projected on to moveable screens that a quartet of Grips shuttle around the set while simultaneously enacting the film's main actions in a striking celluloid/human hybrid.



Photo Credit: Paula Court

Most of *Rope*, a retelling of the infamous and true Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb story of two gay, Nietzschean "supermen" who kill a friend for the thrill of it, remains intact for much of *Gin & 'It'*. A few reels of the film are intentionally left out towards the end, but the narrative does not suffer for that omission.

*Rope* was called a "stunt" by Hitchcock, who was attempting to portray the one-act, one-set drama as having been shot in one continuous take. *Gin & 'It'*, likewise, tries to recreate the complexity of the technical demands of such a shoot. Farrington's intricate choreography of the action is awesome to behold, especially when the Grips act out moments of the film with the help of simple props such as cigarette lighters or hats, with the faces or various body parts of the film's actors displayed on the moveable screens.

Having rewatched *Rope* before attending the show, I was able to concentrate on the ballet-like rhythms of the hard-working Grips, who hit their cues with precision, except for a probable newcomer (played by Christopher Loar) who kept missing his marks and was reproached with barks of "It's gotta be perfect!" by head Grip Karl Allen. This obsession with perfection parallels the killers' own desire for supremacy.



Photo Credit: Paula Court

Additional layers added on to the recreation of this filmic "perfect crime" become the most fascinating aspects of the production. The flirtation between and subtle sexuality of the cast members mimics the unspoken gay relationship of the movie's killers, Brandon and Phillip. ("It" being, after all, the term coined by Hitchcock and screenwriter Arthur Laurents for homosexuality to evade the censors.) And when Chris, the not-so-perfect Grip, is bound, gagged, and hung from his feet in the middle of the stage, the violence is an obvious correlation to the strangulation of the "inferior" classmate of the Leopold and Loeb stand-ins that gives the film its title.

Although I found the production a bit too esoteric for the average theatergoer, I was fascinated by the blurring of filmmaking and theatermaking techniques on display. Is the show simply a visual diary of the attempt to recreate Hitchcock's film onstage? Or is it an insider's view of what it takes to create a precisely-orchestrated multimedia production, including the training (and hazing) of cast members and technicians?

A familiarity with both the original source material and perhaps even the behind-the-scenes workings of movies or theater (or both) might be helpful in appreciating the complexity of the goings-on onstage. But the interweaving of film, theater, and technique in *Gin & 'It'* remains an inventive and fastidious *tour de force* that stands as a fitting homage to Hitchcock himself and the spirit of artistic creation as well.

**GIN & 'IT'**

P.S. 122 (2nd floor)

**Category:** Performance Art

**Written by:** Dramaturgy: Peter C. von Salis Script Supervisor: Sara Jeanne Asselin

**Directed by:** Reid Farrington

**Produced by:** Gin & **Opened:** April 24, 2010 **Closed:** May 9, 2010 **Running Time:** 60 minutes (no intermission)

**Theater:** P.S. 122 (2nd floor)

**Address:** 150 First Ave. New York, NY 10003

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**BOX OFFICE**

**Tickets:** \$FREE \$15 (students/seniors)

**CREDITS**

**Creative Director:** Reid Farrington

**Performers:** Karl Allen, Keith Foster, Christopher Loar, Tim McDonough **Lead Editor:** Paulina Jurzec

**Set:** Art Domantay

**Costumers:** Erin Elizabeth Murphy

**Lights:** Christopher Heilman

**Sound:** Connor Kalista

**Stage Manager:** Julia Funk

**Script Supervisor:** Sara Jeanne Asselin

**Dramaturgy:** Peter C. von Salis

**Fight Choreography:** Carrie Brewer

**Research Assistant:** Sarah Doyle

**Best Boy Editor:** Thomas Gonzalez

**Editors:** Celina Alarado, Jeanne Angel, Patrick Grizzard, Xue Hou, Connor Kalista, Alex Kowal, Zak Loyd, Chris Martinez, Luisa Morales, Vanessa Riegel, Matthew Swenson, Masha Vlasova, Hannah Wasileski

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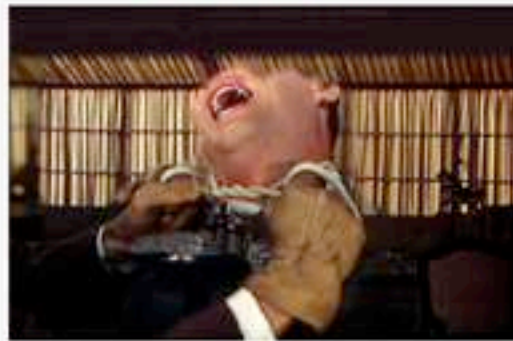
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## Reid Farrington at PS122

Posted on April 26, 2010 by Andy



Saturday night took us to see Reid Farrington's *Gin and "It"* at PS122. The latest in this season's numerous staged deconstructions of film, Farrington brings a whole new level of technical artistry to the genre. Insofar as there is "story" – *Gin and It* is a slippy, surreal comedy about the grips backstage during the filming of the movie *Rope* – three competent ones and one hapless one who race around attempting to capture the action, hit their marks and make their cues during the single-take process. But more than anything *Gin and It* is about movie magic and sleight-of-hand, it is about deception and illusion, about the theories and techniques we use to justify our perspectives on reality.

*Gin and It* defies categorization in a way that is probably frustrating to traditional theatergoers, because it dispenses with plot and conflict, trafficking mostly in images and ideas. In this way it is more like a visual art installation that you observe, but with live performers interacting with the video.

I reflect back on my pet peeve of late about Visual Art Performance and its general lack of professional skill either technically or by its performers. Farrington succeeds in creating spectacle that constantly surprises and amazes, you find yourself asking, "How did they do that?" when a performer "catches" the video on one of the screens that they are constantly shuttling around the stage.

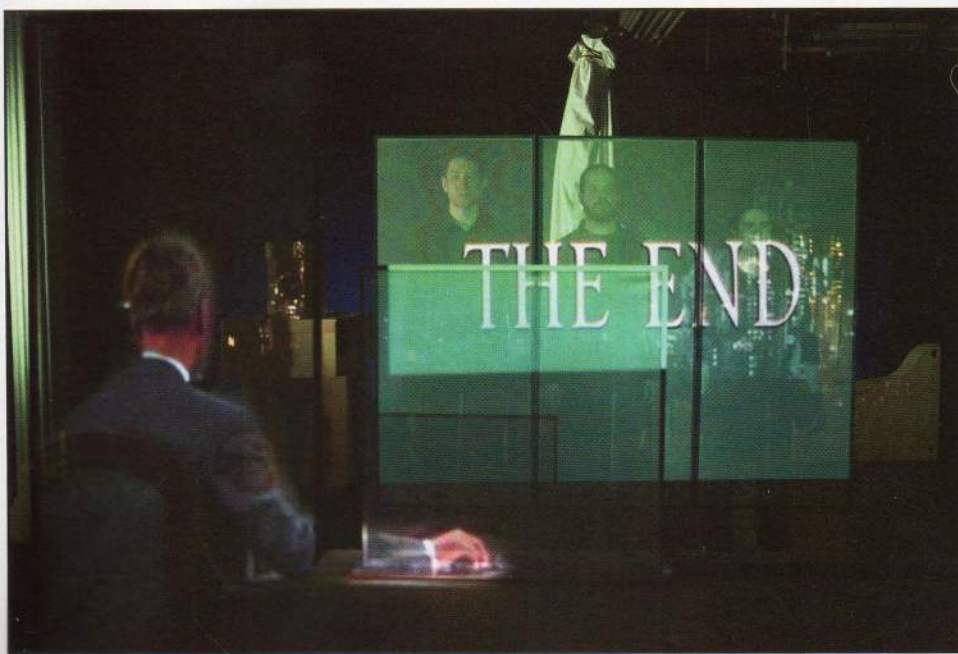
It is exciting that this work is being presented in a theater, as theater. It is part of a process of convergence between the theater world and the visual art world and hopefully these two worlds can come into dialogue more frequently. I'd like to see more visual art performance created with Farrington's rigor and I'd like to see more theater that challenges our traditional notions of the theatrical event.

*Gin and It* is definitely a fascinating step in the right direction.

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## Enough Rope:

Reid Farrington on *Gin & "It"* at P.S. 122

One of the more original experiments in projection design could be seen this spring at New York's P.S. 122, with *Gin & "It,"* created by Reid Farrington. The director and designer, whose experiments include his own take on the classic silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, took on Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rope*. In the great director's canon, *Rope* is something of an aberration. Based on Patrick Hamilton's play about a pair of Leopold-and-Loeb-style thrill killers, the entire film takes place in one room—and was shot in a series of ten takes, one take per reel. The idea was to create the effect of one seamless shot.

Why take on *Rope*? One reason, says Farrington, came from an interview with Arthur Laurents, the film's screenwriter on the DVD. "He said that James Stewart [the film's star] said the only people who rehearsed during the making of the film were the technicians. I'm a technician, and nobody tells our stories. I went to the Warner Brothers archive at UCLA, and the majority of the photos they had from *Rope* were backstage shots, about the making of the film."

Thus *Gin & "It,"* as described by theatre critic Jason Zinoman, brings James Stewart to PS 122: "Mr. Farrington accomplishes this casting coup by digitally isolating the actors in the 1948 movie...and projecting them onto flexible screens onstage. Actors playing a technical staff of four men race around the stage, manipulating the screens, moving them the way the characters move in the film...The interplay between the live and film actors is an elegant kind of dance, and the nervousness of the characters putting on the show plays off the killers' growing anxiety about being found out."

Working at the Eyebeam Art and Technology Center in Manhattan, Farrington and a team of 15 editors went through the film frame by frame, rotoscoping, or cutting out, shots of characters from the film. (He used After Effects and Photoshop.) At the same time, he was developing custom software to run the projections. "I'm modeling tools that we have in the theatre: the computer lighting console and the sound board. I copy the way that the lighting board collates data to record looks and recall them based on

cues. Instead of 0-100 being intensity, I am applying that value to the x/y axis, scale, and rotation of a video. I also copy the way a sound board can route signal; my video can go to all of my projectors or just one. With this software and my array of projectors, I can go into rehearsal without knowing where the video is going to go on stage. I can place the video based on how we develop the performance. I'm taking the functionality of the modern computer editing suite and making it cueable. That's why I say to my performers, 'I'm editing you into the piece,' instead of directing them."

In rehearsals, Farrington and his performers developed the performance through improvisations. Sara Jeanne Asselin, a playwright, acted as the production's script supervisor, keeping track of each action for the final script. Once the actions and dialogue were codified, she would "de-improvise" the dialogue and tighten it up. The production was developed over a year and a half. It had a three-week workshop at Eyebeam, then a 15-week rehearsal at 3LD Art and Technology Center, which led to performances at the Public Theatre's Under the Radar Festival and Performance Space 122's festival, COIL. It premiered at the Wexner Center for the Arts in March, then came to New York.

Farrington says his workhorse projectors are a set of 3K Mitsubishi XD530U consumer projectors. "At \$1,300, they're right in my price range," he says. "Except to get a really big image, I don't know why you'd spend the money on anything else." The entire show was run using the program Max/MSP/Jitter, a graphical environment for music, audio, and multimedia that runs on both Macintosh (OSX) and Windows XP platforms.

The result was an unusual experiment in movement and image that earned many admiring reviews. Next up for Farrington: A version of *A Christmas Carol* that draws on more than three dozen film and video adaptations of the Dickens classic. 🎞