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Papers should not exceed 4500 words (including notes and references). Practice-based papers should normally include images in JPEG format (300ppi). Reviews should be around 1000 words. Photo essays should not exceed 2000 words and 10 pictures. All contributions should be formatted according to the MLA style guidelines (see Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*) and should include a 200-word abstract of the article submitted as well as the article itself. Authors should also send a 50 word bio with their submission.

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Editorial

Performances of sexuality and gender impact upon how theatre is created, received and historicised. Similarly, sensuality can take a multiplicity of forms in performance, including the audience's physical experience of a performance piece. This latest issue of *Platform* was, in part, inspired by inspired by the Theatre and Performance Research Association conference hosted by the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, in September 2014, where sexuality and gender were recurring topics in a variety of papers. Furthermore, publications on theatre, performance and sexuality, including Jill Dolan's *Theatre & Sexuality* and *RiDE* journal's gender and sexuality issues published in 2013, demonstrate the continuing engagement of theatre scholarship with gender and sexuality and encourages us to reconsider 'sexuality' and 'sensuality' in the performing arts.

As we had observed that theories of sexuality and sensuality have been frequently engaged with both at conferences and in publications of late, we were interested in investigating how the two may interact, overlap, or become at odds with each other in this themed issue. It seems that implicit to a sexual identity is an aspect of sensuality, whether it be directed towards one sex, multiple sexes, or none at all. However, there is sometimes a reluctance to discuss the sensual aspect of sexuality, which this issue seeks to engage with.

In working on this issue, a confrontation between these terms was observed in criticisms of National Theatre performances by *Daily Mail* critic, Quentin Letts. Letts was appalled, to say the least, by well-respected physical theatre company DV8's newest work, *JOHN* (2014), which examines the life of a British drug addict, John, and culminates in his living in a gay sauna. Subtly titled 'A National DISGRACE: Sleazy. Amoral. And paid for by

you!’ (capitals original), Letts is flabbergasted that midway through the performance ‘we switch to a gay sauna full of men showing us their whatnots, in at least one case semi-erect.’ (He must have had very close seats). Continuing, Letts observes that: ‘All the men shown—bar one who has a bit of a pot belly—are good-looking, slender, athletic,’ adding this bit of hard-hitting journalistic insight: ‘I bet that ain’t the way things really are in gay saunas.’ Letts is both offended by these nude bodies on stage, and outraged that, as part of a National Theatre production, they were funded by taxpayers!

Compare this to Letts’s review of *King Lear*, also at the National Theatre in 2014. Though not as scathing, Letts was also unimpressed with this production, which included a lengthy nude scene by the character Edgar. However, Letts’s includes Tom Brooke’s portrayal of Edgar in things to be admired about this production, even stating ‘that irritating line ‘poor Tom’s a cold’ is given fresh life because poor Tom is at that point starkers.’ It seems that in this case, frontal male nudity funded by the taxpayer is not only acceptable but also triumphant. So what is the difference? Why does Letts take issue with one case and not the other? Is it the bodies’ sexualities? Were the bodies of *JOHN* seen as gay bodies and that of Edgar seen as non-queer? Or was it sensuality which differentiated them: some appearing in a bathhouse locker room and the other in a comical scene? Or does Letts take issue with the linking of both sexuality and sensuality? In *JOHN* he is sure that among the gay bodies on stage there was at the very least one ‘whatnot’ in a state of arousal, whereas there is no mention of any implicit sensuality in Edgar’s naked body. The boundaries become blurred: can we separate the two at all?

The sexuality/sensuality overlap plays out as well in the contributions to this issue. Our first article is Judita Vivas’s ‘Dramaturgies of the Naked Skin: *Homo Nudus* plays Sexuality.’ Vivas engages with the costume theory of Aoife Monks and histories

of onstage nudity to introduce her new term *homo nudus*, meaning the aesthetic construct and scenography of the nude body in performance. Vivas investigates cases of naked bodies and partially naked bodies in contemporary dance theatre in order to exemplify ways in which *homo nudus* becomes a tool for guiding the spectator through a performance: a dramaturgy of naked skin.

In an effort to queer the traditional journal form, we present two dialogic contributions between *Platform* members and practitioners. In “How We Read Bodies,” Catherine Love interviews award-winning writer, director and performer Chris Goode. In a lively and insightful discussion Goode dissects how he stages nakedness in his work, such as *The Forest and the Field*. Focusing on the ‘idea of nakedness as an act rather than a state of being’, Goode discusses the dynamic that a performer creates through the act of nakedness and how this can impact on an audience’s relationship to nakedness on stage. This interview rounds out the issue’s varied approach to sexuality and sensuality in relationship to how theatre is made and performances are mediated.

In a photo essay/interview which evidences his work *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*, Daniel Ploeger responds to questions by Will Shüler, to chart how his performance art/sex app is a cheeky reaction to the fetishisation of performance artists’ bodies on internet platforms. In “Getting a Rise out of *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*” Ploeger explains how he sought to play with how his body is consumed by spectators and where this kind of work can be advertised. In doing so, he blurs the lines between art and pornography, or perhaps even erases it. In an age where more and more aspects of life have become mediated by our cell phones, this contribution certainly gives new meaning to ‘swipe right.’

Lastly, Sarah Mullan’s contribution ‘Bread and Circuses: the Politics of Claiming Identity in *Puffball*,’ considers how Mark Storer’s production of *Puffball* (2014) at the Roundhouse, London

was marketed using the cast's various LGBTQ identities. Mullan argues that despite this, the production rendered these sexualities and identities as invisible, allowing for a 'universal experience'. It is worth noting that Mullan's article was originally given as a paper at TaPRA's 2014 conference at Royal Holloway, an event which acted as a nexus for this issue's original call for papers.

We would like to thank Royal Holloway, University of London, where this journal is based, and its staff for their continued advice and invaluable support of *Platform*. Developing, reviewing, writing for, and publishing a print journal is an important method of learning for postgraduates and early career researchers, the funding of which demonstrates Royal Holloway's commitment to providing opportunities for new research and the development of research skills. We would also like to thank the peer and academic reviewers for their time and thoughtful feedback. Their support has provided assistance to the research of all who have submitted to this issue. We would also like to thank Bloomsbury Methuen Drama and Performance Research Books for book review copies. Finally, we give special thanks to the authors of the articles and book reviews of 'Sexuality and Sensuality.' Their hard work speaks for itself.

Will Shüler and James Rowson, Editors

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Dr. Jessica Beck is a theatre director and somatic practitioner. She completed a PhD in Performance Practice investigating the challenge of emotion in performance at the University of Exeter. Beck graduates from the Feldenkrais Professional Training Programme in 2015 and is a certified instructor of the Alba Emoting Technique. Recent directing credits include: *Icarus in Love* by Edson Burton (The Bike Shed Theatre), *Normal/Madness* by Fiona Geddes (Pleasance, Edinburgh) and *The Exeter Blitz Project* by Jessica Beck and Helena Enright (The Bike Shed Theatre).

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Chris Goode is a writer, director, performer and sound designer. His recent work includes *Stand, Men in the Cities, The Forest & The Field* and *Monkey Bars*. He is also the author of the forthcoming book *The Forest and the Field: Changing Theatre in a Changing World*, published by Oberon Books.

Catherine Love is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research is investigating the relationship between text and performance in contemporary British theatre. She is also a freelance arts journalist and theatre critic, writing for publications including the *Guardian*, *The Stage* and *Exeunt*.

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From autumn 2014 through to spring 2016, **Julie Rada** is serving as a Raymond C. Morales fellow in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Utah, with a faculty appointment in the Department of Theatre. During her time at the University of Utah, she is writing reviews and articles for academic journals and furthering her creative work in prisons. She received the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) 'On-The-Road' Global Connections grant and will be traveling to Eastern Europe during the summer of 2015 to construct/reconstruct performances, hold salons and pop-up happenings and conduct research into the art movement known as Zenitism.

Adam Rush is a performer and researcher at the University of Lincoln. His doctoral research explores the intertextual character of contemporary musical theatre and its role within popular culture. Adam received an MA in Theatre and Performance from Queen Mary, University of London, in which his dissertation supported the social value of theme parks to recuperate them from a "dupe" (or, more precisely, false consciousness) hermeneutic. As a performer, Adam most recently performed the roles of Jesus and Simon in Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. He is currently producing and co-directing *The Addams Family* for The Lincoln Company as part of their 2015 Edinburgh Fringe Festival season.

Will Shüler is a teaching fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has recently submitted his PhD which examines the educative function of theatre in ancient Athens by employing the pedagogical philosophies of Plato and contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Recent publications include 'Training of the chorus in ancient Greece' in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* and 'Intellectual Equality in Postgraduate Publication' for *Contemporary Theatre Review's* online *Interventions*.

Judita Vivas is a PhD candidate at the University of Kent. Her research questions the status of the human body in social, cultural and theatre performance contexts. She is also a physical theatre artist, teacher and founder of contemporary performance collective Foxtale Ensemble.

Dramaturgies of the Naked Skin: Homo Nudus plays Sexuality

By Judita Vivas

Abstract

The following article questions the relationship between naked and clothed theatre performers and the resulting sexualisation of the body. Contrary to the emphasis on the genital area—which arguably constitutes the sexualised body in contemporary performance (Karl Toepfer 1996)—I argue for a more comprehensive bodily engagement (with a special focus on the human skin) when it comes to the creation and perception of nakedness. Building on Aoife Monks’ idea of nudity as a corporeal costume, this article looks at three examples of contemporary dance theatre—Dubois’ *Tragédie* (2014); Platel’s *Out of Context: For Pina* (2010); Waltz’s *Körper* (2000)—in order to demonstrate that the performer is not necessarily required to ‘take the pants off’ in order to appear naked. I argue for the active involvement of the performer’s skin (skin ‘openly staring’, ‘enticing’, or just ‘peeping through’) which not only constitutes the naked bodily manifestation but also the sexualisation (or lack of it) of the body in theatre. This body is never passive: on the contrary, while the “real” or “truthful” body is no longer accessible (if it ever was), the performers (with the help of the choreographers and designers) are capable of manipulating and multiplying their bodily reality, which allows them to *play* sexuality¹ to create diverse corporeal and sexual meanings.

1 The term “sexuality”, as it is used in this article, does not refer to sexual identity; instead it connotes the sexualisation of the body: sexually suggestive meanings, connotations, and imagery created through and by the body of the performer.

Introduction

In May 2014, I went to see Olivier Dubois's *Tragédie* performed in London's Sadler's Wells. The dancers, nine male and nine female, were naked throughout the performance. In the first half of the performance, the dancers repetitively walked up and down the stage. This had a surprising effect: the naked body became individualised. As a spectator, one was given plenty of time to acquaint oneself with the differences in shape, size, form, colour and all other intricacies and dramaturgies inherent in the naked skins of the dancers. Communally shared nakedness, instead of having a uniting effect, made the plethora of bodily differences much more visible. At the end of the performance, however, the performers unexpectedly entered for their final applause fully, or nearly fully, clothed. The audience had been looking at every bit of their bodies, including the most private parts, for the past ninety minutes, yet the moment the specially codified configuration of theatre performance was over, the performers immediately 'shed the skin' of their naked bodies.

As Dubois's example demonstrates, and as suggested by Aoife Monks in *The Actor in Costume* (2010), nakedness can be seen as a costume or clothing (100) the performer "puts on" and then "takes off" the moment the performance is over. Monks' configuration of 'naked costume' is useful to the present discussion, because, firstly, it challenges the attitude towards the naked body in performance as "real", "truthful" or "universal". Secondly, and while Monks herself does not state so explicitly, it points to the material workings of the performer's skin (in relation to clothing, but also extending to the overall dramaturgy of performance) or, as I see it, the dramaturgies of the naked skin. Monks observes that nudity has a profound impact on the performer's physical presence: the body becomes perceptually dominant, as if 'extra-present' in

performance. Such magnified presence, however, is not a consequence of the naked body itself, but its relationship to clothing which is manifested through the action of undressing (100-101). Consequently, this naked body as costume paradigm, as suggested by Monks, not only challenges the “reality” (the secret beneath the costume) of the performer’s body (101), but also, as I will argue, the perception of its sexuality which, at times, begins to dissipate.

It is no longer immediately obvious what counts as the “naked performer” in a contemporary theatre context. I will question Karl Toepfer’s (1996) position towards nudity when he states that the exposed genitals of the performer works as the main indication of “true” nakedness. Even this indication now comes in diverse formats: full-frontal nudity (as in *Tragédie*), half covered body with only the genitals exposed (e.g. Adrienne Truscott in her solo performance *Asking for it*, [2014] or the work of Narcissister), fully nude body with only the face covered (e.g. Romeo Castellucci’s *Tragedia Endogonidia #09 London* [2010]), and alike. Moreover, do the genitals have to be exposed at all? I will apply my theory of *homo nudus* to fully naked bodies, partially clothed bodies, and partially exposed bodies on stage, in order to unpick the relationship between the naked and clothed (costumed) body. This relationship creates diverse dramaturgical configurations of the naked skin and, in turn, impacts the perception of the performer’s sexuality. I will demonstrate that the act of stripping, thus gradually revealing the bare skin, can be perceived as toying with nakedness and will use Alain Platel’s performance of *Out of Context: For Pina* (2010) as an example. This will lead me to a consideration of the body covered in a see-through garment or costume with only the fragments of skin peeping through – slivers of breast, buttocks or belly – as it appears in Sasha Waltz’s *Körper* (2000).

In order to rethink nudity and sexuality as they occur in

contemporary dance performance,¹ I will shift the focus from the highly contested genital area towards the rest of human corporeality, especially the performer's skin. The material workings of the body and their interrelationship with one's sexuality are alluded to in recent feminist, queer and dance discourses. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that the erotic and libidinal zones are expanded all over the body, not just the genitals (139). Rob Cover applies queer theory in order to criticise Western genital classifications and calls for the understanding of sexuality that 'pervades all elements of the subjective and performative body' (68). Finally, Judith Lynne Hanna in her literature review of sexuality in dance points to the prevalence of 'secondary sex characteristics' like a 'large phallus costume, disrobing within a dance, or lifting a skirt' (213). Building on these observations as well as the emerging costume discourse, I will argue that the material skin, which, as Claudia Benthien aptly put, can be considered a synecdoche for the human being (17), is intimately involved in the overall naked spectacle created. It is, first and foremost, the skin that our gaze "touches" once we are faced with the naked body in performance. It is also the skin that forms immediate and complex relationships with other skins, costume, lighting and scenography. The skin's role is not homogenous: depending on the degree of undress (the creative decision of choreographer or designer), the skin appears as openly staring,² seductively enticing, or just peeping through the clothing – thus constituting the dramaturgies of the naked skin.

It is through this, often complex dramaturgical involvement, and not only through the genital exposition, that one perceives glimpses of the performer's sexuality in *Tragédie, Out of Con-*

1 While nudity occurs in nearly all types of theatre, due to the limits of this article and in order to present a deeper insight into one particular genre, I will only draw on the examples from dance theatre.

2 Michel Serres entertains the idea of 'skin having eyes' in his philosophical contemplations on human senses, see Serres (37).

text and *Körper*. I will take this argument further by suggesting that, while involved in the naked spectacle, the material body does not remain passive. Ann Cooper Albright suggests that ‘at the very moment the dancing body is creating a representation, it is also in the process of actually forming that body’ (3). The performer’s ability to not only form, but also manipulate, alter, and multiply the bodily reality implies an active play of sexuality through which diverse sexual meanings are created.

Nakedness as a Corporeal Costume

Ruth Barcan sees the phenomenon of nudity as highly ambivalent. Depending on particular cultural, religious and visual traditions, it can be perceived as a ‘noble or degraded state’, carrying ‘positive’ (nudists or naturists equalling nakedness with health) or ‘negative’ (sign of poverty or mental instability) connotations (2). The most common association of nakedness, however, is that of sex and ‘in popular imagination the link [between the two] is almost automatic’ (Barcan 3). In popular culture the shift towards the sexual is usually performed through the visual representations of the naked body and, first and foremost, it is the human skin that immediately draws the viewers’ attention (or, rather, is thus deliberately portrayed that it draws the attention to itself). Among many other popular manifestations of nakedness (in film, pornography, music industry, etc.), consumer advertisements designed by Tom Ford serve as excellent examples. The skin is provocatively exposed (with the private parts still covered) in his 2007 advertisement depicting a red-nailed, open-mouthed woman squeezing a bottle of men’s cologne between her breasts. In a 2005 advertisement for ‘Youth Dew: Amber Nude,’ the female model’s skin only teases the viewer by “accidentally” peeping through what appears as a silk sheet draped around the body. Finally, in 2014 advertisement for the

fragrance ‘Neroli,’ the naked skins of male and female models are closely intertwined and touching each other, evoking the sensuous and haptic associations of the body. In all of these cases, Ford’s visual designs, labelled ‘controversial’¹ and ‘hyper-sexualized’², constitute the sexualisation of nakedness through the deliberate display and visual-haptic manipulations of the naked skin. As I will argue later on, very similar manipulations (or dramaturgies) of the naked skin can also be found in contemporary performance. Contrary to Ford’s advertisements, however, they create much more complex meanings that do not always result in the overt sexualisation of the body.

The Western spectator’s perception of nudity in dance theatre differs from that found in popular culture. The latter type of nudity is no less problematic and is critically examined by Barcan (2004) through her encounters with nudists, strippers and the pornography industry and Phillip Carr-Gomm’s (2010) insights into nakedness as it appears in the contexts of religion, politics and sport. The main difference between the nudity types and our perception of them, however, lies in the situatedness of the body – its particular environment. And while these environments often overlap and influence one another, the theatre remains a very specific and highly regulated environment. For the sake of clarity and in order to distinguish between the naked body of everyday (and other) environments and that found in dance theatre, I will refer to the latter as *homo nudus*. Andreas Kotte provides a useful theoretical model which emphasises the codification of theatre when he suggests that:

Four different sequences can be distinguished that help to articulate the transitions from life to theatre (...).

1 See <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/celebrity/160319/tom-ford-reveals-controversial-ad-campaign.html> (accessed 7/2/2015).

2 See <http://www.thefashionlaw.com/in-the-world-of-high-fashion-sex-sells/> (accessed 7/2/2015).

1. neither emphasized nor with reduced consequences
2. emphasized, but not with reduced consequences
3. not emphasized, but with reduced consequences
4. emphasized *and* with reduced consequences

Only number four describes scenic sequences that generate and vitalise theatre forms (37-38). Kotte's seemingly simplistic model implies that, in order to establish a successful (and vitalised) form of theatre, the performer has to be situated within the scenic sequences where one's physical actions, while often arising from those of everyday, carry a special *emphasis* (the performer is on display, observed by the audience, with deliberate actions arousing interest) with *reduced consequences* (the re-enactment of sexual movements like humping does not – yet – result in an actual sexual act). Once positioned in such scenic sequences, the performer's body simply cannot escape codification. In case of nudity in dance theatre, this body turns into a *homo nudus*: it is emphasised and specially codified, constituting an aesthetic construct that forms part of the overall scenography (achieved by the choreographer and designer).

Monks suggests that 'when we watch the actor undressing, we see a series of bodies emerging, which are determined by their relation to clothes' (101) and with each layer of clothing, with each fragment of naked skin revealed, a different body is displayed. Moreover, the clothing or absence of it directly influences the situatedness and perception of these bodies. For Monks, none of the bodies that emerge through undressing signify the "actual" body. Instead, they constitute a series of costumes (or, as I argue, aesthetic constructs): 'the costume of nakedness, the costume of skin or the costume of the traditions of the nude female [or male – JV] figure' (101). My interest is centred on the corporeal 'costume of skin', namely, the role skin plays in the performative and often sexualised act of shedding and putting on clothing.

‘Naked costume’ is not a contemporary idea and it stems from the ever-evolving historical attitudes towards the naked body. An excellent example of nudity resulting in *homo nudus* as a corporeal costume are Victorian *tableaux vivants*. The presentation of the real nude was prohibited, therefore, as Tracy C. Davis observes, Victorian designers ‘invested considerable ingenuity in creating costumes that simulated nudity’ (323). Often arranged in poses resembling the works of the Royal Academy or Parisian Salon (Davis 328), the groups of men and women stood completely still while being gawked at by the excited audience. Due to such “simulation”, the naked body, while absent beneath the clothing (usually a body-stocking), is nevertheless ambiguously exposed. Similarly, Francis Sparshott remarks Balanchine’s choice of costume (close-fitting sheaths of black and white) made the body ‘a sort of austerity of the flesh’: covered, yet also visible as a result of its approximation to nakedness (304). Paradoxically, clothing embodies nudity, and subsequently nudity itself becomes a corporeal costume.

Western theatre no longer relies on simulations of nudity because, as Toepfer demonstrates in ‘Nudity and Textuality in Postmodern Performance’, since the 1960s nudity has developed various strategies of the naked body display.¹ Toepfer also argues for the Western spectator’s voyeuristic desire to catch the glimpses of the other’s private parts by suggesting that nakedness in theatre commonly refers to the ‘exposure of the most erotically exciting and excitable sexual identifiers of the body’ (76) – the genitalia of the performer. And while he admits that such argument has its difficulties, because some nude performances intentionally obstruct the view of the performer’s sexual organs (by using clever lighting), the unveiled genitals remain the sign of “true” nakedness (76). It

1 Toepfer distinguishes between mythic, ritual, therapeutic, model, balletic, uninscribed, inscribed, obscene, and pornographic strategies of nudity display in theatre (78-89).

follows that due to the emphasis on the most intimate parts of the body, the naked performer immediately acquires sexual connotations that arise from the audience's desire to look at the fully naked body. As Toepfer put it, the exposed genitals are 'the most complete 'proof' of the body's vulnerability to desire and the appropriating gaze of the Other' (76).

However, if one applies Monks' 'nakedness as a corporeal costume' argument, Toepfer's emphasis on the genitals as the "true" sign of nudity becomes questionable. Even with the genitals exposed, the naked body of the performer remains a specially designed bodily manifestation, a *homo nudus*, rather than a representation of "true" nakedness. And while Toepfer's argument that the exposed genitalia's ability to "shock", "incite", frighten, disgust, or otherwise produce intense emotional turbulence' is a consequence of the collapse of distinctions between the "real" and 'the "imaginary" body of a "character"', where the sexualised "real" takes precedent over the fictitious (77), rings true in some early cases, it is highly questionable in the contemporary configurations of nakedness. Once the initial "shock" factor at the sight of exposed genitalia subsided (and, I would argue, the shock and disgust Toepfer describes was – and sometimes still is – caused by Western society's insistence on covering the genitals as well as conventions in certain genres rather than the sight of the "real" body), the naked body of the performer remains yet another aspect of theatrical codification.

Dramaturgies of the Naked Skin

As I indicated previously, the abrupt change from fully exposed to covered body in Dubois's *Tragédie* strongly suggests that in this case nakedness was used as a costume. And instead of embodying, as Dubois claims, the essential state of humanity or the 'humanity laid bare' (Winship), thus "baring" the truth and tragedy situated

at the core of human existence, it embodied a slightly different “tragedy” – the naked body’s inability to “bare it all”. Paradoxically, the clothed body which appeared only for a few moments during the curtain call seemed to convey different meanings (the performers looked directly at the audience, thus openly and freely – not deliberately – “laying bare” their individual, dressed bodies),¹ while the naked body remained a manifestation of the strictly choreographed and aestheticised *homo nudus*. And it is precisely this inability to “bare it all” that makes the nudity in dance theatre not only an interesting case study, but also problematises the sexuality of the naked performer.

In case of *Tragédie*, the body is (supposedly) fully visible in all of its sexual “glory”. In turn, the performer’s skin openly stares at the spectator. This stare is performed through the visual, but also, and most importantly, corporeal qualities of the skin. Whereas Sparshott argues that the naked dancer’s body acquires “negative” connotations because it appears as ‘one unwieldy surface’ or a ‘pallid mass’ (306), I believe that the undressed skin can become actively involved in the overall dramaturgy. The lighting design by Patrick Riou and the set design by Dubois himself expose the moving and sweating skin of the dancers: the illuminated skin shakes together with the shaking breasts and swings together with the swinging penises; its diverse colours complement the minimalist scenography; and the strobe lighting accompanied by loud music towards the end of the performance reverberates within the frantically moving bodies. Through such unquestionable involvement, the skin also provokes moments of projected tactility in the viewer: she becomes more acutely aware of her own body. Such dramaturgical configurations of the naked skin set a perfect scene

1 I am not alone, Judith Mackrell in her review of *Tragédie* remarks on this particular moment as ‘thought provoking’: a moment that allows the audience to see the performers ‘anew’, see Mackrell 2014.

for the exploration of performers' sexuality as perceived by the audience. Paradoxically though, in case of this particular *homo nudus*, once the idea of the corporeal costume is introduced, the exposed genitalia gets lost within the intimate folds of the naked skin and the performer's sexuality begins to dissipate.

The question that is rarely asked in the accounts on nudity is how naked does *homo nudus* have to be in order to constitute the corporeal configuration of nudity? Depending on a particular social, historical and cultural environment, "to be naked" in theatre can carry rather conflicting connotations. The aforementioned Victorian *tableau vivants*, despite being fully covered in close fitting fabric, were seen as a representation of nakedness. In the contemporary context, as indicated previously, nudity comes in diverse shapes and formats. This "naked diversity", however, is marked by clothing (or costume in theatrical context). Costume is one of the most immediate objects that *homo nudus* relates to because it is often the first material reality physically touched by the naked skin. Moreover, it is through the intricacies (absence, presence or ambiguous presence) of clothing that we make sense of the naked body beneath. Rosie Wyles (2010) applies semiotic analysis to examine theatre costume, giving precedence to the visual elements and meanings they create. Other scholars have recently expanded costume discourse and work with Joanne Entwistle's concept of clothing as a 'situated bodily practice' (Pantouvaki 186), thus emphasising not only the visual but also material aspects of costume. Donatella Barbieri (2013) looks at the archived costume and argues for the costume as a materiality which is in itself performing. Sofia Pantouvaki (2014) also sees costume as a 'performative act(ion)' (180) which, however, is not only a material but also 'lived and experiential entity' that interacts with the overall dramaturgy of the performance (187). She then applies her take

on costume to examine wearable technologies as a possibility for technologically advanced embodied interactions in performance. Similarly, Siobhán O’Gorman (2014) argues for theatre costume as an embodied reality that can be manipulated by theatre-makers in order to ‘rupture seemingly seamless genders’ (156). And it is precisely this idea of costume as a material and embodied reality which is also malleable (and how this malleable reality influence our perception of nakedness and sexuality) that I want to build on in the present discussion.

Contrary to the full exposure of *Tragédie*, the performers in Platel’s *Out of Context: For Pina* are never completely naked. Designed by Dorine Demuynck, their minimalist costumes (in the form of briefs and bras) stay on throughout the performance. Moreover, from time to time they cover the rest of their bodies with large orange blankets. Nevertheless, an aspect of nudity, while not immediately obvious, is certainly implied – largely in the actions of stripping and dressing again, which work as a framework for the entire piece. At the start of *For Pina*, the performers sit amongst the audience wearing everyday clothing. Subsequently, one by one, they begin to climb onto the stage. The moment of crossing the boundary between the auditorium and the stage already constitutes an act of bodily transgression and provokes different meanings: this person is not an audience member but a performer; the performers are wearing everyday clothes, yet the moment they step on stage, their clothing becomes a costume; moreover, the transgression does not stop there, one by one, the performers begin to slowly remove their clothes, neatly fold them on the floor, and simply stand there in their underwear which also becomes a costume.

What Platel’s performance openly displays (and what happens behind the scenes in Dubois’s work) is the transient process which constitutes the making of *homo nudus* – the act of literal and

metaphorical undressing. Furthermore, by manifesting, emphasising and reiterating the act of undressing, *For Pina* simultaneously exposes the interaction between the strategies of concealment and revelation of the body. The performance “undresses” and reveals the performers’ bodies previously concealed amongst the audience; these bodies instantaneously become specially emphasised and visible, yet their naked materiality remains concealed underneath the casual clothing; the act of stripping begins to reveal the naked skin, yet the genitals remain concealed; during the performance, the large blankets are continuously draped over and then removed from the performers’ bodies which works as a continuation of the concealment/revelation dialectic. One observes an intricate interplay between the clothed and naked body as well as the toying with the possibility of all-revealing nakedness which is never fully achieved. As a result, the materiality of performer’s skin becomes emphasised and seductively enticing, and the performer, through the actions of veiling and unveiling, begins to playfully flirt with the audience.

While not openly staring as it did in the previous example, the skin is actively involved in the stripping spectacle. The deliberate manipulation of clothing entices the viewer. Paradoxically, the main reason for this enticement is the “invisible” genitals. Not everything is present because the naked skin is firmly “framed” by the underwear, and the resulting (genital) absence works as a hindrance which increases the desire to see it all. Therefore, Platel’s performance, through the naked skin’s interrelation to clothing, continuously toys with the (unattainable) contingency of the naked spectacle which undoubtedly resembles the workings of striptease.

Waltz’s *Körper* is another example of dance theatre performance which further illustrates the complexity of *homo nudus* and the resulting (equally complex and sometimes rather ambigu-

ous) sexualisation of the performer's body. During one particular sequence, Waltz's dancers take a handful of each other's skin in order to lift them up. The dancer is then briefly carried by the folds of the material skin, which at that particular moment resembles a layer of fabric that can be firmly gripped, stretched and pulled away from the body. As well as being manipulated as a material layer-becoming-costume, the skin is also in continuous interrelation with clothing, designed by Sylvia Hagen-Schäfer. She covered the naked body of one female dancer with a see-through garment, thus turning her into a *tableaux vivant* in reverse: fully exposed, yet at the same time concealed. Other bodies (male and female) are dressed in semi-revealing costumes, and one catches the glimpses of peeping breast, buttock or genitalia. As Monks observes, with each new layer of costume added, removed, or missing, a new performer-body is displayed. Most importantly, due to this continuous multiplication as well as "stretching" their corporeal skins to the limit, the body becomes, to use Kotte's terminology, specially emphasised yet always already with reduced consequences. Instead of aspiring to reveal the "real" naked body, Waltz's performers display the body that merges with its costume almost completely – a specially arranged material construct. Because the "real" is no longer attainable, the body's sexuality becomes equally ambiguous. And while the costume might (sometimes very playfully) allow the dancer's naked skin to peep through the clothing, we are no longer certain if the sexualised exposition really took place because the skin has become an indistinguishable part of the corporeal costume itself.

Homo Nudus *plays* Sexuality

Throughout this article I argued for *homo nudus* to be considered a corporeal costume which problematises the singularity of the

performer's corporeality in contemporary dance performance. The performances I briefly touched on expose such ambiguity situated in the performer's relationship to nakedness. In Dubois's case the bare skin of the performer was endowed with costume-like qualities, and in Platel's performance the body was further ensnared into the concealment/revelation masquerade that constitutes the making of naked spectacle. Finally, the naked performers in Waltz's piece proved to be permanently caught in the codified design of theatre, with the "real" body lost amidst the corporeal folds of their costume. As a result, I believe that *homo nudus's* sexuality can no longer be seen simply as the exposed genitalia of the performer. Contrary to Toepfer's suggestion that the visible genitalia is immediately appropriated by the spectator's gaze, I have suggested that the naked performer is involved in a much more complex process of *homo nudus playing* sexuality.

The naked body of the performer, as Monks suggests, always "reaches out into the world", namely the specially arranged environment of theatre (105). To "reach out" indicates that it does not remain passive, but instead is actively animated in the viewer's perception (and imagination): the body appears to form intimate interrelationships with the objects and other bodies around it (and, as Albright claims, thus begins to form the body itself), in the process of which it creates a number of dramaturgical configurations. In other words, through the act of reaching out, one observes the performer as *playing* with the naked dramaturgies at hand, with the sexualisation of the naked body being only one of these dramaturgies. Contrary to Toepfer's argument, the mere revelation of performer's genitals does not immediately expose a sexualised subject. Instead, *homo nudus* (in the form of fully naked, partially covered and partially exposed body) seems to create different, codified, playfully deceitful, and often ambiguous sexual and non-sexu-

al configurations. Because the performer exists within the specially emphasised reality with reduced consequences, the skin is deceitfully (in case of *For Pina*, enticingly) situated in between the corporeal (shaking, sweaty, porous body) and the costume-like. Through the acts of dressing and undressing the performers continuously multiply their bodily reality, and while the resulting concealment of the “real” body can be perceived as disappointing (Monks 118), I believe that it also constitutes a potential for new corporeal and sexual meanings.

Consequently, every new dramaturgy of the naked skin, every *homo nudus* one encounters onstage, offers a challenge to the spectator. Instead of promising the same genital exposition, thus sexualised and vulnerable to our desire, with the help of the choreographer (or director) and designer, specially codified theatrical strategies and “tricks”, the performer is able to constantly re-configure the naked body. This body is capable of being on a full display yet at the same time completely concealed; bodily present yet also absent; while maintaining its own sexuality, to momentarily acquire the sexuality of the other, and in the process fill the performance space with multiple, ever shifting corporeal phantasms of *homo nudus*. The performers allow their naked bodies to *play* with the specially arranged corporeal and sexual ambiguity, and as a spectator, one is provided with the pleasure to view and make sense of the naked dramaturgy created.

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How We Read Bodies: An Interview with Chris Goode in Conversation with Catherine Love

Edited by Catherine Love

Chris Goode is a writer, director, performer and sound designer. His work includes *Neutrino* (2001), *Kiss of Life* (2002), ... *Sisters* (2008), *The Adventures of Wound Man and Shirley* (2009), *GOD/HEAD* (2012), *Monkey Bars* (2012), *The Forest and the Field* (2013) and *Men in the Cities* (2014). He is the lead artist of Chris Goode and Company and recently formed the new all-male ensemble Ponyboy Curtis. His book *The Forest and the Field: Changing Theatre in a Changing World*, which considers the concept of theatre as a 'space', will be published by Oberon Books later this year.

Throughout much of his work as a theatre-maker, Goode investigates ideas of space, desire, bodies and nakedness. In *The Forest and the Field*, for example, nakedness is placed in a dialogue with nudity, following John Berger's distinction that 'To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself' (54). In his work with Ponyboy Curtis, meanwhile, Goode is examining constructions and performances of masculinity through a process that involves extensive use of nudity.

Goode has also engaged at length with discourses around nakedness on his long-standing blog, *Thompson's Bank of Communicable Desire*. On this blog, Goode identifies stage nakedness as a research question threading through his theatre-making and poses the question: 'once you're naked - once you've "got" naked - how can you carry on getting *more* naked? How can you extend the line, the curve, however you imagine it, on the graph of clothedness, how can you extend the line

back through its own origin to sub-zero?’ (original emphasis). This provides the starting point for our conversation.

CL: You have described your interest in stage nakedness as a research question as much as an aesthetic interest that you are looking to explore through your work. I’m interested in how you feel you have explored that or where you think you’re going with that research question.

CG: I’m now wondering what I meant by that. I must have had something in mind, but I don’t really understand the distinction I’m making there. What there has been for several years is an interest in staging nakedness as a thing in itself rather than as an effect or as a tonal modifier or for any kind of instrumental reason. The moment I got interested in nakedness as a question was when there was some kind of project application where we had to describe our work and I remember we were talking at the time about the body in limit states. I remember reading back through that application once we’d written it and seeing nakedness in that list of extreme things that we were asking the body to do and suddenly being really struck by that, because I think often we do read nakedness on stage as an extreme case that’s arrived at; we go on a journey and get there. Or if we’re suddenly confronted with it then it feels like it’s occupying a sort of extreme position in relation to whatever we think of as normalcy on stage. It occurred to me how curiously dissonant that is in relation to lived experience, where again there’s a sense that being clothed is the default, but still my experience is that the core of me, the core of my experience, is of nakedness and of clothing that nakedness in order to go out into the world. So that rather than it feeling like an extreme state, it feels like a fundamental, base state. I suppose that was the interesting thing that we started working with: the idea of nakedness being the thing we

departed from and came back to - so essentially flipping the syntax of clothedness on stage. That's a thing that's lodged in my practice.

In a way it's a militantly rigorous response to the idea of thinking about the body. You spend a lot of time as practitioners and theorists talking about "the body" or "the actor's body" when very seldom actually are we seeing the actor's body; we're seeing the actor's body moving clothes around. Once we'd made that flip in terms of the thought position, suddenly clothing really clearly re-presented itself, not as part of the body but as part of the place that the body is in. So if we're talking about the body then the question at the point of departure is always partly about what it is that we want to present and if there's no reason for it to be clothed then there won't be any clothing. What that produces is kind of wilful, because it doesn't matter what perceptual shifts we've been through, people still read nakedness with alarm or with erotic fascination or whatever it might be. But that was where we started out.

A lot later I went back and read *The Empty Space* and it's a question in there that I'd completely forgotten. At one point in passing he says 'why clothes at all?' So it's not a totally new minted idea, but it felt to me like it was quite a big paradigm shift in my head. And I suppose that's become more and more important as my practice has gravitated more and more towards the ideological content of constructions like "body" and "place" and realising what it means to watch actors essentially moving around advertisements for particular ideological positions and thinking of those very often as neutral clothing. Which is obviously not to say that there's anything neutral about nakedness either. Jonathan Burrows has a lovely line about nudity being no more neutral than wearing a big hat, which I think is absolutely right. Nonetheless, I think with pieces I've made, particularly with Jonny Liron, we did find that it was possible to shift an audience's relationship with nakedness.

So there's a critical relationship with clothing and a different kind of attentiveness to the body, one corollary of which is that we've tended to separate out not only nudity from nakedness, which is a distinction with a long critical history, but also trying to use the word 'unclothed' quite often instead. It's tricky, because it re-positions clothedness as the default from which you depart, but what it connotes seems to be more expressive of a problematic binary that's quite interesting between clothed and unclothed, because obviously nudity for a lot of practitioners is a kind of clothedness.

One of the other upshots of disrupting clothedness in the way that we have in the past few years is that that disruption has happened within the system of clothing as well, so that quite often there's a disrupted or destabilised hierarchy of clothing. Particularly in my work with Jonny, he and I would be clothed, but what he might be clothed in could be at one particular moment a beanie hat and boots and nothing else. That inadvertently starts picking up on the image of pornography, where you see naked bodies part-clothed but also registering as naked. I suppose, thinking as best I can about what I might have meant about the research interest, it's about those then becoming really fundamental questions about how we read bodies, how we read the actor, and in particular how we read the special kind of place that theatre is. If clothing is an extension of place, then we need to talk about it in the same way that we talk about site, and I don't think that's something that generally happens.

You mention using nakedness as a point of departure rather than a point of arrival. I was also struck by something else you wrote about being more interested in the movement of getting naked than in the state of nakedness on stage. I wonder if you would be able to expand on that thought?

I think the place it shows up best is Bataille's writing on eroticism. He has a line I'm very fond of in his book *Eroticism* where he says 'getting naked is the decisive act', and I got really interested in that idea of nakedness as an act rather than a state of being. It's quite often our experience of nakedness anyway, that it is something that's moved into and out of, and I suppose I'm interested in the vector of it - partly because it becomes a time-based operation, which makes it feel to me like it belongs in theatre more interestingly. But also it's about the politics of that decisive act. It's funny, because we've just been talking about nakedness as a point of departure and immediately I'm talking about it as a point of arrival, but it feels like a prefatory act - we do this and then we begin. I think that's interesting because it gives an audience time to adjust their relation with what they're seeing and how they're feeling about it. I think there's a certain amount of dread sometimes for people seeing that that's going on, or there's a degree of anticipation, but there's a moving relationship that I think is interesting.

It's interesting, I think, in relation to what Bataille means by 'decisive'. He's setting up a whole network of ideas about discontinuity: the idea that you and I are separate people and we will die alone. Even if we're surrounded by loved ones, it is something that we will go through completely alone and we are the only animal that knows that we are going to go through that. For Bataille, most culture starts in that apprehension, and most culture is one way or another about how we deal with this distance, this discontinuity between us, in order to introduce a plausible element of continuity between us. So whether that's about empathy, or whether it's about recognition, or whether it's just about sharing an experience. This for me was terrifically exciting when I read it, because it seems to me absolutely to describe theatre. In conventional terms, we're in markedly separate areas, and yet what we've gone to the theatre to

do is try and minimise that distance between us - or at least that's what I do.

For me, there's something really interesting about what happens in that moment or that series of moments in the movement between clothedness and nakedness in front of an audience. It's generally still pretty rare for the audience to be being encouraged to get naked at the same time, so there's a built-in imbalance to that gesture. I think that intersects very interestingly with how actors view their own power, their own authority, in that situation. This is something that I think most actors would attest to: there's a very interesting double dynamic going on in getting naked, in that it always reads from the outside as a movement towards vulnerability, but from the inside an actor's experience very often is of becoming more powerful. The naked actor is often the most powerful person in the room, partly because they've got nothing left to hide. That always shows up very interestingly in relation to actors' understanding of their own authorial power and what they're going to do with it, and whether it's important to them to bolster it or whether they can give it away somehow.

One of the things I talk about in the book is an interesting example of this. Casting Call Pro is like a free Spotlight where people can put their headshot and their CV and actors who use that service have to fill in a questionnaire, one question on which is 'perform nude?' There are three options that you can choose from: one is 'yes', one is 'no', and the third is 'only professionally'. So there is a thing about essentially what you charge to get naked, or where the value in it happens. That of course is a kind of mirror of the idea that we have gratuitous nudity, which is where it's not participating properly in a value system that shows it up as expensive. It's gratuitous because it's given away for free, without it being part of a transaction that makes sense in some kind of internal economy

of power or value or authority. So for me, gratuitous nudity is the best nudity there is, because it refuses to participate in that internal economy. That's one of the reasons that I like the idea of nakedness as that default point of departure. We've had a conversation about why I'm interested in that, but in a sense it doesn't justify itself within the operations of theatre. A lot of actors are trained to think 'would my character get naked at this point?' and there are certain kinds of distancing manoeuvres or dissociating gestures that get as far as going 'well, it's not really me that's naked, it's the character'. And then on the other side of that are audiences and critics, particularly newspaper reviewers, who if they ever complain about nakedness it's because they feel like they stop seeing a character and suddenly start seeing the actor; it's never King Lear's dick, it's Ian Holm's dick that we're going to talk about.

So for me there's a real interest in asking actors to think about what it is that they're charging, as it were, in that quasi-economic context. My feeling is that the more that we can give away - the less valorised nakedness is in that economy - the easier it is to then see it as beautiful or as exemplary or as somehow just a little bit elevated. Because that's something that I've always tried to maintain; although I'm talking about nakedness as a point of departure and as a base state, I'm never looking to make it mundane or unremarkable. I think it does take courage for actors to be naked on stage, even those who get very used to it. I think it takes courage and it takes a kind of generosity that I think is very beautiful. It makes very clear the basic contract of what being an actor is, which is to stand up in public and say 'let me be the one who is looked at', and that I think is an extraordinary, generous and important act of volunteering - and it's a volunteering even when it's paid. So I always want an actor's nakedness to be appreciated and that's why I'm interested in the act, the event of becoming naked, because

you see that choice being made and you see the implications of that unfolding in a way that at one and the same time reinforces its humanness and its slight elevation.

There is obviously, as soon as this becomes real and not just something we're talking about, something really problematic about gender here. I in practice as a director - or as a writer to a degree - have a really different relationship with nakedness in relation to female rather than male actors. Partly because patriarchy, partly because the way that patriarchy functions is that it's still more common, I would think, for women to be asked to be naked on stage than for men and it's certainly more common for that nudity to be sexualised. And because I am a male director, even though I'm a queer male director, I am reticent about asking female actors to be naked. I think it has to be that way and I wouldn't want it any other way. It doesn't mean there isn't female nudity in my work sometimes, but it would normally be with an actor that I knew really well and where there had been a conversation. But that becomes a problem when I say, as I've already said in this conversation, that getting naked feels like a fundamental thing for an actor to be able to do. There is a weird thing about my saying, more or less at one and the same time, I expect the actors I work with to be able to at least engage with this question, and I think being able to put naked actors on stage is a fundamental part of my practice, but I'm also sort of then making it impossible for women to register in the same way on stage in my work because I'm reluctant to ask that or even to want that.

A thing that's often made me really happy is when female actors in my room will get naked in an improvisation or a rehearsal and no one's asked them to do that. It just feels like they're OK with offering that in that situation because they feel they can participate in the making of a space that refuses all the things that we

came in with. At the end of the day, it's just another way patriarchy is showing up in that rehearsal room; it's what happens when you pay attention to that. So I'd rather be in that discomfort than in the discomfort of not paying to attention to that and then having people have a horrible time being naked on stage in front of an audience when they're not feeling it. It feels like in our present condition there's always going to be something about it that feels uncomfortable and maybe that's it for now and maybe that's right for now.

I was thinking about that power dynamic when nakedness is being staged and an audience is watching while clothed, which for me as an audience member is an oscillating one. I was also thinking about the framing of theatre and how nakedness reads in theatre specifically. How far do you think it is possible to change audiences' perceptions of staged nakedness and to re-configure that understanding of nakedness as being not the point of arrival but the point of departure? Is it possible to begin to shift that understanding over the course of one piece of work, or is it an ongoing journey?

I think one of the most satisfactory ways of introducing nakedness into a piece for me was in the first version of *The Forest and the Field*, which was in 2009, in which again like the more recent version there was another performer in the room who was naked for quite a lot of the time. That was around the time when I was really feeling very committed to this idea of let's not clothe the actor unless it's necessary. In that case, working with Sébastien Lawson, he was sitting with the audience to begin with and there was no indication that he was going to be involved in the piece. There was something about talking about nakedness first, directly to the audience - talking about what a naked body might be in

this environment - and then introducing Sébastien. I remember him getting a laugh always because it was pretty clear as soon as he was introduced that he was going to be the one who got naked. Us being able to have a little conversation, part scripted and part not, in which an audience saw him consent to that and then start to undress from their midst - I really liked that, because it made it all very transparent and it was familiar by the time it started happening.

Something that I've never liked doing is presenting nakedness in an aggressive way or a way that's meant to cause the audience to recoil. It's always framed as a journey towards intimacy. An audience can't necessarily consent to that intimacy, or they can't always signal their consent, but it's always I think done in a way that invites a measured, calm and spacious response, in which no one hopefully is shocked and where actually if anything it's hard to hang onto that slight elevation that I was talking about and it does become almost boring in the end. Like, 'oh my God, he's taking his clothes off again'. That's quite an interesting moment to get to. In a way I'm always really satisfied by it, because it shows that that whole economy has collapsed, which is good. One of the things that happened with Jonny Liron, which was sad, was that his nakedness became a cliché in our work because we were both interested in it and it was always present. There is a strange jocularity around the response to it, because it stopped being seen as special in a sense and it became not just gratuitous but sort of deflated. I do think that's difficult.

Something that happened to me early on and that was really encouraging was getting to know Tim Miller, who's a Los Angeles performance artist who has always used nudity in his performances in a very joyous way. He's a kind of storyteller really, but sooner or later he's always going to get naked. That's part of

an assertion of queer identity, but it's also an assertion of the importance of nakedness as a not only private state. Tim writes about this in one of his books: he says very clearly that the theatre is the last public place we have where you can look legitimately at the naked body of a stranger; it's kind of the only place where that's possible, at least without it being immediately overdetermined by sexual overtones and a discomfort around etiquette. If there's a naked body on stage, you know you're allowed to look at it.

I started to think about that sense that only theatre can contain this. I feel like there's something really interesting about that, and it explains for me in a richer way than I'd been able to before what my interest in theatrical nakedness has been about. I think there's a very interesting tension there, or an interesting kind of paradox. It's a bit like those chemical elements that only ever exist in the lab for a few seconds and then they're so unstable they sort of disappear again. What theatre allows us to do is to really look at a naked body in a space where that body is OK, where it's not at risk, where it's not actually vulnerable, partly because it's clothed by the theatre. If clothing is part of the place the body is in, then one of the reasons we can do nudity in the theatre is because the theatre becomes the clothing that the actor is in. The theatre is doing the job not only of clothing but of warmth and shelter and all the things that make nakedness viable as an option. So it's a space where there's no reason for nudity to be problematic in itself, because you see a body that doesn't need resolving into anything else; it's the body at its most irreducible, in a sense. I suppose that's what I'm getting at with the idea about it being fundamental, that there is something absolute about a naked body and the fact that there is that completeness is very beautiful.

But at the same time, it's less than complete, because it's dependent on the conditions of theatre to be sustainable. When we

did *The Forest and the Field* at Camden People's Theatre that first time, Sébastien used to leave the theatre and have to walk around the side of the building, so he would be outside naked for a few seconds before he came back in again and there was always something really interesting about the extent to which he had to carry the idea of the theatre with him as he went around. So I think there is this sense that we see something that's signalling a completeness and an integrity in itself, a body that doesn't need to be clothed in order to be legitimate, that doesn't need to be in private in order to be legitimate, but at the same time we're very aware as an audience that we are part of the system that makes this possible and so there is a sense of the actor being dependent on our presence in order to be naked. And in a sense I suppose that just creates an entanglement in the authorship of this moment. Essentially nakedness on stage is always a collaboration and it's dependent on being seen in a way that I guess is true of all theatre, but it means that that's theatre in a very pure sense, because before it's anything else it's just that body.

Finally, you've written about the radical promise contained within this reconfiguring of our relationship with stage nakedness; this idea of transforming it from being a limit state to something that's passed through. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that?

I suppose the thing that comes to mind particularly is the idea of intimacy. Intimate is a word formed along the same lines as ultimate, which is to say that it's about a kind of mostness. Just as the ultimate is about going as far as you can with something, the intimate is about getting as far *into* a relationship or an event or whatever as possible. So that in seeking intimacy we seek a depth of engagement that I suppose ties in a sense to that Bataillan construction of erotic continuity, of the ways in which we are able to

expose to each other ourselves at our most ineluctably human. So for me nakedness is a technology of intimacy, not just in terms of the revelation in public of a state that normally belongs to the private sphere - which I think is sometimes what we mean by intimacy in theatre, that it's about behaving in public as though we were in private together. It's about the construction of moments in which we are as close to each other as we can be. That idea of being close is interesting, because partly it's about proximity, but it's also closeness as in likeness, as in we see each other as more alike each other than we might do and we notice the ways in which clothing serves to separate us and tribalise us and conceal our sameness in some ways. Although there is also another way of looking at it, that there's a huge amount of difference that's revealed and that also is true, but I think the way it signals - particularly when it's staged as an event - has to do with a revelation of intimacy.

This is a very simple thought really: nakedness shows us at our most basic and that's why I want it to be a base state that we read it as, rather than as a state of extremity. We're not in a state of extremity when we're naked; we're in a state of animal basicness. Every version of that sentence has to be completed with something about what we go to the theatre to do and that will be different for everybody, but I think for me there's a sense of wanting to be closer to people, to be reminded of what we share or what we hold in common, to be reminded of our common occupancy of a single place and a single time. Bataille talked eventually about bringing into a discontinuous world all of the continuity that such a world can bear, and I think that's as good a way of expressing it as anything. If the problem we go to theatre to solve is our isolation, our sense of human separateness from each other - I don't know about solve, but alleviate maybe - then it feels to me like nakedness has a really basic role to play in fostering that, both in itself and in how

it changes everything around it.

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Getting a Rise out of *ASCENDING*

***PERFORMANCE*: An Interview with Dani**

Ploeger in Conversation with Will Shüler

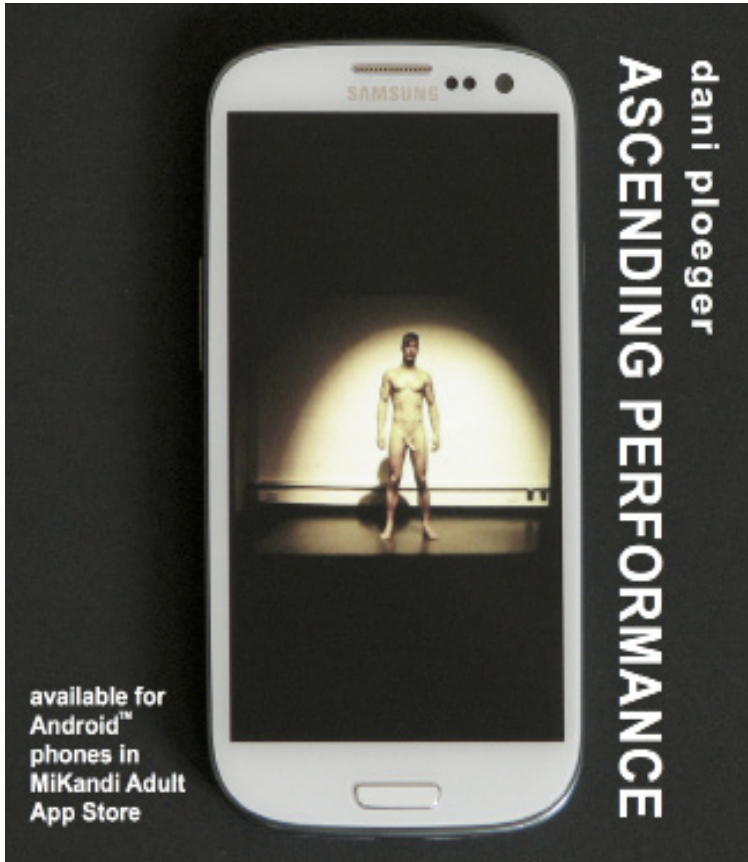
ASCENDING PERFORMANCE is a performance in the form of a smartphone app, which is available from *MiKandi*, an online store for adult content for Android phones. The app was simultaneously advertised in *Artforum International* and on *pornhub.com*. The work features a digitized Super 8 film of the naked artist. By making a very slow swipe gesture over the image on the smartphone screen, the user plays through the frames of the film one by one. Through repetitious performance of this – quasi masturbatory – gesture, an erection gradually emerges.

Download & Installation

System requirements: Smartphone with Android 3.0 or higher

1. Enable 'Unknown sources' (Settings > Security)
2. Download MiKandi from www.mikandi.com
3. Open the MiKandi App Store and search for *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*
4. After registering, download and install *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*

Video: <https://vimeo.com/78257191>



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement in *Artforum International*.
Dani Ploeger (2013).

7 Comments



Bill 2 years ago

« [Group](#) / [naked](#)

Interesting film. There's always something to learn about, such as the uses for this device!



CNMRG 1 year ago

Bravo, maestro!



artzu843 1 year ago

tolles Video, heißer Typ



Gay Bar 1 year ago

super!



Luv bare 5 months ago

very cute butt



darkroom photography 5 months ago

Very nice



ActionBuddy 5 months ago

Some performance artists will do anything to get people to look at their ass.... :)

This conversation is missing your voice. Please [join Vimeo](#) or [log in](#).

ELECTRODE comments on *Vimeo*. Author's Own (2015).

WS: What informed your decision to make this piece? From what you mentioned at IFTR, it was because one of your videos online was being sexualised. How did you come to realise it was being sexualised? How did you react to it? How did it make you feel? Did you ever contact the people sexualising your video? Did they ever contact you?

DP: I have been fascinated by the way in which naked bodies of performance artists—or anyone really—tend to be eroticised or sexualised by a large segment of users on generic online platforms such as *YouTube* or *Vimeo*. This is apparent when you read the comment feeds that accompany the videos, or look at the profiles of people who ‘like’ the material on *Vimeo*. In terms of my own work, I particularly noticed this with the video documentation of *ELECTRODE* (2011), in which I use an anal electrode designed for faecal incontinence treatment to repeatedly emulate the pelvic floor muscle contraction pattern of a male orgasm. Comments such as ‘tolles Video, heißer Typ’ (‘cool video, hot guy’) and ‘very cute butt’ from users with names like ‘Luv bare’ and ‘ActionBuddy’ tend to prevail on the work’s *Vimeo* page (<https://vimeo.com/38581381>). In the offline world, naked bodies are often likely to be perceived in the context of a particular representational framework, such as an art gallery, medical text book or pornographic cinema (cf. Eck 2003). In the case of online platforms, these boundaries are largely blurred; apart from people who primarily watch contents on *Vimeo* to pursue their artistic interests, there is a large segment of users who browse the same videos primarily to find material for sexual arousal and gratification, not to say that a combination of these two attitudes doesn’t exist of course. Whatever the intentions and original representational framework of the performance artwork you put online, you can be sure that it will be sexualised. I have spoken about this more in detail elsewhere (Reisz 2013; Ploeger

2015). My main interest in *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* was to make a work that acknowledges this process of sexualisation and facilitates a critical engagement with it.

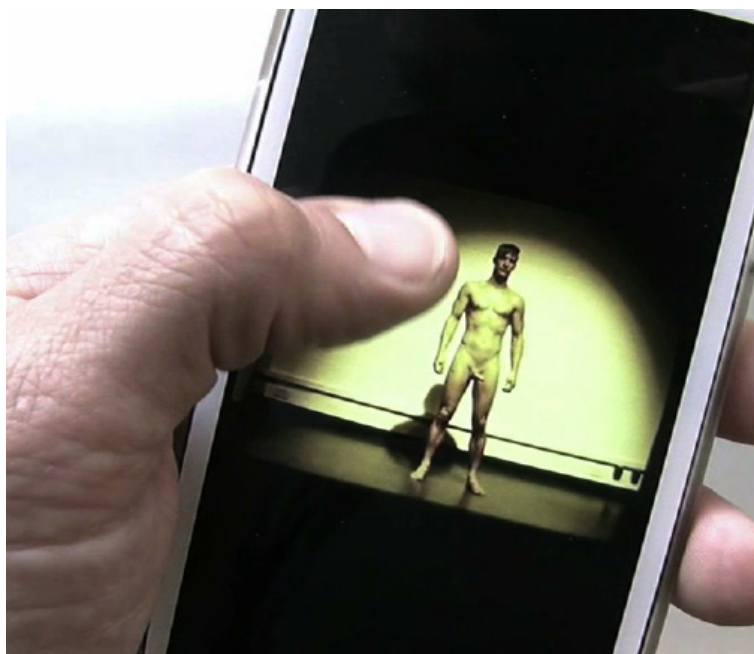
Most of my work tries to juxtapose my critical engagement with normative (body) culture and my more intuitive desire to be part of that very culture. Accordingly, I don't necessarily mind people sexualising my body, especially not when I have a strong sense of control; I decide how my body is represented and exposed in my work and I can take down most of the videos of my work at any time if I wanted to (although I have never done this). I quite like the idea of being desired as a porn star of sorts, whilst at the same time I am rather critical the potential masculinist and body-normative implications of my own liking of this. I have never contacted people who 'liked' my videos on Vimeo, but I do receive some fan mail every now and then. Until now, I haven't responded to any though. There hasn't been any message that attracted me to do so yet.

WS: Is then, one of the intentions of this piece to challenge the sexualisation of artists online?

DP: I don't have a special interest in the position of artists in society. My concern is with a more general tendency to objectify and sexualise bodies that are represented on the web (including artists). I don't know if the work 'challenges' this process. As I said, I'm not sure if it is always necessarily a bad thing. It depends on the extent to which the subject concerned feels in control and empowered. This is what I hope the app does: make apparent and destabilise those structures of control that are usually taken for granted.



ELECTRODE video on *Vimeo*. Dani Ploeger (2015).



Working the app. Dani Ploeger (2014).

WS: After commenting on what made you want to make the piece, can you then address what the process was like when you decided to make an app as a way of engaging? Why an app instead of a live performance? Why decide to get an erection and have the spectator the one who brings it... well, up? Did you have any reservations about sensualising your body for spectators?

DP: I chose to program an app that requires interaction, rather than make a video that is merely watched, to facilitate an engagement with the issue of control I mentioned above. The app gives the user a sense of control in terms of the emergence of my erection, but I am the one who decided where the film stops and from what perspective and distance my body is shown. As a result, it also remains a bit in the middle whether the word 'performance' in the title of the work refers to the user of the app, or my erection in the image.

It was essential for the work to be digital and to be disseminated on the web in order to address the blurring of categorisations I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, which happens to a much greater extent online than offline. Warhol's film *Blow Job* (1964) was also conceived as both art and pornography, but an important difference between this film and my app is that the former's perception as either art or porn was also very much dependent on where it was shown (Warhol presented the work in galleries, as well as 16mm cinemas). Online, my work is accessible as both art and porn in the same place, with little need to move it from one context to the other. I do coerce an art audience onto a porn platform of course, but this step is much smaller and more likely than getting them to enter a pornographic cinema in the offline world.



Super 8 film reel of *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*. Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Gallery, Chicago, IL (2014).

As I said earlier, my main interests in the work have been to engage with the blurring of boundaries between art and porn, and in conjunction with this, the control over sexualised representations of bodies online. I liked the idea of reducing the app's contents to its very minimum in terms of its qualification as porn. Apart from my erection, there is no other representation or performance of sexuality. Some may question whether it is pornographic at all. At the same time, the decision to disseminate it through MiKandi, the only App Store exclusively dedicated to porn, makes it more difficult to read it only as an artwork.

This destabilisation of category distinctions informed several other decisions in the development of the work as well: mainstream pornography often strives to evoke an experience of immediacy, where the viewer is made to forget that the scenario is mediated (cf. Bolter and Grusin 2000). This is done through the use of HD recording quality and POV (point-of-view) perspectives that offer the (usually male) viewer the illusion that he is the protagonist in the film. Instead, I chose to use a digitised Super 8 film recording to generate a hyper-mediated situation: the scratches and dust on the celluloid film make the user more aware of the mediated nature of the material. This strategy of deliberately heightening the experience of mediation to facilitate a critical framework is widespread in new media art practices. In a similar vein, I heightened the toned texture of my body through application of bodybuilder tan and glaze, and the use of theatrical lighting from above to establish a typical porn star body representation. This is then 'artified' through the film's rather distantiated perspective (and the sepia-like colours). Lastly, I chose not to include a money shot: similar to mainstream porn, the user's desire to see a fully exposed body in sexually aroused state is gratified in the app. At the same time, the porn experience is somewhat frustrated by the black screen that comes up in the end, instead of the anticipated orgasm.



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement on *Pornhub.com*.

Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Galler, Chicago, IL (2014).



Artforum International magazines with *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* advertisement. Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Galler, Chicago, IL (2014).

WS: What made you want to cross-promote the app to be consumed as both pornography (as per advertising on *pornhub*)? And what made you want spectators to also engage with it as “art” as well by advertising in *Artforum*? Does advertising in different mediums change what the artwork is? Is this a spatial difference? What made you want to blur the lines between these things? Do you feel the app achieved this blur in practice?

DP: I advertised the work in *Artforum International* (November 2013) and on *pornhub.com* to heighten its perception as both art and porn by (probably mostly) separate audiences. *Artforum* is one of the most renowned publications for the art establishment, whilst *pornhub.com* is among the top websites for the distribution and promotion of (homemade and professional) pornography. My *Artforum* ad is also a reference to Lynda Benglis’ famous 1974 advertising work in the same publication. Whereas in Benglis’s pornographic advertisement the artist holds a flesh coloured double dildo as if it is her penis to challenge the objectification of female bodies in the art world, the *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* advertisement positively asserts the ability to classify my male body as both pornographic and artistic and thus takes a more double-barrelled stance on objectification.

WS: How has this work been received online, perhaps, in comparison to the performance you felt was being sexualised? Is it the same? Is it different? Have people contacted you (strangers from online that is) about this performance?

DP: This work has been sexualised just as much as *ELECTRODE*. The difference is that there is a kind of meta-narrative included in *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*. The people who regard it primarily as an artwork are likely to perceive the porn

consumers—as well as art audiences like themselves—as part of the work. Maybe there is a parallel with Jeff Koons’s *Jim Beam - J.B. Turner Train* (1986) in this respect. If I recall correctly, Koons once said that the collector who would buy this artefact has fallen into the trap. In a way similar to how my app can be seen as both a work of art and pornography, the *Jim Beam - J.B. Turner Train* is both a (rather kitschy) artefact and a conceptual work about the tacky and addictive nature of the art world (and consumer culture in general). The buyer of the artefact becomes part of the work for those who perceive it as a primarily conceptual endeavour.

WS: Reflecting on the *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* now, what do you think? Did it achieve an objective you had (if you had one)? Did it garner responses you predicted (if you did)?

DP: Some people regard the app as a critical artwork (you, I presume), others consume it as porn (apparently the vast majority of the 25,000 people who watched the trailer for the work on Vimeo). Some blogged about it as a porn novelty (<http://bigshoediaries.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/tap-my-app.html?zx=5681b379537b2a1b>), a few *Artforum* readers were confused about it and gallery visitors reflected on it. Amusingly, the satirical magazine *Private Eye* included the work’s press release in their regular section ‘Pseud’s Corner’, highlighting it as an example of pretentious art.



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement on *Pornhub.com*. Dani Ploeger (2015).

**WS: Has anyone said: ‘Well, this is just porn—not art’?
If they did, what would your response be?**
DP: Yes, ‘I hope it turned you on.’

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Book Reviews

***Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain and Being* edited by Nicola Shaughnessy**

London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 320, (softback)

By Jessica Beck

Nicola Shaughnessy's book is the first edited collection to directly address cognitive science and performance since Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth's Hart's *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (2006). Aiming to explore the interchange between science and theatre, Shaughnessy's collection promises to 'create bridging discourses, playing within intermediary spaces to explore and conceptualise the creative and critical middle ground in which the work is deliberately situated' (19). While *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science* ultimately delivers in this regard, the connections between each chapter and the focus of the publication is not always clear.

Shaughnessy's general introduction contains a fascinating discussion of Reckless Sleepers' *Schrödinger* (2011), which is intercut with a brief history of the so-called 'cognitive turn' in performance studies. This coupling creates an odd tension, as the analysis of *Schrödinger* would warrant a chapter of its own, consequently the interweaving of both discussions dilutes (rather than enhances) the critical capacity of each. However, what the overall introduction lacks in clarity is reconciled by the introductions to each of the book's four sections, penned by leading voices in the field.

Part One, 'Dances with Science', is introduced by Evelyn B. Tribble and John Sutton and includes chapters discussing partnerships between performance and cognitive science. Tribble and Sutton address ideas such as conceptual blending, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and mirror neurons and their implications for performance. Part Two, 'Touching Texts and Embodied Performance', is introduced by Amy Cook and contains chapters that explore embodied communication in a variety of texts, while Part Three, 'The Multimodal Actor', prefaced by Rhonda Blair, offers insights on how cognitive science can enrich our understanding of many aspects of performance. The introductions by Cook and Blair engage most with the title of the book. Cook's opens with the admission that she struggled with the terms 'cognitive' and 'affect', fearing that the pairing implies 'that they are complementary terms – rather than overlapping theoretical areas' (83). Blair also grapples with affect theory and cognitive science, suggesting that 'Affect' is used to identify dynamic states such as emotions, moods and sensations, depending on the particular context. She goes on to compare affect theory to feminist theory, in her view 'best understood as affect *theories*, a myriad of approaches to studying and understanding flows of affect' (141; my emphasis). This acknowledgement of multiple approaches is useful for researchers navigating the fields of cognitive science and affect theory. Indeed, it serves as an effective reminder that in the field of affective neuroscience there is still no agreement on what constitutes a basic emotion, let alone a definitive list, though popular neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio would lead

us to believe otherwise.

Both Blair and Cook discuss an important theme of the collection : ‘situated cognition’, an approach that ‘views mind in three modalities’ (139). The first is that cognition is embodied, rejecting Cartesian dualism and acknowledging the significance of the body in cognition. Second, there is embedded cognition: an argument that ‘cognition uses the environment’ (both natural and social) (85). Finally, there is extended cognition: ‘the mind leaks out into the world and cognitive activity is distributed across individuals and situations’ (140). The recognition of the role of the environment is significant as it productively challenges the dated computational theory of mind that the brain and mind operate like a computer running software, independent of external stimulus. This idea of situated cognition is also impressive as it opens up cognitive science to theatre practitioners, enabling discussions on topics such as embodiment, kinesthetic experience and tacit knowledge, and features (though not always explicitly) in many of the chapters across all four sections. This is a move that strengthens the book by allowing a trade, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, to operate between both discourses (science and performance) that fruitfully enables the development of a better understanding of each.

Finally, Part Four, ‘Affecting Audiences’, led by Bruce McConachie, interrogates immersive audience spectatorship. McConachie’s fine introduction ‘Spectating as Sandbox Play’ uses enaction, or dynamic systems theory (DST), as well as Jaak Panksepp’s view of emotions, to discuss cognitive dy-

namics of spectating.

Chapters of particular note include John Lutterbie's 'Wayfaring in Everyday Life: The Unravelling of Intricacy' from Part Two, which contains a clear and enlightening overview of dynamic systems theory and his argument that 'gesture does not illustrate or augment the spoken word but is instrumental in the formation of thought and the articulation of discourse' (110). Building further on Lutterbie's ideas - and an excellent example of situated cognition in practice - Neil Utterback's 'Embodied Memory and Extra-Daily Gesture' from Part Three explores two empirical studies with actors exploring gestures and memory that reveal the importance of embodiment to memorisation. Utterbeck concludes that memory 'is not merely the mental activity confined to an isolated brain but a rich interaction of the body within a contextualized world' (152) and defines gesture as a 'holistic embodied and contextualized cognitive process' (154).

In this way, cognitive science is providing researchers and theorists with a remarkable array of new ways to contextualise their work, but what impact does this have for the everyday person? Two chapters in particular represent an exciting phenomenon to emerge from the cognitive turn: how theatre and performance can contribute to the medical profession and improve lives. Gabriele Sofia's chapter 'The Effect of Theatre Training on Cognitive Functions' from Part Three cites a study revealing 'patients with Parkinson's disease who attended theatre workshops showed continual improvement on all clinical scales' (172). Discussing body-schema as 'a non-conscious system of processes that constantly regulate

posture and movement' (175), Sofia asserts that through theatre training it becomes possible to '*embody* a different body schema' (177). Though in early stages research, there is evidence that 'theatre training causes remarkable neuromotor alterations' (179), which has exciting implications for patients who suffer from degenerative diseases.

Concluding Part Four, Melissa Trimingham's chapter 'Touched by Meaning: Haptic Effect in Autism' explores outcomes from The Imagining Autism Project, which produces sensory immersive performances for autistic children between the ages of eight and eleven. Trimingham makes an important point regarding autism and Theory of Mind: 'If we accept the embodied model of cognition, then sensory difficulties are fundamental cognitive issues, impacting on emotion, empathy, imagination – all associated with the triad of impairments in autism. This is because the mind is formed literally by being 'in touch' with the world' (235). Trimingham offers specific examples of how theatrical experiences using touch and interaction help participants make new meanings and understanding of social exchanges, concluding: '[The participants] became aware of the shared cultural and social embeddedness of these objects, in a mutual flow, however brief, where individual consciousness and the extended mind became impossible to distinguish' (240). Discoveries from projects such as Imagining Autism and Sofia's research illustrate the importance (and life-changing potential) of collaboration between performance and science, an inspiring call for more multidisciplinary research. Shaughnessy presents an ambitious anthology; the fact that not every

chapter sits as comfortably as others in this edition may also serve to highlight some of the challenges and complexities we are faced with when attempting to discuss ideas in such a vast arena. Despite this, the ultimate effect is stimulating and the diversity of contributions ensures there is something of value to be found for every student and researcher working in this burgeoning multidisciplinary field, not to mention the ripe ‘real world’ potential that the collection holds.

***Worlds Bodies Matters: Theatre of the Late Twentieth Century* by Valentina Valentini, trans. Thomas Haskell Simpson**

Aberystwyth: Performance Research Books, 2014, 156 pp.
(softback)

By Cara Berger

Valentina Valentini’s *Worlds Bodies Matter* (translated from the Italian by Thomas Haskell Simpson) – kicks off an ambitious new series of Performance Research Books entitled Thinking Through Performance that will feature a selection of publications dealing in critically innovative and interdisciplinary ways with theatre and performance. If Valentini’s book is an example to go by, this series will bring exciting ideas to the contemporary scholarly scene, not only because it will primarily feature translations not yet available to English-speaking readers, but also because it creates a space for methodologically pioneering works that engage in more creative and explorative modes of writing than thesis-driven publications .

In line with the serie's aims, Valentini is less interested in constructing a totalising narrative or 'handy descriptive catalogue' (xv) of theatre at the end of the twentieth century, but is instead more concerned with offering provocations for the reader to take on and develop further. Refusing simply to slot the practices and aesthetics it engages with into theoretical arguments, the presence of critical theory – especially that of the poststructuralist canon – is often more implicitly felt in the writing than explicitly invoked. The advantage of this method is that Valentini is able to consider the haecceity of individual works and oeuvres, in consequence avoiding what Laura Cull has termed the 'problem of application'. Cull warns that applying theoretical standpoints to theatre runs the risk that 'a fixed idea is superimposed upon a pliant example' (21), with the result that performance is positioned as a secondary activity, merely serving the apparently higher pursuit of philosophy. Valentini circumvents this problem throughout as theatre is taken seriously as a mode of thought in its own right.

This does not mean, however, that Valentini's survey is unsystematic or lacking in theoretical pedigree. As she explains in her introduction, her method builds on Michel Foucault's view of historical progression that suggests we see history unfolding over a series of discontinuities. By paying attention to the 'irruption of the singular event that overwhelms sequential temporality' (xvi), Valentini draws a picture of late twentieth-century theatre that is polymorphous, multidirectional and resistant to linear explication through terms such as influence or tradition. Consistent with this rea-

soning, Valentini's discussion of an eclectic group of practitioners ranging from directors such as Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, Carmelo Bene and Robert Wilson, to authors like Sarah Kane and Heiner Müller, and theatre companies including The Wooster Group and Societas Raffaello Sanzio, shows little regard for the logic of time and place. Instead she elaborates upon a series of reflections grouped into three chapters, each shedding light on a thematic or formal feature from various angles: the founding myths of late twentieth-century theatre, the interconnections between theatre and other media spanning visual art, television and cinema, and the relationship between character, body and actor, respectively.

In place of an overarching argument or thesis, the book presents a rhizomatic network of ideas that allows the reader to pursue those most resonant with their own interests and specialisms. Still, some of Valentini's core ideas stand out particularly since they provide original insights relevant to ongoing conversations in the field. Of note is her discussion of what happens to tragedy in the late twentieth-century, which features as a coherent thread through most of the first chapter. Valentini tracks various traces of the tragic, expanding her earlier proposal that Heiner Müller's plays might be understood as being 'tragic without tragedy' (92) into a more wide-ranging assessment of the period. She asserts that the tragic form is replaced by a 'tragic vision of history' (5) that paints the world as disordered, violent and orgiastic. In this Valentini's ideas correspond with Hans-Thies Lehmann's recent thinking on the tragic, in which he

suggests that postdramatic theatre figures 'human existence as essentially transgressive, thus risky, inherently disastrous and potentially self-destructive' (92). However, whereas Lehmann develops a notion of the tragic through the theoretical formulations of thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche and Bataille, Valentini's perspective crystallises through a sustained engagement with diverse theatre practices, with the result that a more nuanced spectrum of tragic manifestations and their residues emerges.

A further point that may be of particular interest is Valentini's in-depth discussion of the interconnections between the theatre and visual art that makes up much of the second chapter and suggests that 'theatre takes on spatial qualities, and visual art assumes temporal ones' (52). Her contemplation of how abstraction figures in theatre, in which she draws on early twentieth-century visual artists including Wassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer as well as later abstract expressionists, is an important argument. Valentini provides a range of imaginative insights, such as her suggestion that Wilson's visual dramaturgy realises, at the end of the twentieth century, the tendency towards abstraction begun earlier in the visual arts, while the emergence of time-based visual arts – including Land Art, *arte povera* and performance art – signal a convergence of theatrical and visual art strategies. Finally, the third chapter focuses in on various configurations of body, actor and character after the dissolution of the humanist understanding of the subject, including discussions of the cyborg and the Deleuzian body without organs that produces new images of the body as a

non-organic organism.

Although Valentini's broad approach does justice to the varied landscape of twentieth century theatre, at times her case studies are treated unevenly, with the effect that some feel lacking in detail. The Wooster Group's *To you the Birdie!* (*Phèdre*) is dealt with in a page-and-a-half, for example, while Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* is summarised at length. More transparency in such decisions would have helped to guide the reader and clarify the purpose of each case study. While occasionally her discussion of well-known practitioners can seem light, what is particularly enjoyable about Valentini's choice of practices is that she draws attention to Italian theatre groups beyond Societas Raffaello Sanzio, that are often overlooked in Anglophone scholarship such as Studio Azzurro, Teatro Valdoca and Rem & Cap. Here, Valentini's fusion of poetic-descriptive and theoretical registers of writing, alongside the excellently selected production photographs that colour the reading of the text they accompany, is especially captivating, leaving the reader longing for more.

Readers seeking an all-encompassing description or coherent narrative of late twentieth-century theatre may be disappointed, as Valentini's mode of writing gleefully throws up more questions than it answers. But in accordance with Valentini's intention to act as a spur to thought, *Worlds Bodies Matters* is a valuable resource for scholars looking for fresh perspectives on theatre at the end of the last century.

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***Performance and Community: Commentary and Case Studies* by Caoimhe McAvinchey**

London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 256 (softback)

By Julie Rada

In the introduction to *Performance and Community*, Caoimhe McAvinchey characterizes the text as a ‘bringing together’ of artists and organisations working somewhere along the spectrum of ‘performance’ and ‘community’ and articulates a desire to give both of these hefty and nebulous terms ‘equal importance’ in the book (1). To this end, McAvinchey frames the book as an inquiry into two primary research questions: first, if in considering the practices of selected artists, possibilities of performance as a social or political act may be revealed and second, if through this examination of performance, the idea of community may be reconfigured. Working through these queries by alternating case studies with interviews, positioning a range of artists and commentators in close proximity to one another, McAvinchey effectively opens up for the

reader a range of insights tied to the similarities and contrasts that emerge between artists working in disparate milieus. In this way, McAvinchey acts as a curator in a gallery, placing snapshots of various artists in the same exhibition, leaving it up to the viewer (or reader) to connect the dots between their shared and different thematics, composition and intent. The combined effect of the contiguous case studies and interviews that comprise this volume result in a thorough, accessible and engaging read for practitioners and scholars alike. The case studies oscillate in scope: zooming out to provide historical overview and context for the artist, zooming in on particular projects to demonstrate working methods and process. The interviews, on the other hand, are primary research with practitioners on the front lines of the field, speaking as reporters from community-based performance settings.

The practitioners profiled in the book are conscious of the limitations of theatre-making as an antidote to oppression and marginalisation. They jointly express the critical inquiry necessary to avoid a well-meaning but ineffectual 'theatre of good intentions,' to quote Dani Snyder-Young, while simultaneously striving to address social concerns. I commend McAvinchey's curatorial prowess in compiling a volume of twelve essays, none of which profess the kind of missionary zeal that can plague applied theatre practice, which sometimes risks drifting into arts-therapy or rehabilitative modes of practice. The authors are careful and responsible in their descriptions. They foreground the quality of the artists' work, making few claims at community interventions, except inasmuch as the art is the intervention itself evidenced notably in

the work of Anna Ledgard and Mark Storer in Chapter 10, or in Ali Campbell's case study of the Lawnmower's Independent Theatre Company, stating simply that 'no professional standard is compromised' in this company comprised mostly of artists with intellectual disabilities (Campbell 77).

Addressing the problem and potential of community, the artists profiled in *Performance and Community* generally eschew notions of community that portray it as simple. By attacking the idea of community as 'an idealized state of all being well with the world,' in the introduction, McAvinchey repeatedly complicates notions of community, driving the conversation more toward complexity, rupture, uncertainty and renegotiation (19). Taking this range of possibilities further, the essays elucidate that for these artists community is highly contingent and temporary, inclusive of difference and exists ephemerally in the service of the creative project at hand: (summed up by Sue Mayo as an almost mathematic equation consisting of the formula: time + space + place = a temporary community bound up in a creative project, converging in a shared purpose) (Mayo 35; 41). While Mayo's writing describes a performance as a 'container' for community and Bobby Baker describes community as a source for 'collective knowledge,' Martin Welton of Common Dance waxes utopic; in an interview with Rosemary Lee, he notes that his work is 'trying to illustrate community, or to reveal what community might mean or could be' (Baker 110; Lee 147). This revelation hints at the aspirational underpinnings of the work of many included in this book: to utilise performance to expand on the possible and to maximise per-

formance as a mode of claiming public space and ‘making visible’ a ‘living process’ of creation (Mayo 219). If anything binds these artists, perhaps it is a politics of celebration as the foundation for community-based practice. Frequently the artists and organisations cite humour and play as modes of unlocking artistic possibilities, such as in Magic Me’s inter-generational rehearsals, in the work of the Lawnmowers, in the dances and installations of Bobby Baker and the London Bubble’s tactic of engaging audiences through ‘inside jokes’ (Mayo 42; Campbell 84, 88; Baker 113-114; Owen 165). This irreverence destabilises hierarchies between professional artist, community member and audience and challenges applied drama practices that attempt to provide answers and solutions to those perceived to be in need. Instead, *Performance and Community* revels in the foibles, failures and achievements of the shared human experience.

Most prescient, McAvinchey notes that ‘practitioners working in these contexts need to be mindful of whether or not the people living, working, or attending these institutions recognise them as communities, or if they wish to be identified in *relation to* (emphasis added) it’ (3). (Emphasising agency, she goes on to characterise community as an active relationship to an idea, set of principles, or project elevates the tangled notion of community above rigid identity politics and further expands upon what is possible, that each individual may uncover potentials not otherwise explored.) A chapter later, Lois Weaver reinforces this idea, noting that in her work she learned that artists did not want to ‘*be* someone else, they wanted to *do* something else’ (31). Essentially,

the 'community' is created in the creative work itself, not because of an extant placement within a particular geography, socio-economic group, or membership of some kind of club. As individuals in a larger system, the creation of a performance piece allows for a commonality of purpose; (making theatre together is the 'doing of something specific' of which social networks and bonds are formed constituting community) (Kuftinec 64).

Given this idea of optional togetherness, of call and response, it is striking that nearly all of the artists and organisations profiled in the book articulate their work as an 'invitation' marked by neighbourliness and generosity. In the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, the authors of 'Social Capital and the Spiral of Silence,' define neighbourliness in terms of the frequency with which people living near each other exchanged or borrowed items, how often individuals visited one another and the frequency with which people assisted with small tasks (Dalisay et al. 327). In this way, neighbourliness is defined by assistance and exchange, evidenced in articles about Magic Me, the Young Vic and Tony Fegan (44; 192; 241). Mojisola Adebayo sums it by re-stating her attitude to participants in her performances: 'I am so glad you're here' (67). In fact, this kind of neighbourliness is imbued in the very form of the book, as a sharing or 'coming together', the profiles of artists nestled alongside each other seem to exchange ideas, help each other out and visit one another. So much so that the reader may glimpse the possibility of one's own membership of this community of practitioners united more by values than geography or a

distinct mode of making.

While acknowledging the strengths of her research, I question McAvinchey's heavy hand in the articles in the book, authoring five of the twelve essays in addition to the introduction. In an edited volume, the (over)presence of McAvinchey's voice evidences her knowledge and enthusiasm for the topic at hand, but limits a paradoxically broadly-titled book that is already restricted to mostly London-based artists. Though she is prolific, for some reason she does not conclude the book; instead it ends rather abruptly with an interview with Paul Heritage. In his final paragraph, he references Lois Weaver, the interviewee of Chapter One and mutual collaborator of McAvinchey, signalling their shared membership in the applied performance field – neighbours in the same small community. Nonetheless, this is not much by way of an ending and, bewildered, I yearned for a conclusion. With such a diverse collection covering a wide swath of ground, the lack of a conclusion seems a missed opportunity to reflect on the progressive insights developed throughout the text and to envisage a generative future of this approach to performance.

This book gestures towards an understanding and celebrating the oeuvre of makers who are diligently working, if only hopefully and pre-figuratively, at making the world a better place. It certainly achieves its professed aims of contributing to the debate of performance in the context of community, social value and aesthetics, privileging the voices of practitioners in this case. Both pragmatic and idealistic, it captures the complexity of this kind of work. Ultimately, *Performance and Community* assumes a hopeful position, acting

as an inquiry into possibilities, predicated on principles of 'intimacy, care, equity, and justice' (McAvinchey 20).

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***Creating Musical Theatre: Conversations with Broadway Directors and Choreographers* by Lyn Cramer**

London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013, 283 pp. (softback)

By Adam Rush

Despite the slow development of musical theatre studies, something Dan Rebellato and Dominic Symonds insist we should no longer lament, there still remains little scholarship detailing, and even less analysing, the creation of commercial musical theatre (3). Through twelve disparate interviews with

leading directors and choreographers, Lyn Cramer's *Creating Musical Theatre* goes some way to fill this gap. Providing a platform for a select group of participants (whom she suggests represent the 'industry') to voice their opinions on their work, Cramer facilitates discussions that provide timely insight into the world of musical theatre practice. By turning the spotlight on the creative teams behind *Mamma Mia!* (1999) and *The Producers* (2001), amongst others, Cramer's interviews provide accessible and stimulating accounts of each participant's career and creative style. The book effectively highlights that although musical theatre may appear brash, thrilling and fun, there are harsh realities underlying the industry. The discussions that it offers provide fascinating insights into the general issues of the industry, such as training and work ethic, as well as providing specific accounts of song development, casting calls and opening nights. In many ways, this book is a charming and informative chat in paperback and is therefore likely to appeal to a variety of readers: researchers, performers, aspiring directors and choreographers, in addition to the general theatregoer.

However, the book is not without its problems. Significantly, the critical frame and intention of *Creating Musical Theatre* is unclear. Consequently, though Cramer's interviews provide detailed 'insight into how these artists work', this information is not developed into a particular argument or surmised to formulate a reflexive conclusion on the broader socio-economic and cultural issues of the industry. As a result, this text may be critically limited and better understood as a work of transmission, rather than analysis.

This approach is not necessarily problematic but, even regarded in this way, *Creating Musical Theatre* still presents difficulties for the reader. Each chapter begins with a headshot and brief biography of each interviewee, yet Cramer does not specify a date or location of the conversation. This lack of key information means that the reader must decipher a time and production framework from the hints provided throughout the interviews—I frequently found myself searching for the dates of certain productions online. This is an eventuality that clearly hinders *Creating Musical Theatre's* efficiency as a research tool. There is also the risk that, in not contextualising the interviews, each participant's comments are granted a timeless quality. This gives rise to the problematic possibility that responses may be read as 'facts' that may be universally applied, rather than a fluid opinion given in response to a particular question produced in a particular context. For instance, those researching *The Book of Mormon* will find the interview with director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw enlightening and stimulating. Yet Nicholaw was not working on *that* musical when he spoke to Cramer. The failure to illuminate this contextual fact means that the particularity of his opinions, in this instance, may be wrongly applied across the entirety of his career - especially to his most famous piece - when cited in the work of future researchers.

Additionally, the thematic framework of this book presents challenges throughout. It is obvious that Cramer has rigorously selected her participants, edited and ordered their interviews, in addition to guiding her respondents towards certain topics throughout the interviews. Similar to the lack

of a critical frame, however, this labour, and the reasoning behind it, goes unacknowledged and unexplained. As such, even if we accept Cramer as an interesting but challenging transmitter, *Creating Musical Theatre* ultimately leaves a central question frustratingly unanswered: why is she transmitting this information and for what purpose?

While I do not wish to present a scathing review, the preceding issues with *Creating Musical Theatre* ultimately cause me to question its academic utility. Further, Cramer's work leads me to wonder whether an academic publication was the most appropriate form for this research to take. The prolonged scrutiny of academic publishing certainly has its benefits but, when interviews are being transcribed without critical follow up, I wonder if such rigor is necessary? As a comparative example, *Broadway.com's YouTube* series, 'Show People with Paul Wontorek', features interviews with performers and creatives about their current work, in a relaxed and light-hearted manner. Although not designed for an educational purpose, Wontorek presents much of the same insight as Cramer without the lengthy publication processes. His interviews are filmed and posted in a matter of days and provide an immediate snapshot of New York's theatre industry, effectively plotting its evolution over time. Many individuals have been interviewed on repeat occasions, thus their opinions remain fluid and determined by their current role. This is not to suggest that Cramer's research should not have been undertaken, I simply wonder whether the academic transcription of these interviews, with little critical consideration, was the most appropriate outcome for her laudable

efforts. As each chapter finished, I was left wondering what next? How do these interviews alter or construct our perception of contemporary musical theatre making? How might these interviews provide a deeper understanding of an industry that is often only visible within a proscenium arch? Ultimately, while the breadth and general appeal of *Creating Musical Theatre* render it an interesting source, its lack of framing and clear intention prevent it from developing further critical utility within this field of study.

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