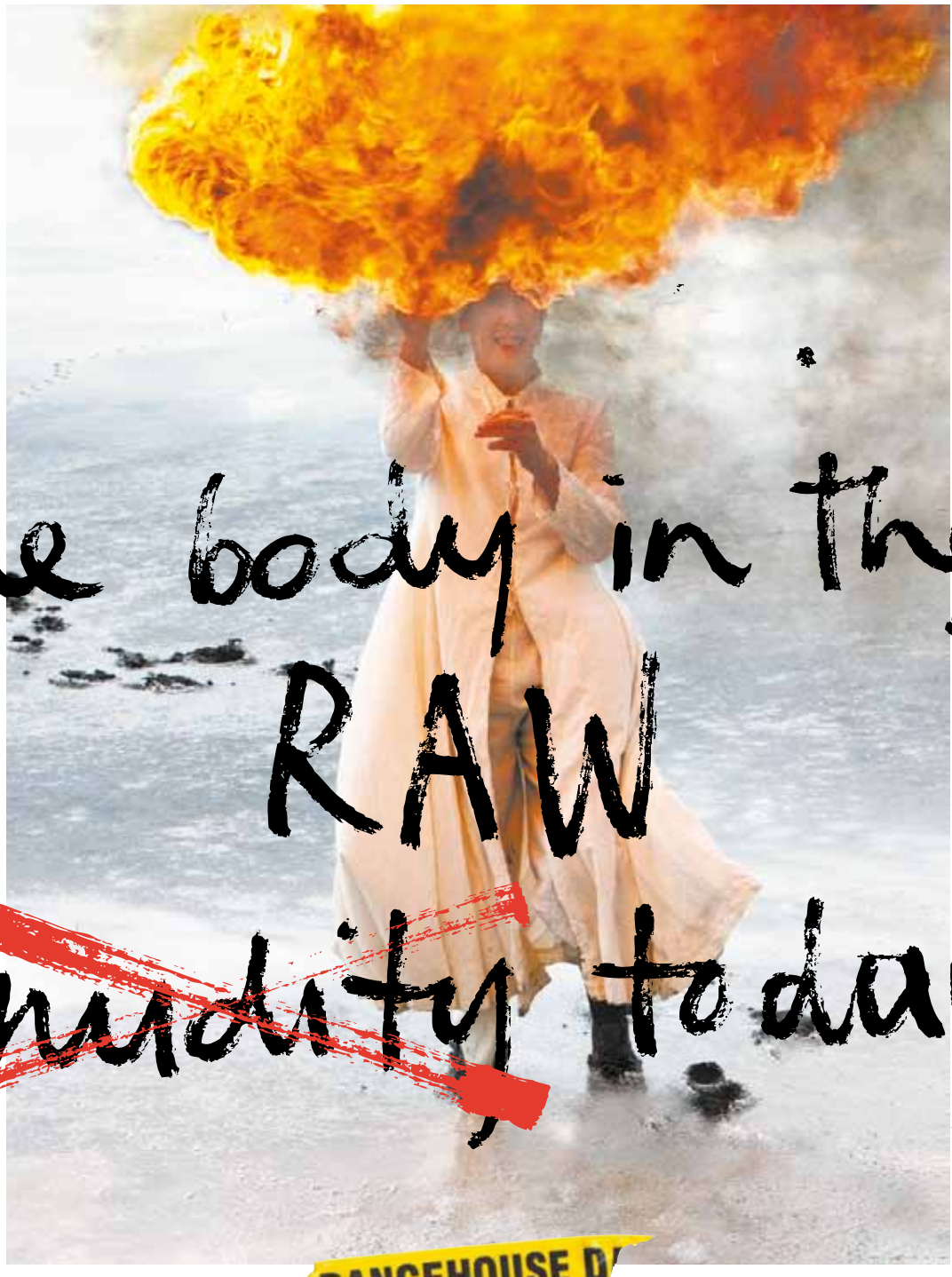
DANCEHOUSE DIARY

ISSUE 6 / 2014



The body in the RAW ~~nudity~~ today

DANCEHOUSE D

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Editorial Board

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What is Dancehouse Diary?

THE DANCEHOUSE DIARY is a free almost quarterly publication published by Dancehouse, Melbourne, Australia. DANCEHOUSE DIARY is a unique dance publication based on discourse, dialogue and connection with other art forms and wider social issues. The DIARY is deeply rooted in Joseph Beuys' reflection on the artist's power to be a social sculptor though movement, action and thought, thus inspiring us to live more creatively. It aims not only to cultivate a taste for dance, but to articulate a most necessary connection of our bodies with our minds, and of how we move and exist in the world and for the world.

More on the Diary and Dancehouse at **www.dancehouse.com.au**

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THE FLESH IS STILL WEAK. SO IS THE MIND.

by Angela Conquet

TARTUFFE
Cover up that bosom, which I can't
Endure to look on.
Things like that offend
Our souls, and fill
our minds with sinful thoughts.

DORINE
Are you so tender to temptation, then,
And has the flesh
such power upon your senses?
I don't know how you get in such a heat;
For my part, I am not so prone to lust,
And I could see you stripped from head to foot, And all your hide not tempt me in the least.

— Molière

THE BODY IN THE RAW. NUDITY NOW scrutinises what a naked body can say today that a clothed body cannot. Let it be said from the outset, this theme was triggered by recent cases of artistic censorship, largely in Australia. While artists have been and are censored for supposedly hurting moral sensibilities in relation to a range of legal offences, such as sedition, blasphemy, obscenity, and defamation, cases of late involving censorship and outrage have all been centred around the nude human body.

So what is it about nudity that provokes such moral panic, especially given the prevalence of (porno)graphic imagery within music and popular culture? Have our social and sexual mores shifted?

In the performing arts, and particularly in dance, nudity has been the stock and trade since the 60s. Back then, if anything ruffled moral feathers, it was not nudity itself but what the body was communicating through its nudity. After more than five decades, we have moved on from its political militant use to a sort of 'ground zero' with respect to nudity, more concerned with a highly conceptualised un-gendered un-sexualised bareness, rather than political statement. We could even speak of geo-ethics of nudity (cf. feature article); and we have long forgotten Courbet's *Origine du Monde*. There is one aspect that has never shifted however – the nude body, when (re)presented in the public domain, is exclusively a question of the viewer's gaze.

There is a clear distinction between nudity and nakedness. Nudity is a kind of performed nakedness. Nudity is less corporeal than representational, inasmuch as it is a vehicle of signification imposed upon the body's reality (bare nakedness). This is what brings spectatorship to the foreground in these matters. What the eyes of the beholder do is another story.

From the naked body to pornography, there is only a very fine line, particularly when our time has no time for nuance. Pornography is, of course, not new. But what is new is how easy it has become to access it. It is so accessible that there is no weapon more powerful to the advertiser's arsenal than fantasised bodies (and desires) inspired by porn imagery. One might wonder how some American Apparel ads were not met with the same indignation as Bill Henson's pictures? It only proves that the naked body as depicted by porn undoubtedly shapes our sexual imaginations, expectations and practices, and insinuates itself into even the dullest of minds.

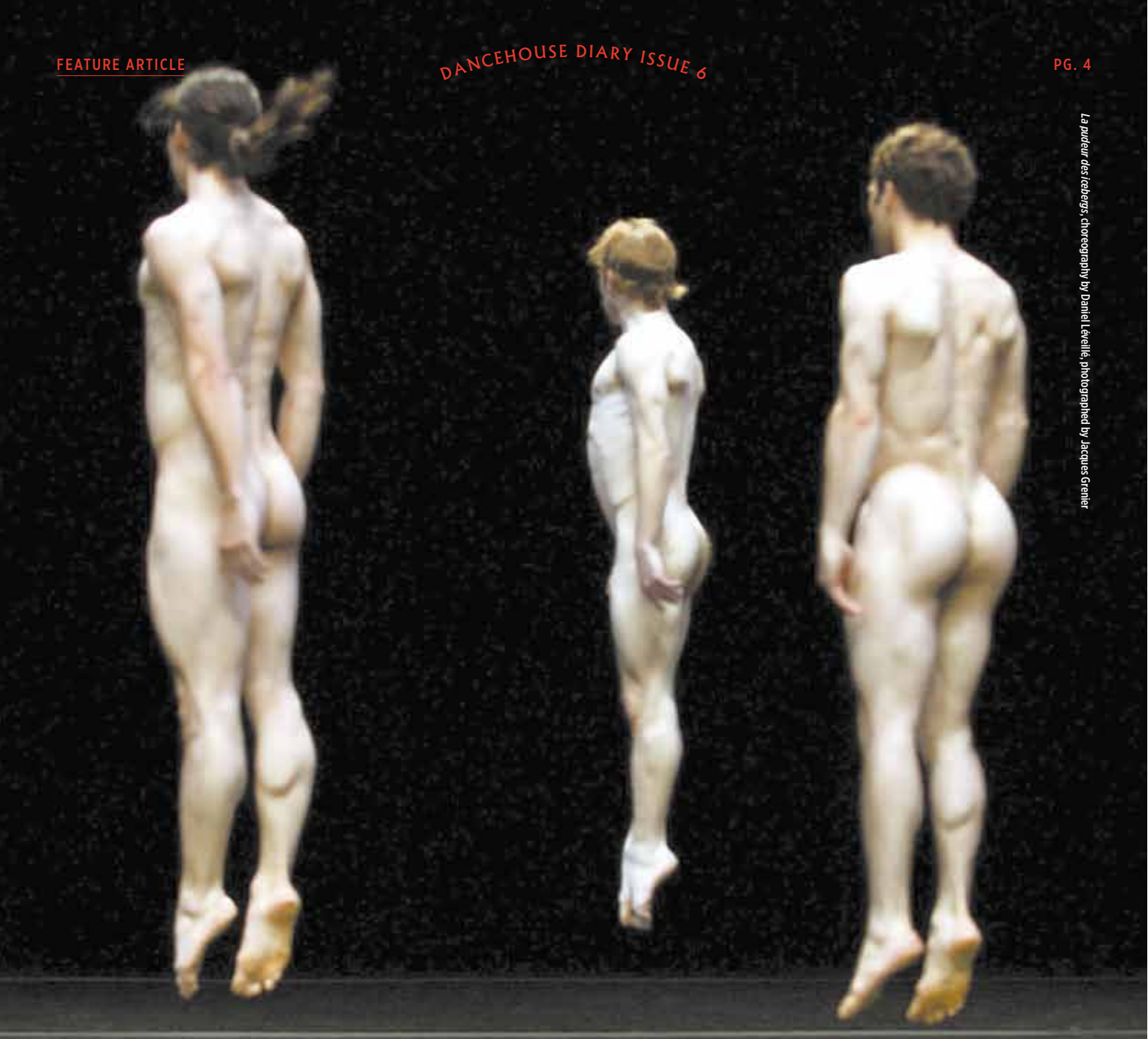
Nevertheless, nudity in art, be it on canvas or live, has a purpose and a meaning. There are things that simply cannot be said with a clothed body. The naked body externalises what its membrane hides, it is a deliberate pose, presentation or distortion. Art acts as a mirror of the culture that produces it, and if this mirror depicts less than orthodox images of the body, this is merely a reflection of our times.

What is wrong then? Has our level of tolerance shifted? Are we going back to the times of suppression and demonization of sex and sexuality that the Judaeo-Christian view of the body imposed on us? Is the freedom of art and the artist under threat by some pseudo-prudish, hypocritical arbiters of what is good and what is wrong? And instead of being outraged by outrageous ads plastered on massive billboards, we are more concerned with how Paul Yore's or Bill Henson's art may inspire or legitimise paedophilic drives? Read Alice Heyward's article (one of Henson's models) and you will see we are so far from the unwilling unknowing 'victim' model. Perhaps the inflammatory debates related to questions of ethics and morality in the arts should not be left to the public regulator alone.

We all know we are at odds with the bodies we have. We are constantly dreaming of reshaping our bums and tums. This may translate into bodily dissatisfaction, even body hatred. We are the ones drenching the images or representations of the naked body with erotic associations and the like. This is the power of the beholder's gaze....

Whichever way we look at the body, clothed or not, it is a social and political construction governed and shaped by myriad behaviours, contexts and...hypocrisy. The flesh has always been weak. The mind shouldn't be. Let us be smart and creative enough to not allow public moralism into the terrain of the arts.

Angela Conquet is the Artistic Director of Dancehouse.



La pudeur des icebergs, choreography by Daniel Léveillé, photographed by Jacques Grenier

NUDITY AND FIGURES OF TRANSGRESSION AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

by Roland Huesca

Translated by Frida Komesaroff

The time has com
for the multiple,
and the movi

In the 90s naked dancers newly visible created as yet unheard of ways of living and feeling the body: sensitively, they offered a different kind of story where nudity, far from incarnating an ideal, appeared instead to propose a new sensory order.

Transgressing "good form"

1998: *Self-Xavier Unfinished*, by Xavier Le Roy. The artist, nude, twists and turns on the stage, from back to front, contorting himself into bizarre shapes where his face and his sex always remain hidden. Columnist Marie-Christine Vernay expressed her surprise in the French newspaper *Libération*:"the spectator is drawn into a constant back and forth between the unknown and the recognisable, the strange and the familiar."[1] At once confounding and resisting conventional perceptions and readings of human identity, this dis-figured body distinguishes itself from usual representations of human corporality. Through his numerous metamorphoses, the artist enables the audience to discover a new imaginary, unfettered by norms imposed by a tradition which saw the Nude as a privileged mode of appearing. This artist, a virtuoso of the strange, has invented new visibilities and as yet unheard of ways of living and feeling the body: sensitively offering a different kind of story where nudity, far from incarnating an ideal, seems instead to propose a new sensory order. On stage, there are only clear or obscure masses and lines put in motion by variations in tension and force. Limbs and torso seem to fuse, become disconnected and then to reconnect differently.

When discussing his work, Xavier Le Roy doesn't hide the influence that knowledge of the theory and techniques of visual art has had on his work. In particular, he borrows from the processes of Laurent Goldring, a photographer and video artist with whom he has collaborated, through posing nude for him.[2] Goldring is a lover of philosophy and art history and has carried out his research in conversation with the philosophers and literary figures who have inspired him. Among them were Gilles Deleuze and especially his writings on cinema, and the paintings of Francis Bacon. What did he learn from Deleuze's work? The idea that one can rid oneself of the tyranny of representation and its endless *mises-en-scene* which always take as their motif conventional representations of the human. Following the advice of the visual artist, the dancer perceives his body as a plastic entity, which can be constructed and deconstructed.

The challenge set by these two artists seems to be to deform the body in order to see it in a new way. Troubling the most orthodox logic of the visible, their work questions the ontological status of the image: what is it about the figure of man and his multiple symbolic arrangements and rearrangements? Prophesying the coming of the 'Superman', Nietzsche had distanced himself more and more from traditional and anthropocentric representations of the human and the world. In their own way, Gilles Deleuze or even Jean-Francois Lyotard took on this idea under the banner of the '*figure*' and '*figural*'. The idea? To escape representation, narration and clearly understandable (predictable) forms, in order to better highlight the powerful place silence holds in the visible. The *figural* form is thus the "wrong form"[3]: an event or becoming which "opens a space and a time of vertigo [not] attached to its context or to its perceptive environment"[4]. In that universe there are no predictions, no preconceptions; only the acknowledgement of an appearing or an apparition, which refuses the most conformist aspects to propose instead a new sensory order. Once the received frames in which ideal and unequivocal images of corporality are enclosed are transgressed, the time has come for the multiple, the unstable and the moving.

Borders and gender

1995: Jerome Bel plays with ambiguity: "There's this scene where she puts her hair on his head and he becomes a woman and then she puts her hair under his arms and he becomes masculine"[5]. Where lies within us the border with the other sex? Of course, formed by corporeal practices, which avoid neither grace, nor curves, nor fluidity, this dancer willingly plays the feminine part coiled inside him. But the one who was carefully refining the body in the solitary asceticism of the studio now comes on stage**.**

This blurring of codes overturns the norm to better allow us to question the hidden secrets of a skin, which we thought familiar, but whose shadowy regions continue to haunt us. Posing the question of the border, the referent of identity gives up its status as 'given' in order to become an enduring problem. On the stage, sexual identity whose borders have become porous, no longer responds to an essentialist or naturalistic gaze, but poses the very question of gender. Man, woman, even at the border one must *belong* – a highly historicised concept dictated by the construction of the social. This work takes aim at the systems for representing the world in binary form, linked to normative powers. Thus, the elements constituting sexuality can no longer be distilled into monolithic meanings. Not tied to a logic of the referent, ambiguity upsets those biological and anatomical necessities traditionally linked with sex. Navigating these troubled waters, this use of the body invites us to rethink the frontiers of difference as an essential aspect of the construction of each person; and to bring these frontiers to the very centre of our reflection.

Twentieth Century art often dealt with the nomadic aspect of sexual configurations. In 1995, the exhibition 'Femininmasculin: the Sex of Art' held at the Pompidou Centre in Paris bore witness to a school of thought linking the labile world of sexuality with the very nature of the artistic field. Through numerous artworks, the public could perceive how artists have explored the territory of the body, exploring its shared dualities: Jeanne Dunning (1988), for example, framing the faces of women wearing a thin moustache; or Jana Sterbak (1993) photographing a female bust, a simple, transparent t-shirt unveiling amply curved breasts; however, as with a man's chest, hairs cover the diaphanous cloth. Both sexes cohabiting the same paradigm. According to Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé, the curators of the exhibition, since the end of the Twentieth Century (and following Marcel Duchamp), artists of the young generation have been very sensitive to this way of unsettling the traditional polarities of masculine and feminine.[6] In their works, they have enjoyed showing the fictitious nature of an arrested sexual identity.

In a reality without thought, without truth, without God, and ever more subject to dispersion, one must teach oneself about that which seems only to be a remainder, an avatar of exteriority.

Desexualising pleasure

1998: *Good Boy*. Alain Buffard, seen from behind, bends forward. Bit by bit, the audience discovers a mass of flesh where thighs and calves play together. This body, without tail or head, cultivates another presence – it casts aside the most habitual allegories of the human. On the stage there is just a pile of flesh; no face, no torso, no features. Under the pale wash of neon lights, the choreographer explores a new physical register; he undergoes metamorphosis, dismisses his earlier state. Light slides across his hairless skin, and movement creeps in. In this mix of shadows and glare, the gestural gives life to forms. The space between the thighs opens, creating a slit. Exploring, a fist, then the upper arm, enters the rift. A strange protuberance, the form that is taking shape, travels into this gap. Little by little, the orifice and the limb arrange the action. Slowly, the fist opens, searching for contact. The thigh shifts towards the offered hand to begin a story of skin and mutual light touchings. Under the spell of these brushing movements, shapes form and deform, continuously creating new anatomies. In this journey, where he who touches wants to be touched, the hand slides, emotion grows. Sensitively, this dance dissolves the conventional and recognisable forms of pleasure. With tact, it displaces them, suspends them so as to find them a way to exist somewhere else, somewhere less acceptable. The choreographer explains that the flesh thus becomes a place "open to the circulation and the multiple bodies of the sexual."[7] Caressing himself, reinventing himself and re-eroticising himself over and over again, the artist plunges the audience into a disturbing body-to-body experience, rich in sensations and sensualities.

Of course, until now the choreographic universe has left the door open to Eros, dance always being a universe which lends itself easily to carnal fantasies. Suggestive movement of the pelvis or spreading of the thighs draws attention to the spaces where we like to lose ourselves in pleasure. Sometimes, portrayals of attraction are explicit. In 1912, the *Faun* by Vaslav Najinsky, feigning masturbation, offended Gaston Calmette. In 1998, in *Manureva*, Laure Bonicel had a nude performer masturbate on stage with a sock. But, whether engraved or in relief, these figures of the body were always referencing genitality. Without, however, dismissing such pulsional and erotic dynamics, Alain Buffard changes their forms. With great awareness, he invents movements by finding surfaces and discovering configurations and intensities not usually covered by the conventional instances of sex. But which and why?

Stroking himself, the homosexual artist turns over a new leaf. His gesture rids him of the old rags of the normative. This use of himself aims to subvert the traditional powers intertwined with questions of politics or desire. Evading the norms of sexuality, he seeks to keep at a distance the values of a power incarnated in the figure of the heterosexual man who makes of sex alone the paradigm of all possible relationships. At this point, the works echo the writings of Michel Foucault, the choreographer's favoured author. The importance placed on the body and the homosexuality of the two men create an environment conducive to a meeting between the ideas of *The History of Sexuality* and an act of choreography. The slogan? "Desexualising pleasure". In his work, the historian and philosopher launched his campaign, saying, "we must free ourselves from a demanding sex"[8]. In order to foil power, the author suggested deconstructing the uses and representations of the body from a politico-sexual point of view. For the choreographer, shifting sensual attention towards various neglected zones of the body, creating dissonances, gaps and excesses of feeling in the monolithic significations of gender, composing new, as yet unimagined, possibilities for pleasure, become the modes of resolutely creative research. Through these creations is born the hope that new ways of being will appear – ones that are still today suppressed by the domination of the heteronormative, which supports oppression by making it seem natural. Here and there, both philosopher and artist politicise the body in order to better question it**.** They deny the knowledge and modes of access to the certitudes linked to it: what is the reality of sex if it is not the discursive modalities trapped in the sociohistorical structures which organise it and make sense of it? It's time for 'queer' – This way of life invented by gay culture announcing publicly its disagreements with dominant culture and engendering relationships which do not fit into received cultural forms. Or at least, here, given presence, the enchanted face of its desire.

These plays on the body are far from the classical understanding of the 'Nude' as an incarnation of beauty. Instead, they have aimed no higher than the sensory. They are conceptual but, on the surface, they have testified to a humanity continually built and transformed by experience. In the folds of the body they have created a visible presence whose contours produce an enigma, unsettling prejudices, preconceptions and givens. The 21st Century will produce other forms of engagement among them, postfeminism, eroticism and sensuality. In that world, women will invade the stage. But that will be a whole other story!

Roland Huesca is professor at the University of Lorraine, France and head of the MA degree 'Aesthetics, arts and sociology of culture'. His research is focused on history and aesthetics of live art, on the body and its live embodiments. He has written several papers on nudity in dance and is currently preparing a book on this subject to be published later this year. Most recently, he has published *Dance, art and Modernity* (PUF, 2012).

Footnotes:

1 Marie-Christine Vernay, « Tours, au plus près du corps », *Libération*, 12 et 13 juin 1999.

2 Just like choreographers Maria Donata d'Urzo, Saskia Hölbling and Benoît Lachambre

3 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours et figures*, 1971, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, p. 277.

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *idem,* p. 135.

5 Interview with Jérôme Bel, 12 July 2001.

6 Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé, « Ouverture », in *Féminin masculin : Le sexe de l'art*, Paris, Gallimard/Electra Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995, p. 11.

7 Interview with Alain Buffard Selooua Boulbina and Sabine Prokhoris, *Vacarme*, n°7, janvier 1999, p. 92-95.

8 Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir, Histoire de la sexualité*, volume 1, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 208.

THE BODY IN THE RAW

by Nebahat Erpolat

The body veiled or unveiled is humanity's most ancient vehicle for creating a language that moves and shapes the world we live in. To whom does this body belong? Does it belong to me or to science, to religion, to the state, to the family or to art institutions and audiences? My body, strong, vulnerable, capable and yet limited, is my canvas to create my works. So, how do I see my naked body? What do I think of nudity in art, dance and performance? It is dangerous to dismiss the body in the raw or nudity within dance. Is it our responsibility as choreographers, dancers and artists to make explicit the body in a world that is manically charged with fear?

When writing about the body and nudity in the context of performance, dance and art, one needs to take into account historical culture, religion, ideology, science and the inherent complexities in these constructed concepts which shift in time yet almost always serve a dominant power structure. Any body politics must also speak about the body's materiality and its social and discursive construction.

In 2009, having participating in Ibrahim Quarishi's workshop in Censorship, Sexuality & Extremities in Impulstanz (Vienna), I began to see differences between Europe and Australia with respect to nudity in dance. Nudity is far more present, in workshops, on stage, and in dance generally in Europe when compared with the Australian dance scene. Stripping dance to the bare body itself, removes the unessential. This pricks me awake; it is as if bodies become piercing elements, like a spear. This rupture, stirs feelings through my own body, a body that exists and serves, based on codes and language. But even though history happens in the body, when watching naked bodies before me, that history falls silent and then the incredible happens; the mystery of the 'bodily present' becomes explicit, which in turn enables a re-writing of history, ours and future generations to come.

I must admit, I was weary of the 'hipster nudity' termed by cynics, a phenomenon that has taken hold of Europe. However, after watching so many different performances, (without judging the works as 'bad' or 'good') it seems to me that the naked body in dance is linked more to its complex past, history and cultures than to the fads and trends of contemporary Europe.

The dance works that I viewed had various national origins and different aesthetic and political concerns. They were created by artists coming from different cultures and countries, with sometimes conflicting agendas, antagonistic views of the body or divergent styles. Hence, underlying these differences were the evident reductionism of theatrics and the presence of the bare, naked body.

Which brings me to question; is the body marginalised in our Western culture? And, if so, does this make dance an inherently subversive art form? The marginality of dance itself as an art form in the west, when compared with painting, sculpture, photography, orchestral music, opera, film and literature, suggests this is so. In Western culture, the fact that the 'classical body and the youthful body' are still revered (Ballet & Modern Dance), suggests that the use of the body in dance itself is not transgressive.

Nudity in dance can therefore only be subversive when it uses the naked body to question and expose the construction of the body in the culture. By doing this, dance can then draw attention to itself as an art form, a medium able to provoke powerful change.

One cannot also discuss body politics without raising the implications for a feminist body politics, for dance, performance art, live art and other body arts discipline. The naked body in dance therefore is able to provide a radical site for cultural and feminist politics. Thus, nudity in dance can attempt to question the identities of the gendered bodies as being socially inscribed and discursively produced.

Dancers, choreographers and cultural curators can engage in the challenging task that questions origins and ideological functions of nudity in art and in dance and work towards a non-patriarchal expression of gender and the body. As Merleau-Ponty suggests in 'The Phenomenology of Perception on the body in its sexual being', the body is a 'historical idea' and not a natural phenomenon as such. Such strategies for intervention challenge representation and can address the construction of gender in the work itself.

The emergence of contemporary choreographers, whose work denies theatrics, brings them closer to the art form of performance art, where on stage we see the 'explicit body'. This makes a new dance emerge, one that marks the body as an open wound and complicates dance as problematic.

In the 1960s, the American avant-garde dance movement led by innovators such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown (just to name a few), had reclaimed the dancing body as utopian and a democratic process. Today, choreographers such as Jerome Bel, Boris Charmatz, La Ribot and Meg Stuart, insist on the presence of the body, the explicit body in its raw naked flesh which is open, marked and consumed, reflecting the current times we live in.

Nebahat Erpolat is a Berlin & Melbourne based choreographer and performance artist who intersects various movement forms, both traditional and contemporary.

Nebahat was born in Melbourne Australia and has a B.A in Political Science (1994-Montclair NJ/USA, 1995-Melb) and a Masters Qualifying in Research in Gender Studies at Monash University (1999-2000) and draws theoretically from her experiential training in Somatic Psychotherapy (2002 Australian College of Contemporary Somatic Psychotherapy (A.C.C.S.P).

An independent choreographer, performer and writer, she creates works and projects in cross-disciplinary art forms encompassing film, photography, ecological, site-specific performance art, Installation, neo-Cabaret and dance movement: intersecting sound, film, voice, narrative and text.

Read More:

Amelia Jones (ed), *The Feminism And Visual Culture* Reader, Routledge, 2005

Lea Vergine, *Body Art And Performance – The Body as Language*, Skira Editore S.p.A, 2007

Andre Lepecki, *Skin Body and Presence in Contemporary European Choreography*.

'Dancing the sublime' Raimund Hoghe in conversation with Bonnie Marranhca. PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art, May/2010.

A.D Coleman, *Critical Focus – Photography in the International Image Community*, Nazraeli Press,1996

Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut (eds), *Contemporary Choreography A Critical Reader,* Routledge Press, 2009

nudity in dance can only be subversive when it ~~is used~~ uses the naked body to question and expose the construction of the body in culture

What can a naked body say today that a clothed body cannot, aesthetically, politically, socially?

Bodies are leaking, bleeding, sweating, shitting, pissing bags of bones and guts. Even the most beautiful bodies are so. We loathe them.

— Maude Davey

Maude Davey

The terrible risk of nakedness is that the public gaze will reflect me back to myself as loathsome – as loathsome as, on my worst days, I believe myself to be.

You look at me naked and at first all you can see is that I am naked. Your mind flicks between what you expect of nudity – porn images, the naked bodies you know, the naked bodies you imagine – and what you are seeing. That makes you uncomfortable, and it makes me uncomfortable because my body is necessarily different from the images in your mind.

But quite soon you stop seeing me naked and you begin to see me. My nakedness has been incorporated into your conception of 'normal' and you don't look at it anymore. It doesn't matter anymore. I'm not an object anymore, I'm a person. And then my body can speak.

We talk about being 'comfortable in our own skin'.
We are not comfortable in our skins, we are supremely uncomfortable about living in our fleshy bodies, which are mortal, which are imperfect, which are surrounded by and rubbing up against so many other mortal and imperfect bodies.

Bodies are leaking, bleeding, sweating, shitting, pissing bags of bones and guts. Even the most beautiful bodies are so. We loathe them. The flesh is weak. At one level we experience our bodies as the source and cause of impending death and putrefaction. Yet our bodies are also the source and cause of everything that is most delightful. A soft breeze on a hot day, swimming in a clear ocean, food, sex, wine, laughter...

The body speaks with directness, without disguise, without artifice. It speaks of vulnerability and of power, of pleasure and suffering, of innocence and knowingness. It tells the truth. It cannot do otherwise.

In the 90s, **Maude Davey** performed in the Gay and Lesbian cabaret scene in Melbourne, prefiguring the resurgence of cabaret as a mainstream art-form in the early 2000s. As one of the core performers in Finucane & Smith's genre-busting *The Burlesque Hour*, Maude Davey has helped to set the standard for edgy, political, provocative and sexy salon performance in Australia and internationally.

Her work is about the extraordinary in the ordinary, the incredible beauty to be found in the truth of skin and flesh and life. In Maude's work, nudity is not an end. It is only a beginning, a launching-off point for a real and intelligent exploration of desire, frailty, sex and gender.

Jill Orr

The 1970s in Australia - and a little earlier elsewhere - was a time of radical protest, calling for equal rights for women, the end of racial discrimination, acknowledgement of indigenous populations as the land's first peoples, the emergence of the environmental movement and the end of the Vietnam war (for which conscription was compulsory in Australia). Ending conscription was achieved by a change of government. The remainder are still works in progress. The passage of time has seen artists working with nudity as a powerful political tool by which the body has its own agency. The naked body has proven to have a powerful resonance when addressing these issues of concern.

As a feminist artist, some of my early work did not sit easily with some feminists who were concerned that the naked female body was pandering to the male gaze. Nudity for me at that time, 1978, was ultimately an aesthetic concern, albeit layered with political nuance. Logically, had all women artists taken the stance to shelter from the gaze, there would have been a continued absence of the naked female body speaking to the issues of concern to them. Who can speak for whom?

From the late 1980s and 1990s, the time of visibility politics had gathered momentum. For example, nudity became part of queer culture, where the visibility of the HIV epidemic was both a memorial of those lost through AIDS and an affirmation of gay pride. This simultaneously became an education in safe sexual practices that is now embraced across an increasing number of cultures.

In 2014, the socio-political and cultural environment is much more complex. Identities are fluid and felt across global media platforms. Identities are not necessarily in competition with each other, but they share simultaneous existence within the one overarching cultural sphere - that could be seen as global economics. Within this sphere is the neo liberalist presence whose censorship, fear, repression and commerce-at-all-costs is countered by activisms of all kinds.

Where is nudity now? I think that it is part of a move to strip back layers of cultural baggage, in the knowledge that we are life infused bodies first and foremost, but we are always beings in relation to technology, politics, gender, race and religion. The bare truth, what ever that may mean, can be glimpsed in the performance of the naked body. It has its own powerful communication which goes straight to the bone, or – should I say? – the heart of the matter!

Jill Orr is a guest editor for this issue (see biography on page 2).

The flesh is weak

Atlanta Eke

Obvious as it may seem, it never ceases to amaze me how distinctly unique each and every individual body is in this world. I think it is funny when we choose clothes as the means to express our individuality, even though Nike does let us pick and design the colour of our very own special kicks. Whether it is dressing with discretion or distinction, clothing is what potentially homogenises us the most.

The naked body has been a common condition of dance performances for decades. Even though nakedness has now become another kind of costume in its every iteration, there is a guaranteed glimmer of inimitability. I have chosen to perform naked in the past because my body is how I exist in the world. When it works for the piece I perform naked to produce the possibility for the reality of my existence, with all the subtleties in the physicality of my dancing body, to occupy a space that is outside of a culture which renounces the truth of the female body in favour of male fantasy.

Atlanta Eke is an Australian artist with interests in dance and choreography in an expanded field. Educated at Deakin University, Atlanta has been a performer and creator presenting her experimental work since 2003 throughout Australia and Europe in a variety of formats. She has worked with artists such as Xavier Le Roy, Ros Warby, Tim Darbyshire and Lucy Guerin among others.

Daniel Léveillé

There is no nudity in dance, theatre or cinema, there are nudities. Similarly, in media or advertising there are nudities. This can be highly justified and relevant or quite the contrary, completely gratuitous or mercantile. Use of nudity is always intimately linked to a certain given time or culture.

Let us remember that when Isadora Duncan emerged on stage with no pointes, no bra and clothed in a translucent robe, the shock was then as strong as fully disclosed and displayed nudity today.

At the end of his life, Michelangelo was offered to paint the wall behind the Sistine Chapel altar. Twenty years after he had finalised the ceiling (colossal work) he decided to paint The Last Judgement and he imagined that when man would appear in front of God, he would be naked. This incredible fresco depicted some hundred naked characters. However, the then Pope and some of his cardinals, encountering unbearable difficulty concentrating on their prayers while facing this fresco (which was more fit, according to them, for the public baths or a brothel rather than one of the holiest places of Christianity) ordered that the bodies be (slightly) clothed. After Michelangelo's death (they didn't dare to offend him while he was alive) one of his close collaborators accepted the job to throw some clothes on this orgy of naked bodies, hoping to curtail the troubles. It is this 'pristine' version that is still in place today.

As an artist, I use nudity in a very similar way to Michelangelo. Nudity on stage, when used with no hidden messages or sexual nuances, glorifies the body, makes it superhuman in a way, takes it closer to God and by doing this, renders it more fragile. My first responsibility as a choreographer is to draw space with the body. Clothing a body is sexualising it. It is being in a seductive mode. Apart from the fact that they protect us from cold, clothes bring the best of ourselves since we choose them in order to conceal imperfections. Clothes embellish reality, and it is in that sense that they seduce. Nudity is truth and this can be confronting. "What you see is what you get". One of the main goals in using nudity is the search of truth, beauty (in its original meaning, the human body is part of nature) and also the unravelling of the incredible complexity and extreme frailty of the human body. Nudity amplifies the feeling of freedom, the array of possibilities and therefore its use is profoundly political and undoubtedly a vehicle for social impact.

I was often asked if it would be appropriate to bring young children to my shows containing nudity and my answer has always been the same: I see no problem with this since, I do not investigate any sexual connotations or references in my shows. At the very worst, what can happen once they have seen the show and are back home is they strip naked, and start to jump, run or dance all over the place. One can imagine worse.

Daniel Léveillé is a Canadian choreographer based in Quebec. Many of his works tackle eroticism, marginalised sexuality and explosive passion. Some of his most recent works *La pudeur des icebergs*(2004) and *Crépuscule des océans* (2007), which form, with *Amour, acide et noix*, a trilogy titled "Anatomy of the imperfection" received huge public acclaimed and toured all over the world including the Dance Venice Biennale in 2010.

www.danielleveilledanse.org

Deborah Hay

o beautiful was choreographed in 2002. That winter, I commissioned Laura Canon, a young costumer from Austin TX, to design an outfit inspired by the film *Blade Runner*. I was distraught by the state of affairs in the world.

In January 2003, I had my first public performances of *o beautiful* at Zodiak Center for New Dance in Helsinki, Finland, and at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY. Following these performances, I decided against the post apocalyptic attire because of how it influenced my movement and colored my behaviour onstage. I found a simple pair of pale blue linen pants and a matching tailored shirt to wear instead.

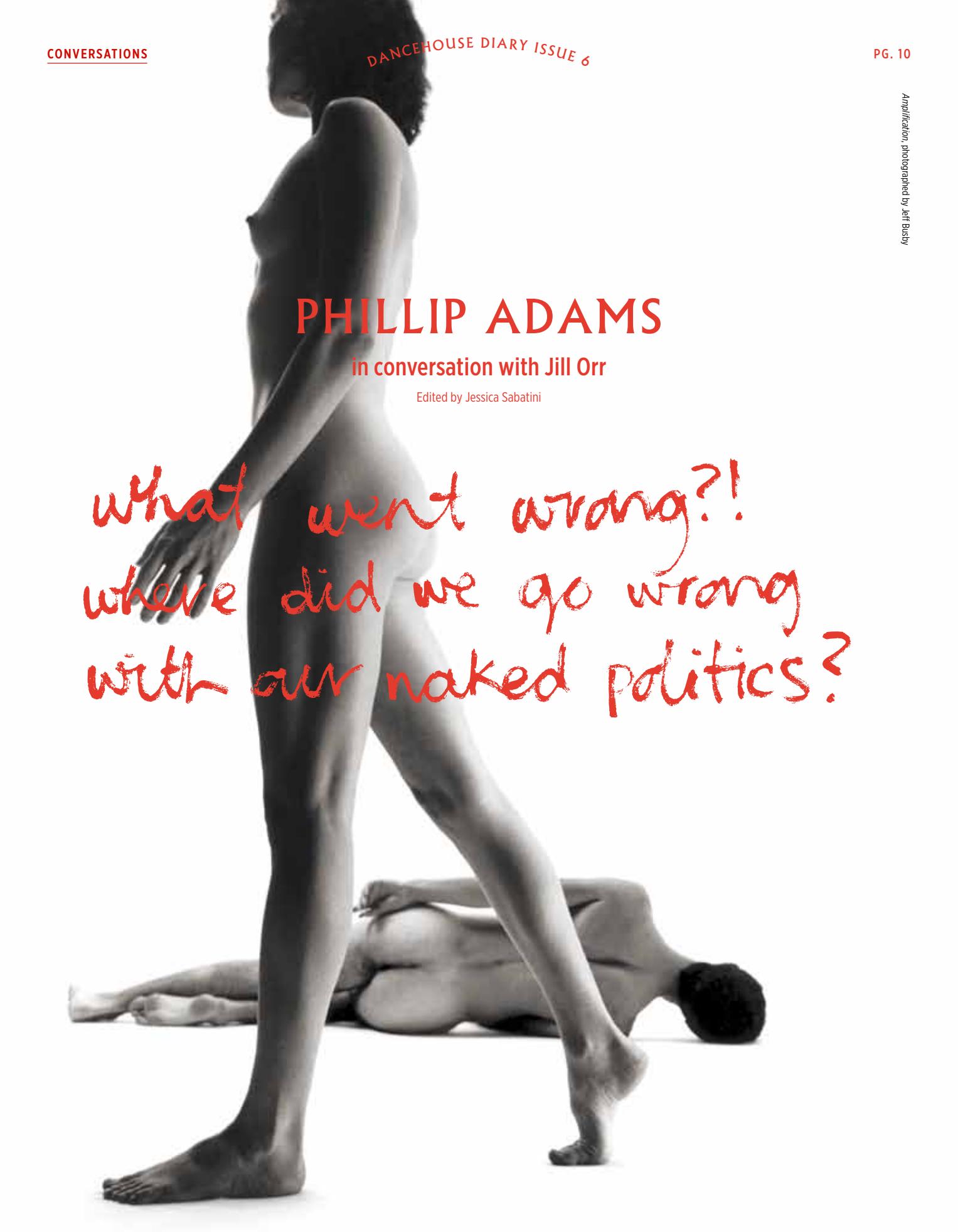
My solo adaptation practice of *o beautiful* continued through early summer in Austin, where temperatures rose into the 90s. I made a point of not turning on the air conditioner in the studio, because I was not paying rent. My arrangement with the proprietor was an exchange of practice space for acknowledging his support in my dance programs and newsletters. The studio was a large room among a suite of smaller massage cubicles above a downtown bicycle shop. One morning, I stripped off my clothing and danced. My body felt animal and my movement naked. It was as if I were in the most pristine environment imaginable. Nudity seemed the only conceivable option for *o beautiful*. I changed the title to *Beauty*.

The London program, in July 2003, began with my solo *Music*. After intermission, clothed in blue linen, I approached the audience and invited a volunteer to the stage. Speaking quietly, I asked if she would follow and undress me upstage and then return to her seat. She proceeded like a mother removing and folding the garments of a much loved child. *Beauty* was performed only once, at the Greenwich Dance Agency in London, England. It was such a quintessentially satisfying experience, for me, that I knew I would not perform again. Never before or since has such a clear single-minded decision followed any performance of my work.

Excerpts from *A Lecture on the Performance of Beauty*, 2004
Choreography, performance and text by **Deborah Hay**

See:

Deborah Hay will present a performative lecture *a continuity of discontinuity* on **March 7, 2014** at Dancehouse.



Amplification, photographed by Jeff Busby

PHILLIP ADAMS

in conversation with Jill Orr

Edited by Jessica Sabatini

JO: Your pieces don't seem to be about the sensationalism of nudity at all. There's a much deeper enquiry there.

PA: To make sense of it, we would need to look into my explorations of ritual. Both ritual and nudity are a shedding of excess and presenting yourself to the spectator without the desires we bring to performance. ...How does the audience now prepare itself to be present, as much as the performer prepares to be in front of the audience? There is an exchange there.

JO: This reminds me of that performance you did at the MTC (Melbourne Theatre Company) with a naked audience (*And All Things Return to Nature Tomorrow*) – what happened? I thought that was such a brave, courageous and quite profound thing!

PA: It was born out of my research into phenomena. The esoteric, out of space, and the alien. I researched where I could feel comfortable exploring this, and settled on the South-Western desert of America. Things happen in the desert, do you agree with that?

JO: Yes. Since time immemorial, the desert has been where you are stripped bare to your essential, minimal self.

PA: Why is it that these Utopian desires that sprang up in the sixties and seventies – cults, activists, architectures that contributed to the alternative lifestyles and collective communities in reaction against Western culture – had a sense of liberation? And no boundaries around nakedness? The hippie movement stemmed from the radicalism to reject Americana at the time.

JO: And consumerism.

PA: Yes. I think the desert is a place we 'go back' to. Doing my research out there, I worked out that my feeling comfortable to move my physical body into a visual body is actually related to allowing my audience to get closer to their experience. What am I going through? What are you going through? This is not the live arts gig. This is about being honest. I've just got this body, and I invite you all to come closer to the experience, the way we all have to surrender, to the impulse of the performance.

But I ask myself: 'how do I rationalise this invitation to the onlooker to participate,' and 'how do I present it to them?' And what I do is I ask my audience to commit. I want you to also take off your clothes in order to fulfil this vision of Utopia. Without that, there is a segregation in hierarchy or form. So this nudity wasn't nudity through politicised action, it was simply about bringing a harmonious agreement between the spectator and the activator, by which we build this environment together.

JO: What has your personal experience of this been, as a performer?

PA: The nudity thing has given me freedom. You feel disarmed as much as you feel enlightened. Presenting yourself in naked performance is totally different to performing clothed. You are more available in your body, you begin to sense every part of you. To rid yourself of your armour, and enter the space, is a 'naked' experience in a grander sense. But it is a two-way experience, and as that particular performance developed over the Dance Massive season, I understood each show had a new audience with a different perspective. All sorts of people came in - young and beautiful bodies, mature bodies, weirdos and creeps. And I thought, 'what have I done? Am I going to get myself into trouble?'....But the interesting thing was that the politics of sexualising the work was dismissed immediately as soon as we became naked. It didn't become sexualised, by any stretch. Why do you think that is? Everyone just went, 'wow, there's no sexually charged point here to reference.' This is just agreement time.

JO: I think it's about that scream of desire. You take your clothes off, you take the desire off. I think, of course, we see the world through that scream. Which is Hollywood... But I also wanted to ask you about your work *Kingdom*, which is an extraordinary piece.

PA: With *Kingdom,* we are working with three of our leading, male physical artists –Matthew Day, Luke George and Rennie McDougall, and the visual artist Andrew Hazewinkel, who is amazing.

JO: Yes, and I saw that each of them has their own particular enquiry, and I think that's how things can work. If you're being told what to do, you don't think. But if you come with a question that's deeply personal, it's different... I think Pina Bausch used to do that, actually she would ask her dancers to set themselves a psychological-physical task and see what they would come up with. And from what I hear, your dancers all want some thing.

PA: It's an enquiry in the body. And it is – I beg the question – decidedly queer. The gender experience is not for me. I think that my behaviour in the studio, in the actual moment of creativity, is driven by a genetic sensibility of queer. Is it flamboyant? Perhaps. Is it extrovert? Maybe. Is it camp? Perhaps. But combined, if I monitor myself and yet not label myself, I would say this enquiry has an overt sense of flamboyantly queer behaviour patterns. My contribution is to monitor that behaviour into an artwork, and see to this quirky bird creating something for the king. I feel comfortable, presenting this inexplicable queer stuff.

Matthew Day is not like that. He is a minimalist, and I love working with him. This is the opposite of my own body. I'm naked, rolling for hours from one side of the room to the other, and he'll just watch us, back and forth – three hours of a single action, which is a ritual – to find this state of being available for each other, being vulnerable for each other. At the end of it, I really don't know what's queer about all this – queer has no real definition yet – I just know we need to work together, and that's enough.

JO: Can you comment on some of the recent political responses to nudity, ritual, and this undefined sensibility in the work you've done?

PA: Well, I was recently slandered in the media and it reached senate. I participated in a work at ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art) by my good friend visual artist Mikala Dwyer, and she presented an exhibition called *Goldene Bend'er*, and part of her ritual was to take a group shit together at ACCA. And I believed in the artist, of course. I didn't question her. But I felt like I was punched in the gut by the reactions. There was a call for decency in the Arts, and I don't know what to say... It all appeared in an article in *The Australian*, with statistics of how much grant money I've received over the years, and I was being called up by the media – but you've got to take the bullet and walk away. How conservative we are! The naked body of the 1970s in Australia was far superior to the conservative politics we've returned to now. I remember the nakedness of our language back in the sixties and seventies when Australia was carving a new space with theatre, and in other media, like photography... and now to find myself opening up a paper, when I'm broadening my scope as an artist and becoming interested in hybrid practice, and being hit by something as offensive as that? ...I can only think, what went wrong?! Where did we go wrong with our naked politics?

JO: This government is so bound by fear, fear of anything that would make us open up, because we're one big island. It's the political make-up of Australia.

PA: The fear is rife. In a way, shedding our clothes for tomorrow, and becoming part of the utopian impulse is similar to the way Spencer Tunick laid out the Princess Bridge for the celebration of the naked photographic essay (*Naked City)*. I would only hope that such beautiful creative work could be celebrated in politics and not dragged down to the standards of this current government.

JO: Bear in mind, if we were doing the same work somewhere else – maybe with the exception of China – it wouldn't be a problem.

PA: I think back to my early work as a dancer in the nineties in New York. I was naked so often that when I got a costume I felt exposed, so it was hard at first when I came back to Australia after ten years away, because I carried that knowledge with me. But I'm glad I have that to contribute here now... more broadly, we do look at the body of naked history and politics, to the masters, from Classicism through to Caravaggio and then on to our celebrated Bill Henson – who have always been at the forefront, taking the bullet and enjoying that role... Somebody's got to take the bullet. And my company has always had that position and claimed it early. Love it or hate it.

I pride myself on the naked form, in that I'm succeeding and failing with my body in every way I can imagine.

Phillip Adams and his company, BalletLab, cultivates ground breaking contemporary hybrid cross-disciplinary projects that embrace a cultural risk in the arts at a recognised platform of rigorous experimentalism. Adams proposes projects that exist between two established cultural frameworks: performance/venue and increasingly, museum/gallery. Adams processes into the world of collaboration through the medium of design, fashion, architecture, cinema, queer culture, the unorthodox, visual arts, science and sociology and more recently, community based live arts performance.

Phillip Adams has been commissioned to make works by many companies including MONA FOMA, The Australian Ballet, Chunky Move, Guangdong Modern Dance Company (China), Dance Works Rotterdam (NL), City Contemporary Dance Company (HK), Festival of Mexico, Melbourne Recital Centre among others.

www.balletlab.com

Jill Orr is a guest editor for this issue.

Jessica Sabatini is a freelance writer with a special interest in dance. She has trained in Argentine tango and is now passionately involved with contact improvisation in Melbourne.

Censorship, nudity and childhood innocence: from Henson to Yore

by Jo Faulkner

Recent years have witnessed a number of controversies in Australian art that circulate around childhood nudity. Outrage over Bill Henson's exhibition was the top news story of 2008, and there has since been acute sensitivity about artists' use of images of children. Most recently, 2013 saw five pieces excluded from Tyza Stewart's Sydney exhibition after the gallery received legal advice. In Victoria, police confiscated works by Paul Yore because they contained images of children.[1] While the capacity to access and distribute pornography over the Internet is ever increasing, it is curious that anxiety about the protection of children should focus on artworks that are exhibited in public galleries, and not for the purpose of titillation. Children have been depicted nude throughout history, most notably for religious representation but also for humorous purpose (e.g., *Manneken Pis* in Brussels). So why this heightened attention to children's bodies and their meaning, and why now?

Two attitudes are revealed through this anxiety about children's nudity in art, but a third is also implicit within it. Firstly, nudity is attributed only a sexual meaning. Secondly, it highlights a cultural investment in childhood innocence, maintained through an effort to keep children rigorously separate from adult concerns (of which sexuality is particularly emblematic). The fact that art is now the focus of this nervousness signals a third anxiety regarding the purpose of art, in particular art's power to question and shift cultural values and 'community standards.'

A consideration of the timing and context of the Henson controversy elucidates how that exhibition came to furnish the occasion for a perfect storm. Two years earlier, the representation of children's bodies in the media – and particularly girls bodies – had become a focal point of concern with the publication of *Corporate Paedophilia*, the Australia Institute sponsored paper on the sexualisation of girls.[2] It articulated an anxiety that corporations profit from the objectification of children in advertising, placing them in "adult contexts" and rendering them as objects of adult desire. It recruited feelings of unease many share, namely that there is no longer cultural space for children to be innocent of adult modes of enjoyment and experience. *Corporate Paedophilia* has been widely criticised as poorly researched and as stretching the limits of what is considered an "adult context."[3] It nonetheless catalysed a movement of soul searching about the meaning of childhood and the exploitation of children.

Bill Henson's tribulations emerged directly out of this rhetorical context, so a discussion that had pertained to 'low' culture (advertising) was transposed onto the reception of 'high' culture (art). Henson's art was thus reduced to a commercial enterprise. But moreover, that the 'offending material' in the Henson case was classified as art rather than emerging from the pages of an advertising brochure added to his accusers' righteous indignation. It was felt that a tolerance for child pornography issued from the highest echelons of culture, rather than only its crudest, most commercial levels. Art's cultural standing renewed momentum behind arguments for new laws regulating images of children.

In America, unease about juvenile nudity has converged on artists whose subjects are their own children, such as photographer Sally Mann (as well as more 'ordinary' parents like Cynthia Stewart, prosecuted for producing child pornography after photographing her eight-year-old in the bath).[4] Like Henson, Mann's photographs reveal private, ambiguous moments in the children's lives, in which they negotiate their burgeoning identity and experience their own bodies in enjoyment, and sometimes pain. Conservative citizens' groups picketed bookshops across America that stocked Mann's book, *Immediate Family*, citing their deep discomfort with the photographs.[5] The outspoken Christian broadcaster, Pat Robertson, likened Mann to a pimp, stating, "selling photographs of children in their nakedness for profit is an exploitation of the parental role."[6]

Childhood nudity, or rather a particular variety of nudity – unadorned by the fig leaf of sentimentality that we find, for instance, in Anne Geddes – comes thus to be associated not with innocence, but its betrayal.[7] A subtle and ever-shifting lexicon must be manipulated to *demonstrate* the 'innocent' child, as a fetish through which sex, gender, race and class are rendered invisible. Childhood innocence designates a purity through which adults who celebrate it can ignore the ambiguity and compromise that soil everyday desire. The innocent child must be protected from adult things, kept otherworldly, so as not to reflect back the messy contingency and pain of life. The nudity of these children threatens because it defies that lexicon through which innocence is produced, opening instead to questions of the child's desire, blurring once clear distinctions between adult and child.

Footnotes:

1 Yore's work was subsequently removed from the Sydney Art Fair, also following legal advice.

2 Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia*, Discussion Paper Number 90, October 2006, The Australia Institute: https://www.tai.org.au/file.php?file=DP90.pdf (last accessed 24 January 2014).

3 See especially R. Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes, "Girls, Sexuality and the Strange Carnalities of Advertisements: Deconstructing the Discourse of Corporate Paedophilia," *Australian Feminist Studies*, Special Issue 'The Child,' Barbara Baird (ed.) Vol. 23 No. 57 (September 2008); See also *Media International Australia*, Special Issue 'Children, Young People, Sexuality and the Media,' Kath Albury and Catharine Lumby (eds) No. 136 (May 2010).

4 Lynn Powell, *Framing Innocence: A Mother's Photographs, a Prosecutor's Zeal, and a Small Town's Response*, The New Press, (2010)

5 Barnes & Noble were investigated in twenty states. A Grand Jury in Alabama indicted Barnes & Noble under a "harmful-to-minors" law for selling *Immediate Family*, as well as another book by Jock Sturges. The bookstore reached a settlement whereby books were shrink-wrapped and placed on shelves that were not easily accessible. See http://www.thefileroom.org/documents/dyn/DisplayCase.cfm/id/350 (last accessed 24 January 2014).

6 Steven Cantor *Blood Ties: The Life and Work of Sally Mann*, Stick Figure Productions, (1993).

7 Steven Angelides has written a subtle and provocative piece on the Henson case. In it, he reflects on the model in that photograph as an 'Eve' figure, who embodies the shame of having only just realized her nakedness, and he relates this to the situation of the adolescent. It is that shame, and commentators refusal to contemplate it as the child's (instead deflecting it as something the child herself cannot realize), that animated the Henson debate, according to Angelides. See "What's Behind Child Sex Panics: The Bill Henson Scandal," LAMBDA NORDICA (Sweden), Issue 2 (2011): 101–25, and Joanne Faulkner, "Vulnerability and the Passing of Childhood in Bill Henson: Innocence in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Parrhesia: a journal of critical philosophy, vol. 11 (2011): 44–55.

childhood nudity comes to be associated not with nudity, but its betrayal.

Life intrudes upon the fantasy of the innocent child. A Parliamentary Library briefing commissioned in the wake of the Henson affair highlights the difficulty of defining child pornography, and the diverse and at times conflicting aims that inform its legislation. Definitions of 'pornography' and of 'child' vary widely between jurisdictions. Jurisdictions also vary in the concerns they privilege in framing and deciding what child pornography perpetrates. In America, the wrong is literally represented in the image, which evidences the abuse it depicts. Its circulation then implicates consumers in that original crime. In the U.K. and Australia, the wrong is defined more nebulously according to 'decency' or 'community standards.' The wrong refers not simply to an action performed on a child for which the photograph constitutes evidence. The subject needn't even be a child; it may be a youthful-looking consenting adult or virtual, drawn from the imagination. There is then scope for legal argument that harm is located in the eye of the beholder – in how the viewer *interprets* the image – and not necessarily in the body of a child. Here the principle that child pornography is not a victimless crime begins to attenuate.

While journalist Miranda Devine and child abuse campaigner Hetty Johnson argued along these lines that Henson's photograph helped foster a paedophile-friendly environment, ultimately cooler heads prevailed. With regard to a blog 'reporting' the image, the Classification Board concluded that the "nudity is very mild in viewing impact and justified by context," and classified the 'content' as PG. At least legally, then, the hot air was expelled from this issue.

Yet, as the Henson case bore out, anxiety about children's nudity signifies a deeper apprehension about the 'eye of the beholder' and the degradation of community standards. What unsettles is the sexualisation of culture more generally, and the spectre of the paedophile both heralds and ironically produces the capacity for normal adults to view children sexually.

Legalistic responses to Tyza Stewart and Paul Yore took place in the shadow of Henson; each uses images of children, which is why lawyers and police withheld or seized those works. Most perplexing about these cases is that while each dealt with *conceptions* of childhood, neither represented a child being sexually abused or offered a child's body up for viewers' gratification. Rather, in the case of Stewart, the art negotiated the meaning of the artists own gender identity, representing his childhood self. Yore, far from instigating a form of sexualisation, took as his subject matter the sexualisation of childhood in consumer/celebrity culture itself, so that examples of this trend (such as Justin Bieber) serve only as ironic citations of a phenomenon he critiques. Stewart's work deals with his transformation from female-born child to male-identified adult, and was deemed pornographic because, in depicting this experience, Stewart draws self-portraits of his young 'female' self with adult male bodies. While, Stewart, through his art making, can be seen retroactively to offer support and protection to his confused and isolated childhood self, the state's object of protection is a more rarefied childhood innocence, 'unadulterated' by considerations of sexuality. The 'obscenity' pertains to queasiness about associating childhood with sexuality. At stake is a conception of childhood preserved from 'adulthood' (for which sexuality is a metonym). What Stewart has to say about sex and gender identity, however transgressive, is not forbidden *as such*, but because it takes the form of this deeper transgression against childhood innocence.

Likewise, Yore superimposes Justin Bieber's adolescent face on pastiche images of acts of urination and masturbation. This is not realist art, nor would it be prohibited were it not for this association with childhood. They clearly invite the viewer to reflect on contemporary culture's cooption of childhood in the name of consumption. They clearly do *not* invite the reader to enjoy the image sexually, as it would were it pornographic.

When art represents children in a manner that disrupts social expectations, artistic practice brings to crisis the meaning of childhood, creating an opportunity for discussion about how we understand art *and* childhood. The community's response thus far, however, has been to construe all depictions of child nudity as pornography. This produces a chilling effect, leading galleries preemptively to censor exhibitions to avoid being shut down or raided by police. The desire to legislate art has replaced a conversation about what is at stake in the artistic depiction of children: childhood innocence, and the social norms that it regulates.

Joanne Faulkner is a research fellow in the School of History and Philosophy at the University of NSW. She is the author of *The Importance of Being Innocent: Why We Worry About Children (Cambridge, 2011)*, among other titles. Her current research investigates the significance of innocence and of childhood for contemporary understandings of socio-political community.

childhood innocen and the social norm it regulates

NAKEDNESS IS A PROCESS NOT A STATE

by Alice Heyward

The key is that, in life and art nakedness is a process, not a state. We are our bodies; our bodies are our selves. Nudity generates self knowledge and power.

The naked body has long been a source of creative inspiration and of moral alarm, both in and out of artistic contexts. The reaction to the "issue" of nudity is relevant to all art forms, but to dance in a way like no other, as our bodies are the crux of the form's expression. Nudity can reveal a truer depiction of the body in its raw condition – particularly of a live, moving body – and hence, can awaken deep fears and desires in us all.

It is not nudity or nakedness that objectifies; it is the way in which subjects are conveyed in their nude or naked state. Religious or secular, ancient or modern, live performance or otherwise, the implication is that objectified subjects are aware of being seen, without concomitantly 'seeing' themselves. They are not naked in their own right, *only* as seen by the viewer, and hence they forgo their fundamental sense of self; to create the space of objectification that so antagonizes our society. John Berger distinguishes between "nude" and "naked" in his book *Ways of Seeing*, "To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself"[1]. A *naked* body has to be seen as an object in order to become a *nude*. For art critic Kenneth Clark, to be "naked" is simply to be without clothes, and the "*nude* is a naked body conveyed in a work of art"[2]. As a spectator, Clark is choosing to deny the sexuality and individuality of the 'nude', limiting his *Way*(s) *of Seeing*.

Nudity is not a categorical 'point'; it is an inseparable aspect of every one of us, and it can become a passage to enlightenment. As a model in many of Bill Henson photographs, my own experience of being depicted naked in art has been illuminating. I found it liberating to be naked in an artistic context. The naked body speaks a different language and possesses idiosyncratic sensibilities, tones and freedoms. When I was naked in these photo-shoots, I was, in a sense, dancing, moving with a unique sensation. Nudity can transport us to a different conscious reality, infusing in us a powerful sense of awareness and presence.

Luke George describes his experience of performing semi-naked in his new work *'The Unnamed Feeling'* as, "a different physical and conscious state to be in"[3], allowing him to "think and move differently"[4]. For George, "it both was and wasn't about the nudity"[5]; he employed his semi-nakedness in order to "affect and induce particular sensations and perceptions"[6] for him and his audience, yet also transcend, through the process of his work, the strange impression of a male wearing only T-shirt, socks and shoes, a cap and a thin silk veil.

George's deliberately weird semi-nakedness was in fact partially influenced by, "the way (he) was working when creating and rehearsing this piece, in (his) bedrooms and living rooms, often half naked, and it felt comfortable and supported (his) experience of performing it, so (he) kept doing it"[7].

The full nudity in Deborah Hay's work *'O beautiful'* (2002) (renamed *'Beauty'*), a solo that the prolific artist performed at age 62, came about because of her overheated rehearsal conditions, in a similarly organic process. Hay explains, "What I experienced performing that piece, without any clothes on, was so phenomenal that it had to be the costume"[8], illustrating the greater sense of perspicuity that nudity can allow in the body. Did she inflict harm on herself, or others, exposing her nakedness to the public? No. Is it an honest, open gesture in her work, appropriate to 'Beauty'? Yes. Does she 'offend' or make anyone 'uncomfortable'? Maybe. But who wants to be perpetually comfortable? And since when has it been the role of art to render people so?

As an audience, we choose what we look at. We become aware that we can be seen, and hence aware that we are part of the visible world, just as Adam and Eve became conscious of themselves when gaining knowledge of "good and evil". We are faced with the choice either to reach for the nearest fig leaf, and complain to the government, or to experience our self-awareness, take in the physical world around us, learn, transform, and grow.

The attacks on visual artists such as Henson are generally made without consideration for how the nudity is inseparable from the power and aesthetic value of the work. They focus on the "moral" damage that nudity might inflict on both the subject and spectator. In a live performance, the issue of nudity is perceived differently. Perhaps its 'live-ness' renders the "issue" less about the welfare of the subject, and more about the validity of nudity within the work. The media has attacked dance performances, such as Phillip Adams' *Tomorrow*, that incorporate nudity in these terms.

There isn't anything morally wrong with a depiction that may provoke sexual attraction, a reaction that is as subjective as we are diverse. What frightens us by such displays and ideas is both our transportation from our habitual zones of comfort, and the envisaged reality of the subject, out of the work's context.

The naked body is both traditional and radical. It always has and will continue to have a necessary relationship to art. The question now, is how? George "find(s) a completely naked body to be quite a classical form, in how it reads and how it feels to perform"[9]. George's interest in a "contemporary body"[10] may in fact paradoxically be achieved by reverting to notions of concealment.

The key is that, in life and art, nakedness is a process, not a state. We are our bodies; our bodies are our selves. Nudity generates self-knowledge and power. The body is both historic and modern, something that we cannot change, providing us with the choice to find new and enriching ways of experiencing and witnessing it. What is a body of the present, and what presence does it create?

Alice Heyward is a dancer, choreographer and writer. She recently graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), where she was the recipient of the VCAM Endowment Scholarship for Dance. Since graduating, Alice has worked with and performed for Timothy Walsh, Nebahat Erpolat and Becky Hilton. Alice has both choreographed and performed for Melbourne's Short and Sweet Dance Festival, ORGI at Conduit Arts, PAVE festival, Mudfest, and First Run at Lucy Guerin Inc. She has traveled to New York, Tokyo and soon to Europe, to pursue her passion for dance.

Footnotes:

1 John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 2008.

2 Kenneth Clark. *The Nude*. New York: MJF Books, 1956.

3, 4, 5, 6, 7 Luke George. Interview by author. Email interview. Melbourne, New York City, January 16, 2014

8 Deborah Hay. *A Lecture of the Performance of Beauty*. Lecture, artist talk from DanceSpace project, New York City, March 24, 2010.

9, 10 Luke George., *op. cit.*

PRUDE

Syllabification: prude
Pronunciation: proōd

by Gulsen Ozer

issues around morality are just not that simple

When I was a teenager, I was really excited to get my P plates and I had this idea that I was going to get a car and drive from Melbourne to Sydney, naked. I was genuinely surprised and disappointed when I learned that actually my plan was foiled because it is illegal to be naked in public. This rocked my world. I knew that society was culturally conservative about getting naked, but it hadn't occurred to me that getting naked was illegal. 'Naked is natural!', I exclaimed. Somehow, I felt robbed.

Later, I came to realise that my naked utopian ideals were somewhat at odds with some very real social, linguistic, economic and political structures that exist in the world.

Being naked was a definite thing, definitely very different from not being naked. Some nakedness was able to make you feel free and connected with the world around you, while other types of nakedness were able to make you feel disconnected, isolated and powerless. Actually, I learned that being naked wasn't just a *thing*; sometimes being naked made you feel like a *thing* and not so much like a human being.

We live in a world where the body is often made to appear as an object and dehumanised via visual modes of representation. Because of its prevalence in mainstream media it can seem normative and someone, such as myself, may forget what objectification is and how it operates. It works to render the body not as human, but as a thing and what we understand about *things* is that *things* don't have feelings. As a result, people generally feel permitted to treat them in any way without any moral conflict or consequence. It is against this backdrop of nudity's relation to objectification that I would like to continue with the following uncensored (naked, if you will) thoughts.

It is not simply nudity that causes physical or moral concern for the individual or the collective; it is rather what naked bodies are doing, how they are framed, who they are and who constitutes the audience. Inextricably, it is the perception of those elements in relationship to the viewer. It's subjective, it's varied, and it's messy. Any conversation about the naked body and its differences to the clothed body cannot be read and responded to in isolation, nor distilled down to an unchangeable interpretation, due to the converging of elements which make up any moment. Context matters.

How the human compass of morality functions in relation to images of the naked body lines up against a backdrop of images; advertising, screen cultures, lived experience and histories, make it very difficult to have a blanket policy of what forms of nudity are or aren't acceptable. No matter how expertly an artwork challenges or entertains its audience, there is always the possibility of a gap between moral concern and aesthetic possibility. In our widely sexualised culture, being outspoken about the representation of the body in media and advertising as having a negative affect on social and sexual values is nothing new, but speaking out in an art context may prove to be more challenging. The context of art makes the context for reception different. I'm not saying that it shouldn't be different, but we should know what that different context is doing, how it affects our behavior, and how we are moulded by it as a form of conditioning.

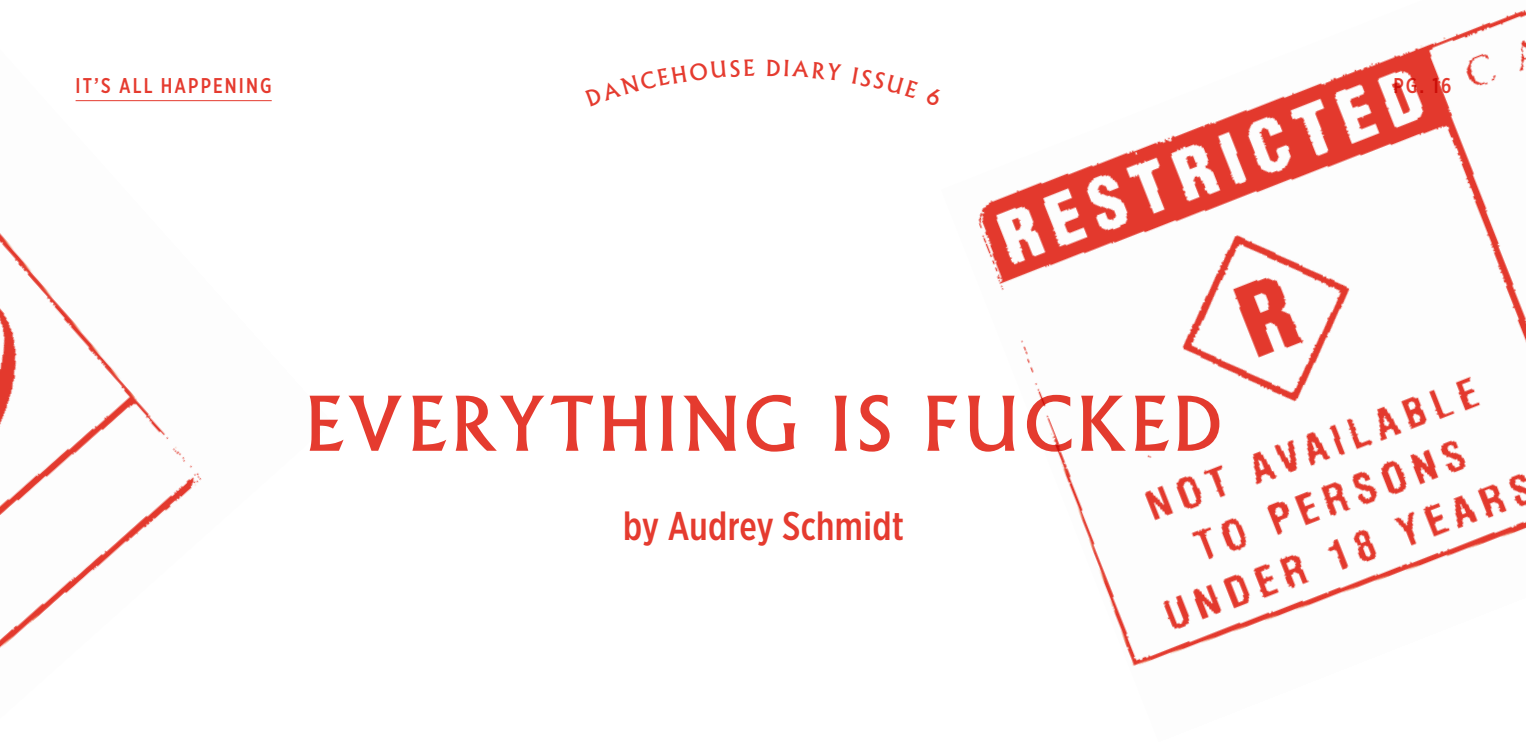
For many artists, performing naked is a rite of passage, an act of bravery, a sacrifice of the self for art, even a conquering of the ego. That politic does seem to create an environment of expectation for all performers to be okay with nudity and permission to label any artist who is not, as a prude. This is an assumption that concerns me. I'm not arguing about the performer's choice to perform naked, rather against the assumption that they would, or should, if asked. From my experience and in speaking with peers, this does seem to be the assumption.

Like many artists, I see myself as being open minded and freethinking and able to make educated evaluations and decisions about nudity in art because I have specialised knowledge and experience in art. But does that translate into having the authority to criticise another person's moral standards? Artists often see people with more conservative views than themselves as being limited in their thinking and trapped. But how might that in turn trap the artist? What happens if the artist finds himself or herself at one point or another watching a fellow performer making choices, which challenge their sense of morality? I wonder if they might perhaps then, not speak out about their feelings for fear of being, becoming, or being seen as, one of those conservative others? In the art community there can be a crippling desire to not be caught out, to not be seen as a prude, un-cool or weak, and the overriding fear of being perceived as uneducated. Because education is linked to class, and a perception of class divides people. For many artists, it is very important that even if some of us don't have a lot of money, we at least do have class.

The performing arts context is often comprised of small interdependent communities of people who work extremely hard to bring even a sniff of a show to fruition. However, our care and respect for one another does not prescribe that we should be expected to be okay with each other's performative choices, including those regarding nudity. We will generally be okay and respectful, even caring – but we don't have to like the performance or pretend that we do, for fear that people will assume that it is because we are uncomfortable with nakedness. Furthermore, if we are uncomfortable with nakedness that ought to be able to be expressed without fear of being persecuted (perhaps sometimes being uncomfortable is the performer's point and we miss it because we are too caught up in the belief that to be an artist means being okay with nudity). Equally, if we loved seeing nudity as expressed in a performance, felt happily confused or an enhanced intimacy, felt that it was incredibly subversive and brave, profound, clever or brilliantly silly, all and any of those responses are the stuff of great conversation and learning. We are complex human beings; living bodies, watching complex beings and their living bodies onstage. We do not have to accept all that is presented to us and abide images that we think involve poor choices in the name of pushing boundaries.

The split between positioning the artistic community on the open-minded, freedom-willing 'side' of any cultural taboo and the right wing conservatives on the other, is common practice in debates around artistic censorship and protectionism, but this liberal/conservative hard line is a falsity, because issues around morality are just not that simple.

Gulsen Ozer is a performing artist and project manager. She works as an independent choreographer, dancer, actor, curator, educator and community development worker. Although a local Melbourne artist, Gulsen has recently returned to Melbourne, after living for the past 2 years in Istanbul, Turkey. Gulsen's work aims to create experiences which provoke audiences to contemplate how human beings co-create their lives through their relationships. She is deeply committed to social justice and the pursuit of ecological well-being and sustainability.



EVERYTHING IS FUCKED

by Audrey Schmidt

The museum and art gallery as public sphere in contemporary Australia is subject to significant censorship – the scope of artistic expression is limited in order to politically, religiously and institutionally guard the ambiguous and propagandist notion of 'public morality'. Vastly problematic and transient notions of pornography, erotica, sexually explicit material and obscenity are at times employed to serve conservative political agendas. These agendas restrict the scope of contemporary artists' work conceptually and materially. Moreover, media sensationalism and hysteria that defines certain works as 'obscene' or 'morally corrupt' leads to public bans, rescinds our right to make our own decisions and demonises artists who push boundaries — a reminder that we live in an Orwellian nanny state.

The word 'obscene' may derive from a combination the Latin prefix *ob* (against) and Greek term *skene*, a combination yielding 'off stage' and which pertains to ancient Greek theatre, when violent acts were committed away from the eyes of the audience or 'behind the scenes.'[1] In the sixteenth century, the Latinate *obscensus* entered use and meant something that should be kept 'out of public view.'[2] This private/public dichotomy is intertwined with historically and culturally defined notions of shame, modesty and obscenity, predominantly related to sexual subject matter and bodily functions. Anchored in the Cartesian mind-body split and confronting Western thought for centuries, sexually explicit material is often excluded from the sanctioned realm of aesthetic expression. Every society deems certain areas of human practice and modes of conduct off-limits, excluding them on the basis of public morality and cultural and religious customs.[3]

The distinction between 'erotica', 'porn', and 'sexually explicit material' is a problematic one – often determined by the popular dictum, "I know it when I see it".[4] The definition of pornographic material has become much more open to interpretation in recent years. Barbara Creed asserts that the:

"[m]ajor aim of the mainstream conventional pornographic film is to arouse the (male) viewer by depicting as many sexually explicit images and sexual scenarios as possible within a... short time frame."[5]

Conventions and tropes that pornography employs or chooses not to employ are often porn-specific. As pornography is rarely interested in character development, and has minimal narrative structure, there are few filmic devices or narrative strategies in place that allow viewer identification with the protagonist(s).[6] Further meaning or engagement beyond the masturbatory is scarcely encouraged.

The aesthetics of mainstream pornography usually include close-up shots of genitalia, erect penises and the all-important 'money-shot', whereby male ejaculation is depicted to reinforce the 'reality' of sex. Monogamous sex and the institutional 'couple' are largely repudiated in pornography, as "the aim of the sexual experience is not reproduction but pleasure".[7] In *For Adult Users Only,* Joan Hoff notes that "[e]rotica was capable of teaching lessons and stimulating discussions about sexuality. Unlike pornography, its main purpose or function was not simply sexual arousal".[8] In this light, 'erotica' can be seen as an intellectualised narrative containing sexually explicit material, whereas porn must be viewed as devoid of any artistic or intellectual merit whatsoever. Sexually explicit material appears to be the residual of these categorical descriptors.

Yet, differentiating between pornography, erotica and sexually explicit material is to create an artificial divide between high and low culture.[9] To retain this division, the material traditionally classed as 'erotica' must actively recontextualise pornographic imagery within an otherwise normative narrative structure, blurring the line between porn and non-porn. To say one is 'art' and the other is 'obscene' is often merely a fluid value judgment similar to the transient and indefinable differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' art. An American Apparel advertisement might be considered pornographic in the context of a XXX bookstore, and a pornographic collage could appear intellectually, rather than sexually, stimulating when its signs and codes are structurally reinterpreted. Context, then, seems crucial. Breasts, arses, provocative poses, sexual suggestion and borrowed fetish and BDSM imagery are commonplace in the advertising, fashion and cinema spheres, as Simpson and Potter argue:

"It is the aesthetic which distinguishes the artistic from the pornographic, the moral which provides the societal gauge that transforms the erotic into the obscene, and the utilitarian which suggests that the members of a healthy society enjoy only pure thoughts and can have no proper use for obscene or indecent publications, images or text."[10]

Furthermore, there is an important link between obscenity and taboo. Social and religious groups enforce censorship measures in order to suppress cultural practices deemed 'obscene'. These

Footnotes:

1 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, derivation from 'stage' may be a 'folk' etymology. The term has also been related to *scaevus* (left-sided, inauspicious) and *caenum* (mud, filth). See Oxford English Dictionary, "obscene," http://www.oed.com (accessed 9 October 2013).

2, 3 Kerstin Mey, *Art and Obscenity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 5-6.

4 'I know it when I see it' was famously used by United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart to describe his threshold test for obscenity in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964).

5 6 7 Barbara Creed, *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 62-63.

8 Susan Gubar and Joan Hoff, *For Adult Users Only: The Dilemma of Violent Pornography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 28.

9 Barbara Creed, *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality*, (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 74.

10 Shane Simpson and Richard Potter, "Restrictions on Freedom of Expression," Collections Law: Legal issues for Australian Archives, Galleries Libraries and Museums, http://www.collectionslaw.com.au/chapter-25-restrictions-on-freedom-of-expression (Accessed June 13 2013).

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dissectjournal.com

actions seem partially based on a belief that such material could possess potentially socially dangerous effects, an idea that echoes the theme of the Hicklin test. Established in 1868, this test attempted to appraise the likelihood of supposedly offending material to deprave and corrupt social mores.

After the Motion Picture Association of America introduced a rating system in 1968, the explosive proliferation of sexual imagery across all media led to the establishment of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography the same year. The Commission investigated the links between public access to sexual materials and possible dangerous effects, and after extensive cross-disciplinary research, announced in 1970 that there was no causal link between pornography and criminal behaviour. Furthermore, despite their claims, studies made since are yet to prove the contrary which is indicative of its immeasurability,[11] as pornographic imagery is inseparable from other sexually explicit media influences.

Nevertheless, within the museum or gallery context in Australia, sexual explicitness is either seemingly exempt from moral codes as a result of subjective factors (such as sufficient intellectual/aesthetic/artistic merit), or severely censored due to a supposed absence of these qualities. Freedom of expression is not an inviolable constitutional right as it is in the United States, where the First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees free speech. *The Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)* created the first right to freedom of expression in Australia, albeit curbed by a clause stating that the right is subject to lawful restrictions a) to respect the rights and reputation of other persons or b) for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.[12]

Australia has a long history of art censorship, some prominent cases being:

- Norman Lindsay's (1879-1969) *Pollice Verso* (1904) depicting a crowd of nude figures pointing towards a crucifixion was turned to face the wall at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1907.
- In 1982, the Vice Squad seized Juan Davila's (b. 1946) *Stupid as a Painter* (1981-2) after a complaint made by a member of the Call to Australia Party (now the Christian Democratic Party) at the Fourth Biennale of Sydney.
- Traditional black censor bars were placed over the sexually explicit parts of Anne McDonald's (b. 1960) photographs in *Perspecta '85* (1985) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- The Art Gallery of Western Australia ordered a conservator to paint out the sexually explicit portions of Brett Whiteley's (1939-1992) major work, *The American Dream* (1968-9).
- Police seized a number of Bill Henson's (b. 1955) photographs in 2008 from the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney based on the nude, pre-pubescent subjects.

After the seizure of Davila's *Stupid As A Painter*, then NSW Premier Neville Wran declared that the NSW Government would amend indecency laws after ordering the return of *Stupid As A Painter* with an R-rating, yet no such changes were introduced. Following the Henson debacle, the NSW Attorney-General announced that the Government would amend the legislation, and, two years later, the NSW Government passed the *Crimes Amendment (Child Pornography and Abuse Material) Act 2010.* Under this legislation, 'artistic merit' is not, in itself, a defence, but rather a factor to be considered when determining the extent to which any given material is 'indecent' or not.

Although the gallery is able to use the defence of 'artistic merit' under possession laws, this is by no means applicable to the 'producer' of the work(s) in question. If a gallery chooses to show sexually explicit images and submits them to the Commonwealth Classification Board, only a classification can provide the exhibitor *and* the artist with a more concrete defence. The Australian classification system in question is also used in the rating of films – the same system that banned pivotal arthouse films such as *Baise-moi* (2000) and *Ken Park* (2002). The most heinous aspect of the obscenity laws in Australia is that an artist cannot know whether they have breached that incredibly ambiguous standard until, more often than not, a politically motivated individual has protested. At that point, it is too late. Regardless of the proliferation of sexually explicit material in mainstream media, such as the underage sexual suggestiveness of child beauty pageants (propagated by the popular *Toddlers and Tiaras* television show) or even that pornography shelf at your local newsagent, a museum wall is likely to come under more scrutiny in Australia, which has some of the strictest censorship laws in the Western world. In a censored cultural environment such as this, mainstream pornography and media monopolise discourse surrounding body image, sexuality, gender and eroticism without critical examination or artistic engagement. Cultural spaces are then necessarily subordinate to commercial spheres and understandings of these fundamental existential subjects.

Footnotes:

11, 12 For a more recent and comprehensive review of the literature on the connection between pornographic material and sexual violence, see Tamara Addison, Mary Koss and Neil M. Malamuth, "Pornography and Sexual Aggression: Are There Reliable Effects and Can We Understand Them?" *Annual Review of Sex Research* 11, no. 1 (2000): 26-91.

A recent addition to absurd, sensationalised censorship in Australia is the incident surrounding contemporary Melbourne artist, Paul Yore (b. 1987). Yore's work was exhibited in a group exhibition at The Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts as part of the *Like Mike* exhibition series, curated by Geoff Newton. *Like Mike* celebrates the iconic, boundary-breaking work of Mike Brown (1938-1997) – the only Australian artist to be successfully prosecuted for obscenity (1966-67). Brown's work references everything from pop lyrics and pornography to psychedelica. In addition to the Linden Centre, four other galleries hosted exhibitions (Sarah Scout, Utopian Slumps, Charles Nodrum Galleries and Neon Parc), concurrent with an exhibition of Brown's work in *The Sometimes Chaotic World of Mike Brown* at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne. Both a response and homage to Brown, these exhibitions recognised his legacy as an Australian artist who has directly and indirectly influenced the exhibiting artists.

On May 31, detectives raided the Linden Centre for Contemporary Art following a complaint and removed a number of images from Yore's installation at the gallery's *Like Mike Now What?* exhibition (co-curated by Jan Duffy). Yore's installation, *Everything is Fucked* (2013), was seized by Victoria Police for allegedly depicting sexual acts between children, as the collages superimposed children's faces on adult bodies. One of the sculptural collages that featured widely in the media coverage of Yore's case features pop singer Justin Bieber's face on a child's body, attached to a urinating plastic penis, often pixelated in said media coverage. This collage was a small part of the large, colourful sprawling installation that included a content warning sign at the entrance to the room.

Prior to the raid, on May 28, Adrian Jackson, Chris Spillane and Cr Andrew Bond (those most widely cited as complaining about the exhibition) were at a Port Phillip City Council meeting discussing Yore's installation. In public question time, the meeting minutes indicate that while Spillane had not seen *Like Mike Now What?*, he had 'heard' it was 'offensive and pornographic' and thus suggested that the exhibition should be shut down, or, at the very least, Yore's installation should be cordoned off with age restrictions put in place. As sponsors of the Linden Centre, he then asked the Council what action they intended to take. Mayor Amanda Stevens responded that an independent board runs the gallery and there is already appropriate signage in place.[13]

Spillane is a Liberal Party candidate for the local Council who has been accused of racism, describing multiculturalism as 'failed dogma' and a 'waste of money'.[14] Jackson was an Australian Army infantry officer for twenty-three years, and is an ex-Liberal Party member who has since run unsuccessfully as an independent candidate three times. Evidently, a conservative political agenda underpins the accusations against Yore's work. Similarly, the 'culture wars' in the U.S as it pertains to taxpayer funded art was ultimately not about sexual explicitness, rather it was a 'morality' campaign masking an extremely conservative small government agenda.

In March 2012, an unpixellated photo taken in Yore's studio depicting the same urinating Justin Bieber collage, appeared on *Desktop Magazine*'s website advertising Yore's exhibition in the NGV Atrium at Federation Square.[15] Yore's work was also part of the WeAustralians.org debut exhibition, *Manifestations of Now*, which involved him living in a cave (similar to the installation created for *Like Mike Now What?*) for the entire fourteen-day exhibition. Yore stated that "occupying space in this way engages directly with the conceptual underpinning of the work, to see it as ongoing and durational, rather than fixed and 'finished' at any given point."[16] Yore reinforced this sentiment in an interview for the Linden Centre website, in which he stated that he actually repurposed many of the components used in prior works for his *Everything Is Fucked* installation.[17] The fact that much of the material in Yore's work had been publicly exhibited uncensored in the past, testifies to the fact that what is considered 'offensive' is often entirely conditional and highly politicised.

The Justin Bieber component of Yore's imagery seems to be examining the sexualisation of children in a larger social context, with a focus on mass consumption and the commodification of bodies and young persons' in particular. The collage as a whole is far more complex, embodying sentiments of excess, frenzy, spectacle, violence, darkness, appropriation, kitsch, phallocentricism, queerness, and as Yore states on the Linden Centre website: 'reflect[s] the ways in which one experiences the world, as a distorted, fragmented, fluctuating set of systems, signs and codes'.[18]

The Linden Centre remained closed for nearly two weeks after police seized the works, offering no explanations to Yore, curator Geoff Newton or the other artists. Regarding artistic censorship, Simon and Potter note:

"Arguably there is a need for major institutions to stand up for freedom of expression by publicly defending the material they choose to exhibit if they come under attack. By providing for a reasoned and intelligent public discourse in such circumstances, they enhance the public appreciation, understanding or at least tolerance of ideas and expression."[19]

The Linden Centre has, perhaps pragmatically, yet at the expense of justice and intelligent discourse, ignored these responsibilities following victorious conservative Jackson's comments to the *Leader* newspaper:

"Mission accomplished - the kiddy art exhibition is now closed. Next step is getting the Linden Gallery to be self-funding instead of behaving like a parasite on ratepayers. Currently $100,000 PA is spent by Port Phillip Council on maintenance and equipment in the Linden, which has been a ratepayer owned building for the last twenty-five years or so."[20]

Following an anti-censorship protest at the site on June 8, the Linden Centre re- opened its doors on June 11 and sectioned off Yore's work with signs advising patrons that the work was awaiting classification from the Australian Classification Board. Again, there was no explanation provided as to why the work

Footnotes:

13 The Port Phillip City Council, "Ordinary Meeting of Council: Minutes," Council Chamber, St Kilda Town Hall, 28 May 2013, http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/28_May_2013_Ordinary_Meeting_of_Council_Minutes.pdf (accessed June 3 2013)

14 Beau Donelly, "Port Phillip poll: I'm no racist, claims anti-multiculturalism Lib candidate," The Weekly Review: Bayside, October 22 2012, http://www.theweeklyreviewbayside.com.au/story/411868/port-phillip-poll-im-no-racist-claims-anti- multiculturalism-lib-candidate/ (accessed May 30 2013)

15 Desktop Magazine, "Q&A: Artist Paul Yore," http://desktopmag.com.au/features/qa-artist-paul- yore/#.UlSWx9JaV8E (accessed May 30 2013).

16 Paul Yore, cited in ibid.

17 Paul Yore, "Curator/Artist Interviews," Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, http://www.lindenarts.org/exhibitions/2013/like-mike.aspx (accessed May 30 2013)

18 Ibid. Everything is Fucked

19 Shane Simpson and Richard Potter, "Restrictions on Freedom of Expression," Collections Law: Legal issues for Australian Archives, Galleries Libraries and Museums, http://www.collectionslaw.com.au/chapter-25-restrictions-on-freedom-of-expression (Accessed June 13 2013).

20 Dana McCauley and Wayne Flower, "St Kilda art gallery raided by police after displaying pornographic images involving children," The Herald Sun, June 01 2013, http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/central/offensive-art-involving-justin-bieber-collage-creates- controversy-at-st-kildas-linden-centre-for-contemporary-art/story-fngnvlpt-1226655013041 (accessed June 2 2013).

It is the aesthetic which distinguishes the artistic from the transforms the erotic into the obscene and the utilitarian which suggests proper use of the obscene or indecent

was not being shown. The following week, the Linden Centre re-opened Yore's installation to the public with an R18+ rating, however, the components of the installation seized by police have not been returned and are still part of the ongoing child pornography investigation. The Linden Board commented on the (arguably vandalised) remains of the installation, stating, "the publication contains depictions of a bona fide art installation which appears to have genuine cultural and historical context."[21] This judgement was based on the content in isolation from the supposedly 'pornographic' components that were seized.

On 6 September, Yore was charged with one count of possessing child pornography and one count of producing child pornography – charges which he intends to fight at the forthcoming hearing and potential trial at the Melbourne Magistrates Court in November. The irony of the seized works paying homage to the only Australian artist to be successfully prosecuted for obscenity seems to have been lost in translation and Yore's charges likely prompted the new *Sydney Contemporary* art fair to remove Paul Yore's work from their exhibition later that month. Fairfax Media reports that Yore had altered the installation, which repurposed many materials from his *Everything is Fucked* work, to the satisfaction of lawyers for the art fair and his gallery but was removed at the insistence of the founder of *Sydney Contemporary*, Tim Etchells[22]. The announcement was made just hours before the VIP opening by the chief executive of Sydney Contemporary, Barry Keldoulis, who stated that:

"We support artists and their need to express themselves and ... explore their concerns, however we need to work within the law especially in an environment like this where the general public is invited in."[23]

Although the sexual imagery in Yore's works re-uses pre-existing sexual imagery which is available freely and commercially within Australia's censorship regime, the fear arises from the conception of the art gallery as a public sphere that legitimates motifs – sexually explicit or otherwise. Interestingly, a number of artists in Australia who have encountered censorship have re-purposed pre-existing sexual imagery. Juan Davila used clippings from comic and art books and Mike Brown used found images from pornographic magazines.

The organisers of Sydney Contemporary also removed five of Tyza Stewart's paintings from display, citing similar legal advice contravening NSW crimes legislation; news that was overshadowed by the removal of Yore's installation. Stewart's work is about gender binaries, norms and socialisation and often depicts Stewart's child-like face over naked bodies with genitalia that is either noticeably gendered or absent, sometimes in sexual positions. Yet again, mainstream pornography and media are allowed to monopolise discourse surrounding body image, sexuality, gender and eroticism because critical examination of these 'distasteful' human realities through artistic engagement is seen to legitimise the imagery that already inundates us. The nonexistent logic in this bizarre unspoken assertion is so pervasive it seems impossible to penetrate.

The "is it art or pornography" debate reflects a long history of censorship and an equally long history of subjectively politicised debate over what is 'good' versus 'bad' art. Censorship in Australian art is not restricted to sexually explicit material, as demonstrated by the exclusion of several photographs by South African artist, Jodi Beiber (b. 1966) from the annual Vivid Festival in Sydney this year (May 24 – June 10). Beiber's images were originally displayed onscreen near the Museum of Contemporary Art, and later removed from the exhibition as they depicted dead children and a bare-breasted woman. Beiber withdrew all of her work from the exhibition in protest, posing the question: "How are your children going to be when they go out into the real world, if they're not allowed to experience or see or make up their own mind about what happens in the world?"[24]. In September, Bill Henson withdrew works from the 2014 Adelaide Biennial after a South Australian police officer wrote to every MP in that state, the Premier and the director of the Art Gallery of South Australia expressing concern at Henson's planned inclusion based on the assumption they would include underage, nude subjects. The images selected for inclusion were purportedly of clouds, doors and landscapes.

pornographic, the moral which provides the societal gauge that that the members of society enjoy only pure thoughts and can have only publications, images and text.

Contemporary Australian art galleries create a political public sphere which contradictorily professes to be interested in new, intimate, authentic and immediate forms of expression, yet does not shift and expand to allow for them. Far from encouraging fresh artistic production and relevant contemporary subject matter, art that challenges the anthropology of images (in collage works, for example) or contains subject matter that is institutionally guarded on the ambiguous basis of 'public morality' will be conditionally omitted, censored and vilified. Institutional censorship undoubtedly results in creative self-censorship, which is immeasurably detrimental to the scope and ideological development of both contemporary art and thought in Australia.

Audrey Schmidt is an artist and writer based in Melbourne. Schmidt focuses on collage, using imagery from fetish and pornography to homemaking and fitness, as she reflects on the complex relationships that exist between sex, gender, popular culture and the everyday. Schmidt predominantly writes on the topics of contemporary art, censorship and feminism.

audreyschmidt.com
audreyschmidt.wordpress.com

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21 Dewi Cooke, "Raided art given an R rating," Sydney Morning Herald, June 15 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/raided-art-given-r-rating-20130614- 2o9vk.html#ixzz2X6VugeN7 (accessed June 16 2013).

22, 23 Andrew Taylor, "Sydney art fair removes Paul Yore work." Sydney Morning Herald, September 19 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/sydney-art-fair-removes-paul-yore-work- 20130919-2u2ap.html#ixzz2h8SvyCKd (accessed September 22 2013).

24 Jodi Beiber, quoted in "Photographers withdraw from Vivid over censorship claims," ABC News, May 26, 2013, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-26/photographers-withdraw-from-vivid-over-censorship/4713460 (accessed June 1 2013).

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Paul Yore. *Q&A: Artist Paul Yore.* Desktop (March 2012)

Full notes and bibliography, including websites on http://audreyschmidt.wordpress.com/2013/12/26/everything-is-fucked/

The Economy of Proximity: Dramaturgical Work in Contemporary Dance

by Bojana Kunst

Introduction

"I know what I do, but I do not know how to name it," said André Lepecki in the early 1990s about his role in Vera Mantero's work. "You are a dramaturg," was the reply of Bruno Verbegt, a producer. (Lepecki, "Dance" 28) In this essay, I wish to show that the reasons why dramaturgy has entered contemporary dance over the last two decades have not only been due to the aesthetic and formal changes in contemporary dance, but also because of a profound shift in our understanding of the manners of working in contemporary dance and of the ways of its production and presentation.

It is a known fact that the dramaturg enters contemporary dance simultaneously with the changes in European contemporary dance that have been taking place from the 1980s onwards. This is when contemporary dance – by means of interdisciplinary approaches – begins to shatter the stability of the categories that define choreographic and dance roles, and also raises the question: what is dance? At first sight, dramaturgical work in dance seems to reflect the increasing need for theory and reflection, which re-questions the a priori truths and self-evidence of dance (e.g that dance equals movement, or that there is a neutral dance body), and thus brings a self-reflective dimension into dance, an awareness of the cultural, historical and economic context of the contemporary dance genre. However, if the entry of dramaturgy is only understood as a consequence of aesthetic changes, we are in danger of labeling dramaturgy as a new *doxa*. According to this new *doxa* the dramaturg is someone who is trained in the poststructuralist critical manner and familiar with the post-dramatic expansion of performance practice; the dramaturg is a guarantor of interdisciplinary. At the same time, her work corresponds to the curatorial concepts of festivals and increasingly contextually-oriented production scopes. This kind of understanding of dramaturgy often works as a guarantee for the quality of performance, and is contained (albeit not always consciously) in the abovementioned dramaturgical coaching schemes.

Closely reading how dramaturgs themselves describe their work in contemporary dance, we can observe that many of them emphasise the need for the proximity of the work processes, for their inclusion, and point out the affective and embodied aspects of their work. Dramaturgical work has been described as embodied (Lepecki), as the management of different dramaturgical energies (Imschoot), as making the material richer in terms of dynamics and meaning. (Fabio) (Turner and Behrndt 2008) Often, such descriptions reject the notion of the dramaturg as an observer, the one who is in the know, someone who spends most of the time sitting in the darkness of the stalls with a critical perspective from a distance. These descriptions aim to transcend the role of the dramaturg as a guarantor of objective knowledge. Dramaturgical collaboration is therefore characterised by a demand for proximity, which not only springs from the instability of epistemological categories or the fact that dramaturgs collaborate in dance performances with bodies and not texts. It also describes the topography of the work process, the division of roles and activities – we can also talk about certain characteristics of dramaturgical 'labour'.[1] I remember Meg Stuart describing a bodily automatism as a consequence of the proximity of her collaboration with her former dramaturg Bettina Masoch, who allegedly always sat very close to her and to whom the artist always turned to during the process by putting her hands on her shoulders: "I used to continue doing that for a while, even when she was no longer beside me."[2] This anecdotal automatism of work proximity (which, of course, can enter a variety of topographical images) speaks of a specific embodied aspect of dramaturgical work that is often in the foreground when we discuss the dramaturgy of a dance performance. What does this need for proximity suggest and where does it come from?

Paradox of Public Proximity

One of the answers can be found in focusing upon more "process-oriented methods of work, where the meaning, purpose, form and substance of work come from the work process and not from a meaning given in advance that needs to be dug out." (Kerkhoven 18-20) Van Kerkhoven points out the shift toward more research-oriented, open and interdisciplinary ways of creating dance performance. In her essays from two decades ago, this manner of working is connected with a postmodern understanding of art, which refuses to accept truths and meanings set in advance. Nevertheless, it is possible to claim from today's perspective that, in addition to the aesthetic characteristics of some specific style or art period, this kind of focus upon process-oriented methods of working is connected with the wider economic and cultural contexts of work processes, with immaterial labour in general.

In the foreground of many productions and presentations of contemporary dance over the last two decades has been the multilogue and pluralist orientation of the very process of artistic work, its affective, linguistic and cognitive dimensions, which importantly contribute to and shape the contexts of presentation and institutionalisation of dance (as well as that of dance education, research, etc.).

The work process in contemporary dance is also closely connected with the temporary community modes of collaboration. This is proved by the phenomenon of the appearance and disappearance of dance centres (Brussels, Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris), or temporary production initiatives whose additional value is precisely that of a constant exchange of immaterial work (information, knowledge, affection, emotion, proximity, criticalness, belonging).[3] The proximity often found in descriptions of dramaturgical work in dance is then not only a consequence of the dramaturg's work with bodies, or her awareness that there is no external guarantor of truth. This kind of demand for proximity is closely connected with the disappearance of the differences between individual manners of human experience, between labour, action, and intellect. Paolo Virno analyses the disappearance of the differences between labour (work oriented towards an organic exchange with nature) and action (political activity) in the contemporary post-Fordian world of labour, a world where labour is becoming increasingly similar to political, public action – the kind of action which finds its own fulfillment in itself. At the same time, intellect, too, is no longer an isolated reflexive activity but, according to Virno, becomes the basic score of post-Fordian labour (at the forefront of

production are human cognitive abilities). Labour therefore becomes public, a virtuoso practice which always takes place in front of others.

It is no coincidence that contemporary dance (along with other contemporary art forms) is created and presented through many production contexts which encourage and develop artistic work in front of the public: we watch works-in-progress, research processes, open rehearsals, workshops, festivals with curatorial and contextual orientations, results of research processes, and so forth. "In the new landscape, the choreographer claims a theoretical voice, the critic emerges as producer, the agent writes dance reviews, the philosopher tries some steps, the audience is invited to join as both student and practitioner." (Lepecki, "Dramaturgija" 27) In the first part of his text, Lepecki connects this kind of disappearance of differences with an emerging epistemological uncertainty about the critical discourse of dance. At the same time, he points out that this kind of disappearance should be studied from the perspective of the economy and capital which are influencing contemporary modes of production in performance. The disappearance of the differences between various categories of work and practices results from a shift in the understanding of the materiality of the artistic process of work itself, which profoundly influences the current ways in which dance is performed.

It could be argued that the need for proximity and embodiment of dramaturgical work in performance stems from the paradoxical fact that the methods of work, and labour processes in general, have become visible or public. The work that goes into creating a performance takes on a performative dimension – it is a process in itself and therefore demands an audience. The need for proximity is therefore actually the other side of the public character of the processes of artistic work. The performance of the work process is closely connected with the need for the inclusion of participants.

It is well known that 20th-century art calls attention to visibility, perception, and the materiality of the creative processes. Art is performed as a specific practice which finds its own fulfillment in itself. As Agamben states, contemporary art has experienced a gradual disappearance of the distinction between poiesis and praxis, the two dimensions of human work which Aristotle had formulated as separate.[4] The disappearance of a difference between work whose fulfillment lies outside of itself (poiesis) and work which finds its fulfillment in itself (praxis) has influenced many aesthetic shifts in art, such as the emancipatory aspects of the avant-garde, the relation between life and art, open work concepts, as well as the conceptual and collaborative artistic processes.

In contemporary dance, however, we are faced with an interesting problem which at this point can only be briefly outlined. Since its beginnings, contemporary dance has been viewed as a unique praxis, as a movement which finds its own fulfilment in itself, as a unique metakinesis where there is no difference between poiesis and praxis. The contemporary dance movements which, over the last 20 years, have again put into the foreground the praxis of dance, and engaged in the proximity of the spectator within that praxis, are therefore not a digression from production-oriented contemporary dance which might understand itself as a unique poiesis. I would also claim that, in this case, it is not so much about a clash of ideologies or statements over what dance is supposed to be, which is why the frequent description of the dance movements of the last two decades as conceptual dance misses the point. What really takes place is a change in the manner of practice, in the production of dance itself, in the way dance is made, all of which is closely connected to choreographic work in the wider sense of the word. The proximity and collapse of the distance between various work processes and professions is closely connected with changes in contemporary capitalism, where, according to Virno, fundamental abilities of the human being come into prominence. At the forefront of production are language, thought, self-reflection, and the ability to learn. Contemporary production consists of sharing linguistic and cognitive habits, and it is this affective and intellectual exchange of knowledge that constitutes post-Fordist labour production. "All the workers enter into the production as much as they are speaking-thinking. This has nothing to do, mind you, with 'professionality' or with the ancient concepts of 'skill' or 'craftsmanship': to speak/to think are generic habits of the human animal, the opposite of any sort of specialisation." (Virno 41) For Virno, this can be described as preliminary sharing, which is itself the basis of contemporary production. In his view, sharing is opposed to the traditional division of labour. There are no longer objective technical criteria that regulate the shared working conditions or define the responsibility of each worker in his or her own specialised sphere. As Virno writes, "the segmentation of duties no longer answers on the objective 'technical' criteria, but is, instead, explicitly arbitrary, reversible, changeable." (41) In this context, the manner of artistic production no longer differs from other manners of production; as a matter of fact, contemporary capitalism has accepted some of the basic characteristics of artistic work such as creativity, autonomy and innovation. Interdisciplinarity, dance as a field of knowledge, research, open work, work in progress, embodied dramaturgy – all these categories are to be rethought and positioned in relation to cognitive capitalism, which places embodied language relations and events at the foreground of production processes. In this sense, the eventness of dance itself, its relationality, and the effectiveness of work processes are emphasised and become part of the production and performance of contemporary dance.

It would also be possible to set a hypothesis which we will not be able to reflect on in depth at this point. Having developed through the 20th century in connection with the principles of Fordism (endless motion, speed, oscillation between order and chaos, the regulated and the coincidental), the development of contemporary dance over the last two decades has reflected the deep changes brought about by post-Fordian modes of labour (cognitive and affective virtuosity, multilayered temporality, proximity, collaboration processes, openness of work, etc.). In this sense, different choreographic practices should not be understood only as aesthetic practices, but also as wider social processes of distributing bodies in time and space. These kinds of practices no longer emerge from the speed and autonomy of the industrial movement. What unfolds before us is the perceptive embodiment of the body, the intermediation of the body, the cognitive and biogenetic potentiality of movement. There has been a shift from the autonomy and dynamism of movement to the broader social and cultural distribution of bodies, with heteronomy and proximity emerging as main characteristics of contemporary cultural and economic relations.

Footnotes:

1 At the time when differences between manners of work are disappearing, dramaturgy can also be approached from the perspective of immaterial labour.

2 The memory refers to a conference which featured duos of choreographers and dramaturgs. The conference was organised by Luk van den Dries, De Singel, Antwerpen, 2004.

3 The fact that the majority of these exchanges takes place on a voluntary basis additionally emphasizes the value of this kind of immaterial work which is free of charge (Bauer 107-108).

4 Ana Vujanović writes about that in her text in this same issue of *Maska*.

The Profession of the Dramaturg

A major reason for the entry of dramaturgy into dance can be found in the changing contexts of artistic practice and social labour. The entry of the dramaturg into dance could be read as a consequence of the changes in the political economy of labour, where the production of language, contexts, and human cognitive and affective abilities now dominates. These changes are not only a consequence of artistic self-reflexivity and cannot be considered as isolated events in the (supposedly autonomous) sphere of art, but a reflection of the onset of cognitive capitalism and the altered modes of production associated with it. This is why the dramaturg's work is strongly characterised by flexibility; as a participant in the process, the dramaturg can occupy a variety of roles – those of practical dramaturg, producer, festival director, stage manager, writer, journalist, teacher, workshop leader, coach, lecturer, academic, artist, dancer, production network member, cultural politics advisor, mentor, friend, compass, memory, fellow traveller, mediator, psychologist. The complexity of the dramaturg's profession – the affective ability to move between theoretical reflection and practical knowledge, to be an external eye and an involved participant at the same time – is often too hastily reduced to a sort of 'aesthetic' elusiveness. On the contrary, the flexibility of the dramaturg's work is connected to the contemporary production of events and relations, and the dramaturg often becomes a facilitator of the contemporary exchange of concepts, senses, attention, and perception. Flexibility, which is part of the political economy of the dramaturg's work/labour, enables them to continuously deal with various possibilities of artistic production. These production possibilities are closely connected with new institutions, which are not based so much on the stable architecture and representative power of production houses, but rather on a model of constantly changing, critical and creative platforms for events and meetings. In this sense, contemporary dramaturgy differs from the modern project of audience cultivation and critical discourse formation, which has shaped audience taste and collective identification. As Eda Čufer writes, the function of the dramaturg according to the traditional enlightenment model is especially to establish fluidity and transition between various autonomous systems or spheres.[5] Precisely because of its ability to transgress, the work of traditional dramaturgy is marked by a sense of objectivity, with the dramaturg identifying and categorising the audience that visits the artistic institution. Today, however, when the differences between diverse ways of human experience (labour, action, intellect) are blurred and the differences between autonomous systems discussed by Čufer are disappearing as well, notions of objectivity and externality seem anachronistic. Proximity, therefore, corresponds to the contemporary tendency towards audience fragmentation and individualisation, as well as to the ideals of mobility and flexibility embraced by contemporary artistic institutions. Rather than adopting a perspective of objective distance, the professional dramaturg today embodies a kind of affective proximity, which, at the same time, is also at the forefront of understanding contemporary creative processes, models of contemporary institutions, and ways of disseminating artistic work.

Very often the role of the dramaturg has been defined by the simple fact that a performance always takes place before an audience. The dramaturg is continuously denoted as the first spectator, or someone who translates between the process and the product presented; someone who establishes the context of presenting and mediates between the various dissemination processes of artistic work. In all of these descriptions, the dramaturg adopts an outside perspective, whereas the audience is presented as a sort of anonymous multitude whose identification is also constructed by the dramaturg. Not only does the dramaturg represent the taste of the audience, but she is also capable of transforming attitudes by means of interpreting meaning. Contemporary dramaturgy radically digresses from this representational function of the dramaturg, not least because contemporary audiences can no longer be defined as a multitude characterised by a communal ways of identification. As the developments of the performing arts in the 20th century have shown, the modes of audience perception and reception have become fragmentary. Contemporary audiences are a lot more unstable, dynamic and singular; spectators become aware of their own viewing positions and perspectives and experience proximity and distance in embodied ways. Such individualised ways of looking, however, raise an interesting problem that places the anonymous contemporary spectator (anonymous because a priori they do not belong to a defined group, nation, class, gender, etc.) in proximity to the event. The spectator becomes a participant who is actively and critically involved in what takes place. This economy of proximity is characteristic of the production contexts within which contemporary art is presented and produced. Inclusion, participation, relationality, engagement, emotional and intellectual involvement, affective temporality, expectation – all of these modes are embraced in contemporary dance dramaturgy.

Conclusion

One of my most unusual dramaturgical experiences began on a Monday morning in 2007, when a kind organiser of a contemporary dance production house gave me the list of participants of a one-week session in dramaturgical coaching. As a dramaturg, I was to meet three authors or groups per day, with three hours in the studio available for our 'séance'. The intention was to work on their upcoming performances, address questions generated by the authors during the work process, analyse created materials, question the relation to the audience, etc. It soon turned out that the authors came from a variety of backgrounds and with quite diverse motivations. Some had open questions that arose in the middle of the work on their performances; some wanted to share ideas from the beginning stages of their work; some came with finished performances. Like many of the authors, I felt at the beginning of each three-hour 'séance' as if going to a blind date and jumping into a precipice to boot; as befits dates of this kind, some of the meetings were unforgettable and some were failures from the very start. It was precisely due to the endless diversity of these meetings and the elusive materiality of our exchanges that I obsessively began to search for a common denominator with which I could connect and 'ground' our meetings. At the end of the week I noticed that, for the purposes of note-taking, we all used the currently very trendy Moleskine notebook, commercially successful and sold along with the romantic experience of its first user, Bruce Chatwin.

Compared to other more intensive and more research-oriented formats, this singular adventure of one-week dramaturgical coaching could be brushed off as not a very good idea on the part of the production house. Nevertheless, I think the very fact that there is a need for the artist (choreographer, director, dancer, etc.) to be dramaturgically trained, needs consideration. In the case described above, the artists involved are prepared to pay for this meeting; an economic exchange takes place between the artist and the dramaturgical 'coach' with the aid of an intermediary / producer. At the same time, such workshops are not the domain of result-driven production houses but are generally sought after by arts organisations that are interested in open ways of working rather than in products. Prior to the adventure described, I had the opportunity to participate in workshops held by more research-oriented organisations. There was no payment required from the artists and the coach's fee was much lower as well. There was, however, more emphasis placed on the symbolic value of the exchange because it enables artists to acquire new knowledge, as well as providing an opportunity to socialize and practice contemporary forms of dance and theatre art. Considering that coaching always aims at improving a certain ability, increasing the quality of performing

a certain task and perfecting a certain discipline, what could be the aim of dramaturgical coaching? Which quality should be enhanced by means of it? How should the object of this exchange be articulated? What ability is coached? What can change or shift by means of such a meeting? One could get away with the answer that it is simply about a dialogue between two parties, about a proximity that opens the path toward the possibility of exchanging knowledge and approaches. Why is it, however, that this dialogue is given a material value, in concrete financial or symbolic terms? And why is it that this kind of proximity is dependent upon the intermediation by a third party (who marks this proximity with their own indelible stamp)?

I think that these questions can only be answered by analysing the cultural and economic contexts that have influenced the emergence of dramaturgy in contemporary dance over the last two decades, especially since the 1990s. It is only in this way that the phenomenon of dramaturgical coaching will not be moralistically read as excess or an example of bad practice, one testifying to the production/market appropriation of research-oriented, open and interdisciplinary ways of working. Quite the opposite, coaching is only the other, extreme side of 'good practice', of the so-called elusiveness of dramaturgical practice, its frequently anecdotal inability of naming, its visible invisibility, and its ability to combine theory and practice. It is this openness of the dramaturgical practice in contemporary dance that can take up many different roles, oscillating between "reflection and creativity; detail and overview" (Behrndt 96). It is interdisciplinary, opens possibilities for production, and represents an ability that is difficult to define.

"That was just a very good dialogue between me, as dramaturge, and them, as the artists ... I'm probably rather a curator, but in both cases the important thing is that they – that the artists have a partner to give them a kind of faith that is welcome – that it's kind of accepted, that it's understood. That's probably the most important thing, that it's understood." (Thomas Frank in Turner and Behrndt 112) This is how Thomas Frank (a dramaturg and the current joint artistic director of BRUT theatre in Vienna) describes his work with the UK Company Lone Twin. Emphasizing the notion of proximity, Frank describes the dramaturg as someone who calms you down, offers emotional support and even faith. What is accepted (or not) as a result of the proximity of the dramaturg? What exactly is calming about the dramaturg's presence? These questions are meant to supplement the introductory questions pertaining to the difficulty of articulating the processes of dramaturgical coaching. If we wish to at least approximately answer those questions, we need to immerse ourselves in the complex core of immaterial knowledge – an elusive ability and potentiality which is part of dramaturgical work. The appearance of this knowledge/ability can be explained by using Marx's famous description of the changes in the 19th century: "All that is solid melts into air." As we well know, it is dematerialization that guarantees surplus value, or better put, the fictitiousness of value (whose material consequences we are facing in the present economic crisis). In this immaterial process, articulated through various ways of proximity and collaboration, cognitive and embodied knowledge become frequently appropriated, organized and embodied through the intermediation of the market and capital. Furthermore, this knowledge is at the core of contemporary production. The questions that I consider essential are: How can one place dramaturgical work in relation to politics and capital? The most interesting problem here is the question about the political potentiality of proximity itself. What is the potentiality of working with a dramaturg? On the one hand, proximity often veils the appropriation of the processual character of work and gives priority to a critical, but non-antagonistic understanding of performance work and audience reception. According to this perspective the dramaturg becomes that fellow conversationalist who calms our fears about contemporary life by ensuring that a certain practice can be shown on the market. On the other hand, we have to examine whether the entry of the dramaturg into contemporary dance nevertheless testifies to a certain radical change of artistic practice, which has the power to intervene socially and disclose artistic work as an antagonistic political space.

From this perspective, proximity does not spring from the intermediation of a third party which enables us to write our thoughts down into the same trendy notebooks, but results from an encounter of different ways of working together, which only enables (or fails to enable) changes and establishes future forms of being. The placing of cognitive knowledge into the centre of the production process can thus open new ways of being and also profoundly question the nature of dance and its supposedly self-evident relation to contemporary life.

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kunstbody.wordpress.com

Do:

Bojana Kunst will be teaching a 1-week workshop at Dancehouse on **On Dramaturgy in Contemporary Dance and Performance**

March 17–21.

Footnotes:

5 Eda Čufer writes that dramaturgy is an intermediation between three autonomous spheres: the first one is philosophy, theory and academic discourse; the second one is literary and theatre practice; the third one is theatre as an institution of public significance and ideological discourse. (Čufer 23) These three spheres correspond to the three domains of human experience described by Virno.

Read More:

Eleanor Bauer. "*Becoming Room, Becoming Mac: New Artistic Identity in the Transnational Brussels Dance Community.*" *Maska* 107-108 (2007): 58-67.

Synne K. Behrndt. "The dramaturg as collaborator: process and proximity." conference paper, conference *Dramaturgy as Applied Knowledge: From Theory to Pactice and Back*, The Department of Theatre Studies, Tel Aviv University, http://expandeddramaturgies.com/?cat=10. 25. 3. 2007.

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Cathy Turner, and Synne K. Behrndt. *Dramaturgy and Performance. Theatre and performance practices*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

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The body speaks of directness,
without disguise, without artifice.
It speaks of vulnerability
and of power, of pleasure and
suffering, of innocence and
knowingness. It tells truth.
It cant do otherwise.