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ISSUE 13. POLITICALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE. WINTER 2017

# THEATRE PAGES

ISSUE 13

POLITICALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE

EDITOR  
ILLUSTRATIONS

**Matthew Reason**  
**Jules Dorey Richmond**

**Rachel Conlon**  
**Lana Cowings**  
**Lucy Dickinson**  
**Jules Dorey Richmond**  
**Charlotte Hansell**  
**Alana Howarth-Lees**  
**Shannon Mack**  
**Rita Marcalo**  
**Jordan Miller**  
**Matthew Reason**  
**Nick Rowe**  
**Rachael Sampson**  
**Holly Sloan**  
**Elanor Stannage**  
**Nathan Walker**  
**Brandon Webb**

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POLITICAL SATIRE

Huge thanks to Jules Dorey Richmond, Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at YSJU, for the illustrations that accompany each entry in this special issue. They playfully and evocatively respond to the content, representing the art works and concepts visually in an enlivening manner.

# ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION

This special issue of Theatre Pages focuses on politically engaged practice.

We know, of course, that everything is political. The personal is political; the private is political; beauty is political; doing nothing is especially political; art is always political.

This is a truism: a statement or platitude that runs the risk of saying nothing, of meaning nothing. For it to become meaning we need to pause, consider the relationship between politics and arts practice, reassert the role of the artist as activist, interrogate how the affective qualities of art enable it to have an impact on minds, attitudes and emotions.

This special issue emerges from a level 2 module, also titled Politically Engaged Practice, which invites students to consider how arts practice impacts upon and is itself impacted by political movements. Around half of the contributions are from students on this module, representing their engagement with practitioners and concepts that have inspired them and made them think differently about their world.

This special issue is eclectic. It does not claim to be comprehensive or systematic. Rather it offers a snapshot of the concerns and values that circulate in our world at this time. We hope you enjoy, maybe learn something and are inspired by what you read here.

February 2017

# SHAKESPEARE IN PRISONS

York St John University's Prison Partnership Project has collaborated with the Donmar Warehouse in London, on a unique, creative partnership between the arts, education and the prison service. The partnership arose out of director Phyllida Lloyd's vision for producing a trilogy of Shakespeare plays set in women's prisons and performed by all-female casts.

The partnership has involved working with prisoners at HMP Askham Grange and HMP New Hall to explore Shakespeare, considering the themes of the play in relation to their personal journeys through the criminal justice system. Through dynamic creative engagement it has been powerful to witness the women prisoners speaking and performing Shakespeare, recognising elements of themselves and others in the characters of the plays. The ability of the prisoners to give voice to the wider critical issues surrounding women in the criminal justice system, which emerged through the reading and exploration of the trilogy of plays, was inspiring.

In return the Donmar's company developed a deeper understanding of the terrain of prison, always striving for authenticity when mapping the topography of prison onto Shakespeare's plays. Through this carefully nurtured creative process, working in parallel, we have illuminated each other's desire to dig deeper into the text, unearthing a voice that

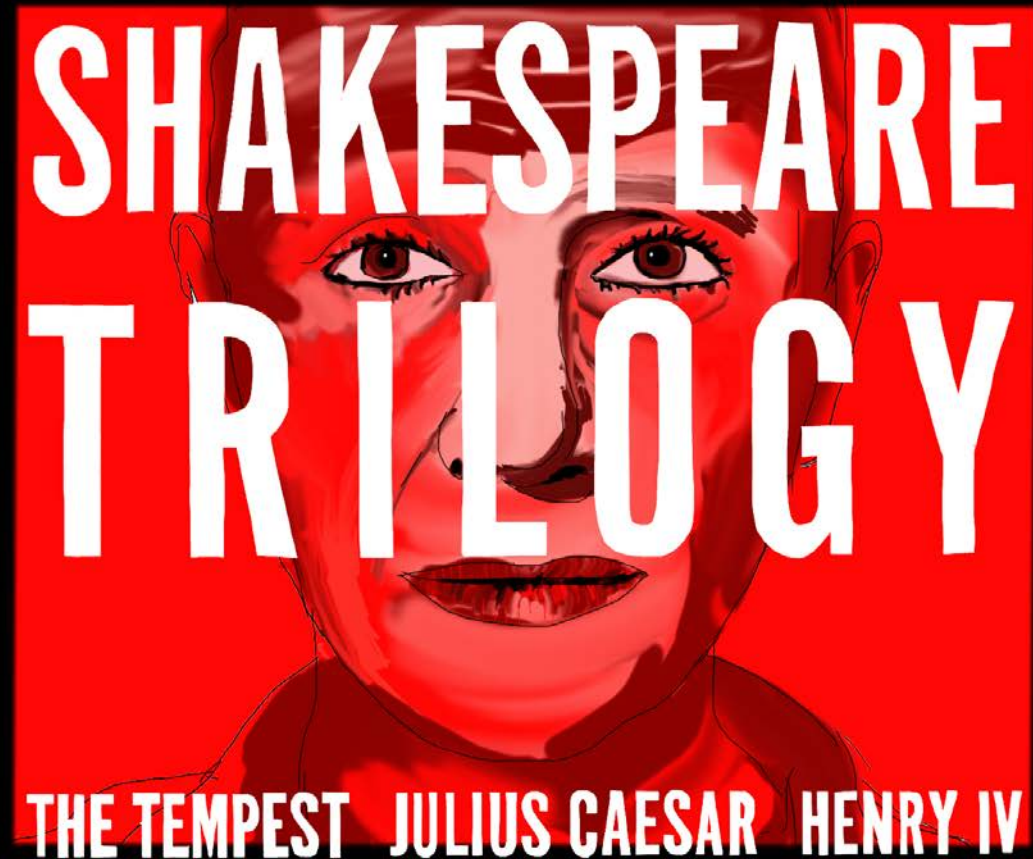
challenges the perception of women in prison, and questions how we as a society lock women up.

The actors' desire to get their prison characters right, to make sure that they were not just presenting a simplistic view of women in prison, to do justice to the women that they had met and listened to through the work of the Partnership, is powerful. The prisoners were amazed by the actors' commitment to the cause and delighted at how they paid homage to the fresh insights of prison life that were provided.

There have been moments in the rehearsal process when a shift in the development was needed and the prisoners have provided the nudge required, sharing their experiences of prison to enable the actors to unlock their characters' relationship to one another and to the prison system. When moments such as these happen, the women leave the drama group empowered and full of vigor. 'I feel like I have a voice, that I'm turning a bad situation into a good one,' says one prisoner. 'We need to make the days count, not count the days,' replies another. One of the ways in which the arts can effect social change is by looking beyond our own selves and community. By creating theatre and by facilitating a shared arts process that encourages an equal voice in the learning process, both communities see each other as real people.

**Rachel Conlon**

Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre



# Krip-Hop NATION



## BEAUTY IN EXILE

In our daily lives we are constantly bombarded with images of 'beauty.' But what is considered beautiful? According to the dictionary, beauty is defined as being 'a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight.' When it comes to people, however, the conventional ideals of beauty can be constricting, limiting, even corrosive to wellbeing and sense of self. This is particularly the case for individuals marked by difference, such as disability.

In her work and writings disabled artist Riva Lehrer explores how beauty is much more than its limiting and purely skin deep definition. She suggests that beauty has two meanings; 'simple beauty' being one that is based purely on appearance, while 'informed beauty' is one that takes time, and is the 'kind of thing we undergo when we fall in love.' As a woman with visible disabilities, she has a complex and uncomfortable relationship with beauty and has concluded that disabled bodies are collectively 'afraid to let informed beauty happen.' Lehrer describes how in opening herself to being loved, she is opening her own self-acceptance: 'I can attest that I am altered when someone makes me see myself differently. When my lover tells me I'm beautiful I won't ask her what she means. She's made me understand what I'm asking from

someone when I ask them to let me really look.'

Musician and performer Leroy Moore also expresses aspects of this 'informed beauty' within his work; this invitation to allow someone to accept and appreciate your own natural beauty. As a composer of Krip-Hop (hip hop artists with disabilities), Leroy Moore allows his disability to become beautiful. His piece entitled Droolicious, focuses on switching something people are used to seeing as a negative and giving it a new window; in this case 'drooling', caused by his cerebral palsy. His use of the term 'Droolicious' in relation to his drooling, aims to give something that is stereotypically considered 'gross' and 'ugly', more positive connotations:

*Cerebral palsy, was schooled to catch my drool.  
Now I'm a man changing the rules.  
Found someone that thinks it's sexy.  
Now I'm naming it Droolicious.  
Baby come here and give me kisses.  
Straight from my lips into your mouth. (Moore 2014)*

Through their work, Moore and Lehrer use beauty, love and sexuality to subvert the negative connotations associated with disability, revealing the the intersection between the politics of disability and the politics of beauty.



# PENNY DROP DEMO

## PENNY DROP



In 2013 I choreographed *Penny Drop Demo*, a series of manifestations against bankers' greed. *Penny Drop Demo* was an instance of protest dance; a choreographed arrangement of relations between physical bodies in time and space as an act of protest with the intent of highlighting, defying or changing something about the political or social environment.

One of my motivations for *Penny Drop Demo* was to effectively express my frustrations and anger as a working class woman at the impact of the global financial crisis on the poor, which was largely evaded by the wealthy. I was aware of the limitations of traditional forms of protest. According to Direct Action Network's N30 Handbook 'Traditional demonstrations and protests, while essential often alienate the general public, are disregarded by corporate media, bore many of the participants and are ignored by policy makers' (2005). Conventional protests such as marches, occupations and strikes use threats of some kind of negative outcome – whether violence, loss of services or loss of votes – to achieve results. By contrast, protest dance encourages change by making people think. It is creative, engaging, thought-provoking and non-violent protest, in which human bodies can express solidarity and freedom in a physically real sense. It achieves desired outcomes by maintaining the interest and engaging more effectively with the thinking of observers and

participants. This in turn could lead to a positive climate of change affecting societal attitudes and influence decision makers.

*Penny Drop Demo* happened in four public manifestations, the last of which could be followed online through a blog. In one manifestation people dropped handfuls of pennies outside three banks on Parliament Street, York. The penny droppers offered pennies they had picked back up to members of the audience and the public as a small act of generosity. The manifestation caused diverse reactions ranging from groups of people standing and looking, a bank manager coming out to ask what we were doing, to a member of the public demanding of the participants that they explain themselves. My aim was to engage with onlookers by encouraging them to think about greed and the role of banks in our high streets in the financial crisis.

It would be interesting to know if a conventional protest with the same number of protestors would have attracted as much attention as *Penny Drop Demo*. Elie Wiesel writes that 'There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest' (1997). Particularly in an era of increasing racism, Brexit and Trump, protest – whether through dance or other art forms – seems evermore needed.



## IT'S NOT OK

Theatre in Education functions to assist young people to engage with the world in which they live and provide what Augusto Boal described as a 'rehearsal for life.' In Spring 2015, myself and colleague Rachel Conlon, in association with Connecting Youth Culture, were commissioned by the City of York Safeguarding Children Board and the NSPCC to write and deliver an accessible and creative TIE project to all year 7 pupils in York as part of a year-long city wide campaign to raise awareness of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation.

The creative team, of current and alumni YSJ theatre students, drew upon professional support service testimonies and real life case studies to devise *It's Not OK* – a 25-minute play following four teenagers through their experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation via the prism of internet, gaming, social and family relationships. This was followed by a 90-minute drama workshop where pupils explore the issues raised by the play. Through TIE techniques the pupils give the characters 'advice' and find strategies in order to seek out support against sexual abuse and exploitation. A safeguarding children's worker accompanied the production, as 'an expert in the room' for the young people to speak to at all times.

The commission was born out of a real social need and the desire to combat the cultural epidemic of child sexual

abuse and child sexual exploitation. It was delivered to 2,000 young people in York, giving the important message that sexual abuse and exploitation is never OK as well as practical tools to recognize and report it. One teacher commented: 'We often make the big mistake of informing our young people of dangers but giving them no understanding of how to resolve situations, yet seeing the play and having the workshop discussions gave pupils a number of solutions for how to resolve the issues.'

A pupil at one school fed back afterwards: 'The play put difficult problems into a format that made it easier for me to understand what child sexual abuse was.'

TIE can support children in intervening positively in their lives, providing strategies for protecting themselves, seeking help and advice and indeed knowing and voicing the fact that child sexual abuse 'is not ok'. Thanks to the support of the commissioners and other agencies, *It's Not OK* is currently touring to year 8 pupils across 5-local authorities in SE Wales and has been invited to tour schools throughout Sheffield and Sunderland. The project as whole is testament to the enduring potency of TIE as a vehicle to engender understanding, act as a rehearsal for life and facilitate empowerment and social change.

# WAFAA BILAL

In 2007 Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal spent 31 days in a room with a paintball gun, in order to challenge ideas of privacy and engage people in a political dialogue through less conventional means. For his performance, *Domestic Tension*, the artist hooked a webcam up to a paintball gun and allowed users (via a website) to take shots at him, 24 hours a day. The website also contained a chat room in which participants could talk to the artist and each other. In the first day alone, over 1000 paintballs had already been shot. Writing about the performance, Clio Unger states, 'Bilal staged his performance to draw attention to a growing disconnect between those perpetuating violence and those being subjected to it' (2015).

Bilal's brother Haji had been killed in war by a young soldier who had dropped bombs remotely on Iraqi targets from a drone while himself in the safety of the US. This spurred his intention for the piece to be a critical commentary on the West's detachment from war through modern technologies that allows those involved to be 'completely oblivious to the terror and destruction that they were causing to a family – a whole society – halfway across the world' (Bilal 2008). This notion of anonymity also became a key concept in Bilal's work. Participants could shoot Bilal through the website or in the gallery space, and he found that the people who were shooting through the website (who were only known via

an IP address) were more likely than not to hit him, whilst the people who were actually with him in the gallery space were not. This is due to the fact that when we are anonymous, we feel less of a connection and responsibility towards someone. We can hide behind a screen and can never be blamed in the real world as we are only known by this virtual identity.

Throughout the process, Bilal documented each day through video diaries. Watching these videos you can see that the drastic change in Bilal's mental state as the days go on. His journey within the piece is challenging, under constant surveillance and never knowing at any moment what to expect; giving the audience such ownership and responsibility of the performance is a risk in itself. By day 30 you can see the sleep deprived state in which he has become, but also a relief that that it is nearly over. Exhausted, he says 'It's had its ups and downs, it has united people, it has divided people, but that is what art is supposed to do, it is supposed to inform and educate' (2007).



**Charlotte Hansell**  
BA Drama Student



# GREEN PORNO

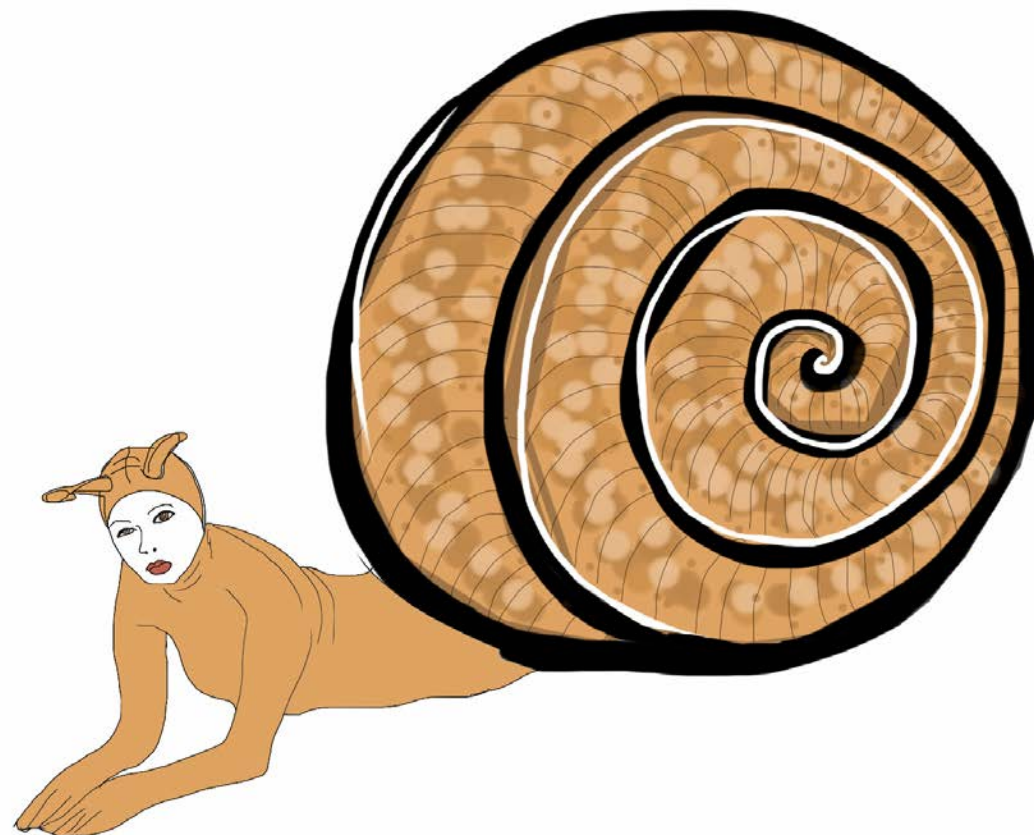
Human existence is one of the greatest contributors to the destruction of our fragile environment and as humans we have largely disconnected ourselves from the natural world. Instead, we have anthropomorphized nature to fit what we want and expect from it, often making it 'cute', sugar-coated and to an extent human-like (think Bambi).

One artist that strives to change the warped manner in which people view nature is actor, filmmaker and activist Isabella Rossellini. Rossellini's *Green Porno* is a series of short films in which she portrays animals for what they really are, dressing in striking foam costumes representing each animal as she describes how they reproduce, their complex sexualities and maternal/paternal relationships. The films are at once educational and entertaining, often focusing on sex, with Rossellini explaining that while not everyone is interested in animals, it is undeniable that everyone takes an interest in sex. Not only does she base each individual film on a taboo topic, but also often focuses on animals which people would not class as being cute, such as bed bugs and snails, with her intention being to spark interest in animals that are markedly different to us.

When asked about what fueled her ideas for *Green Porno*, Rossellini says, 'I think society has made the mistake of seeing the act of making love or mating as an act of reproduction,

when actually it is used for other things, too. Animals use it for social events, bonding, solving conflict and so on' (2009). *Green Porno* is a far cry from the representations of animals we get to see in film, or in children's picture books such as Beatrix Potter, and the detailed understanding of how snails (to take just one example) fornicate undeniably changes the way we think of the species – so much more complex, rich and different than we might have expected.

It is difficult to get people to engage with something they have disconnected from without projecting humanness all over it. There is also a kind of impossibility to this task, as Thomas Thwaites (an artist himself most famous for dressing up as a goat) says 'It's impossible because we are trapped in our own human thought.' Nevertheless the attempt is what is important. We cannot go on living as though we are the only things on this planet that matter when there are millions of other life forms that we share it with. As human we seek empathy with one another in order to live harmoniously, and if we desire an ecologically sustainable future we must extend this empathy to the natural world as well.







## LISA BUFANO

Many artists use their bodies to express political messages. The body can be used to shock, educate and inform audiences about things and experiences that they might not be aware of or fully understand. This is particularly the case with disabled artists and disabled bodies, which are often gazed upon because they are different. They aren't what society perceives as the norm, and become 'the focus of more of less furtive stares as passers-by attempt to make sense of their its startling, unruly or strange corporeality' (Hadley 2014). When abled bodied people gaze at disabled people they might feel disturbance, curiosity, attraction, sometimes even pity, due to them being different, being 'Other'. This is no exception to performance artist Lisa Bufano, who became a below the knee and total finger-thumb amputee aged 21 as a result of a bacterial infection.

As a performer Bufano explores the nature of her disability and the gaze it attracts from audiences. As with other disabled artists, Bufano explores how her disability might 'creep out' or disturb her audiences, using 'freakishness' [as] a powerful tool for social critique and personal awareness' (Fahy & King 2002). This is the case in *One Breath is an Ocean for a Wooden Heart*, a work created in collaboration with abled bodied artist Sonsheree Giles which premiered in December 2007. For this piece both performers wear 28" wooden stilts secured to their

arms and legs, designed to replicate Queen Anne style table legs. Wearing these, the performers create images of animals and objects – whether insects, birds, furniture, toys, freakish monsters – with the disabled and abled bodies working together in a dance piece.

The result is that the difference between the abled and disabled performers becomes obscured. Bufano and Giles experience the struggle and frustration of moving on the extended stilts together. They both rely upon and are encumbered by the stilts equally; both rely upon each other equally. By doing so is Giles placing herself inside the disabled experience? Or does the work begin to make such categories redundant? When wearing 28" Queen Anne style legs, the 'Other' and 'Norm' no longer exist in meaningful sense. They are both in the same situation going through these struggles together.

Through work such as this, Bufano allows people to gaze upon her disability, given permission for the stare but required to engage with it actively. She challenges notions that disabled people are fragile and need to be looked after. Bufano shows her audience that she might be disabled, but she is strong minded and won't allow people to treat her differently due to her disability. She invites you to imagine yourself walking on stilts.

# DANCING WITH STRANGERS

In 2016 Instant Dissidence partnered with humanitarian organisation The People's Street Kitchen to travel to 'The Jungle', a name the residents themselves gave to one of the refugee camps outside Calais. Over the course of 10 days we ran free dance workshops open to 'Jungle' residents. A smaller group of four residents also participated in one-on-one workshops and together we created a series of physical duets and audio stories of who they are, why they are there, and their aspirations for a future in the UK.

Afterwards I returned to England, but the 'Jungle' residents were, of course, unable to travel and remained behind. I therefore staged a series of street performances throughout the country where I invited people to dance with me:

*I stand in a public square, with outstretched arms and a t-shirt that says 'Dance With Me.' For every person saying yes I first hand them a set of four cards, one for each of the four 'Jungle' residents. The participant chooses a resident to dance with and I hand them headphones with an audio story by the chosen resident. As the participant listens, they perform movement instructions for the duet created by that 'Jungle' resident, and embodying what they would like to communicate to people in England should they be able to cross the border. The participant performs the*

*duet with my body, as it stands in for the body of their chosen resident who cannot be present in the flesh.*

I see *Dancing with Strangers: From Calais to England* as a choreographic act of border transgression. My body becomes a channel so that people who find themselves currently in 'The Jungle' camp offer people in England an embodied experience of their personal story of migration. Each duet is filmed, and both the English participants and the 'Jungle' residents given a weblink so they can watch their dance.

When people ask me 'what was it like to work in the camp', I find it hard to come up with an answer. Words feel inadequate for that experience. The only linguistic articulation that I have is that working in the camp felt like my model of the world got exploded and broken into little pieces. Nina Simone once said 'an artist's duty is to reflect the times.' There was a time when my work was concerned with advancing the art form of choreography. But 'that time' is no longer 'this time', and 'this time' no longer affords me that luxury. So today I foreground the role that dance can play as a social engine. I call myself an 'activist' and I utilise the power of connecting art and social consciousness.



# QUEER

The word 'queer' brings to mind a person, a community, an identity. This image mostly includes people who are attracted to others with similar genitals and communities of half-naked people marching down streets with rainbow flags. For most of us, especially those in the queer community, queer is an umbrella term to include people who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgendered. It seems impossible to define queer without referencing the dominant normative sexuality and gender. This is because gender, like race, class, and other social constructions, is a human invention and sexuality is its by-product. However the huge difference between those constructions and gender is we don't have established identities for people only attracted to one race, people above a certain height, or people with a certain socio-economic status. People indeed discriminate on romantic and sexual partners based on these preferences but they are treated as preferences and as such they are fluid and can change. However sexuality is viewed as static and people can proudly hold an identity based on their gender discrimination of sexual and romantic partners. So before we can define queer we must first analyse gender and how it operates within sexuality.

In her article 'Critically Queer' gender theorist Judith Butler states 'whereas it is important to emphasise that forms of sexuality do not unilaterally

determine gender, a non-casual and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain' (1993). Butler is arguing that the relationship between gender and sexuality is complex and co-reliant, meaning not only does gender play a role in determining our sexuality, but sexuality also changes the perception of our gender identity. She argues that homophobia is the fear of 'losing proper gender' (1993) meaning there is an idea that a gay man is not a true man and a lesbian is not a woman at all. Therefore when people identify as queer they are challenging gender reality. The word queer brings into question everything that is known about gender and sexuality. As inhabitants of a society we have to ask why many of us perceive the genders of a gay man and a heterosexual man differently or why trans and non-binary individuals confuse people because many of us thought gender was something one was born with.

This exposure and destruction of gender and heteronormativity is what leads us to the word queer. Queer, as both an identity and a scholarly lens, is the deconstruction and challenge of normative gender association and the heterosexual matrix, and is an important tool in the destruction of gender and sexual oppression.

**Jordan Miller**

Exchange Student, Pacific University, USA





# IT'S THE SKIN YOU'RE LIVING IN

We are now living in the Anthropocene, a new geological age defined as the period since human activity has become *the* dominant factor on climate and environmental change. The significance of this statement needs some reflection. The previous geological age was the Holocene, an epoch that begun 11,500 years ago when the glaciers began to retreat. It is now human activity that is causing change to natural systems at this kind of global level. The role, relevance and even point of art in the face of such issues might be considered moot. They are too big, too impossible, too abstract. Yet it is in the context of these issues that work like *Fevered Sleep's It's the skin you're living in* makes an important contribution.

The work is a multi-format film that follows the progress of a man dressed as a polar bear as he moves through a series of locations – snow covered Svalbard, the Outer Hebrides, the M11 motorway, a suburban house, a farmyard... 'Dressed as' is an inadequate description, at variously stages more-or-less of the costume is discarded as the figure morphs between human and bear and bear-human and human-bear. At one point, wearing bear head and legs but with his human arms and chest exposed, the figure walks past a series of uninterested cows; at another it roars impotently at lorries passing under a motorway bridge.

The film is mournful, inviting us to think about alienation from habitat and home. If it is about climate change then it is about it as a planet wide experience of dislocation. It uses the polar bear as the iconic symbol of the vulnerability of nature to environmental change – think of images of bears perched on melting icebergs – while through the fragmentation of the human/bear representation seeks to assert that this is happening to us too, and not just exotic animals in stark and faraway places.

The film, however, is less *about* something in the manner of a lecture or a sermon; when it comes to climate change there are plenty of those elsewhere. Rather it seeks to *do* something; specifically it seeks to re-stage the relationship between humans and animals. As the bear-human-bear travels through landscapes that are both familiar and strange the film stages our interrelationship with what David Abrams terms the 'more-than-human-world': 'We are only human' suggests Abrams, 'in contact, and conviviality, with that which is not human' (1996). Thus the Anthropocene describes not only humanity's dominant impact upon planet-wide systems, but also our responsibility for those systems. The power and potential of ecological art is to tell affective stories about worlds that are human and more-than-human.

**Matthew Reason**

Professor in Theatre and Performance





# EMPOWERMENT



The word empowerment often appears in the discourse of applied theatre. Claims are made that in some way engaging in theatre, or in drama workshops, might empower people. Too often this has little substance or any real credibility. Can we really claim that we can give power to people disadvantaged by poverty, prejudice and stigma? What can a theatre do? Is it merely 'bread and circuses'?

Despite the risk of claiming too much for the arts, the aim remains a creditable one; it recognises that many of the people we work with in the community arts or in applied theatre practice are marginalised, disadvantaged and powerless: people with learning disabilities, mental health problems, travellers, people living in impoverished neighbourhoods or in prisons. To claim that the arts may empower is to recognise the politics and economics that lie behind all we do. There is an argument that theatre can enable people, as individuals or as a community, to find their voice, and challenge the dynamics of oppression.

I want to suggest another means through which engagement in the arts can 'empower', which proceeds from the everyday observation that people who are disadvantaged in society tend to fill roles and attend places that are not valued by society. As an example from theatre: people with learning disabilities rehearse in dusty church halls; people with mental health

problems engage in drama groups often led by health professionals with little theatre experience. Language gives away the role that is expected of them: clients, patients, service users.... The inequality and power differences are reinforced by the poverty of the spaces in which people work and in the unambitious expectations of the work they make. As Wolf Wolfensberger puts it, 'Those in valued roles tend to be treated well and those in devalued roles, ill' (2000).

It follows from this analysis that to change the dynamics of powerlessness we need to engage people in activities, roles and in places that are valued by society. What might this mean? The work of Converge at York St John University suggests four pathways. First, that we work with people in socially valued roles, as artists or students, not as clients or service users. Second, that activities take place in spaces and in institutions that are valued by society, such as universities and mainstream theatres. Third, that we bring people together across social divisions. Fourth, that where possible people who are stigmatised or disadvantaged are employed, in paid and voluntary roles that challenge the prejudices attributed to them.

The nexus between power and value is tightly woven. Theatre can empower by instilling socially valued perceptions and roles that challenge prejudice.

**Nick Rowe**

Associate Professor in Arts and Health

# CUT PIECE

by  
Yoko  
Ono.



## YOKO ONO

Yoko Ono created a performance first staged in 1964 called *Cut Piece*. The work consisted of Ono passively sitting in the middle of a concert hall wearing her best suit of clothing with a pair of scissors in front of her. The audience then went up, one at a time, to cut off parts of her clothing. Similarly to Marina Abramović's notorious piece *Rhythm 0*, Ono put the performance and her fate in the hands of her audience, allowing them to decide what happened to her body and what parts should be exposed. Through this she challenged the neutrality of the relationship between spectator and art object.

Depictions of women's bodies have often been the most popular forms of artistry throughout history, and the audience's enthusiasm/willingness to gaze upon Ono as if she were a portrait in a gallery did not seem dissimilar, even though this piece of art was live, alive and human. Watching recordings of the work it is possible to note that some participants look as if they are gratified from exposing Ono, and with her body in a vulnerable state on the floor, some appeared to enjoy the power they gain from her submissiveness. One male participant can be seen in the video of the performance cutting off Ono's bra, and the man appears to instantly stop when one female audience member shouts 'stop being such a creep.'

In this work, Ono uses her body to make a political statement by remaining silent and still, (just like a large percentage of women have done throughout history) as the audience dictate her outcome. *Cut Piece* offers 'a literal example of violence aimed explicitly at the female body' (Applin 2016) through this dominative, controlling scenario. Ono's neutrality puts the audience in power, and they have to carefully decide what they should do. Are the participants to abide by the rules however disparaging towards the subject, or are they to remain passive and say nothing? Or finally, do they interrupt the piece and make a statement of protection? All three outcomes say drastically different things about the participants, and all of them come from one woman muting her body and simply sitting still.

Ono's mute physique in this piece only emphasises the reality of the male gaze, the spectator has become infected by the notion that a woman is to be stared at and objectified, and this representation seen in *Cut Piece* holds a direct correlation with the state of male hegemony in society.

# EXHIBIT B

Brett Bailey is a South African practitioner and director who explores aspects of racism through art installations. Both highly controversial yet innovative in the eyes of critics, his work includes the installation *Exhibit B*, based on the nineteenth century human zoos which 'featured Africans and conquered indigenous peoples, putting them on display in much the same way as animals.' Bailey reincarnates human zoos in *Exhibit B* through 'powerful living snapshots depicting racism and colonialism' such as live images of black women chained to the bed of an officer (*The Guardian* 2014). As slaves it was near impossible to have an individual identity, and this is expressed clearly in the work with a sense of loss – every person trapped in a human zoo effectively had their identities stripped away from them through abuse.

The installation received both rave reviews and much criticism and scrutiny, particular at its London exhibition with the showing at the Barbican eventually being cancelled in the face of fierce protests. Questions were raised over whether the installation was objectifying black people, enabling white people to gaze in a position of power over what was once deemed a normalised activity. Rosemarie Garland Thomson suggests that staring occurs because humans have a natural desire to stare at things which are unusual and different. Applied to *Exhibit B*, it

could be argued that Bailey created an installation designed to encourage a cultural gaze on bodies which are put there to be consumed, objectified by the largely white audiences of a museum or gallery, potentially re-objectifying black people in the same way they were historically.

With Bailey being a white artist, the work is particularly open to accusations of appropriation and misunderstanding. Whatever his intentions, the forcefulness of objections to the work require respecting. Indeed, Bailey acknowledges, people have said to him 'White boy, you are messing with my culture. You have no right to tell the story of our spiritual practices or our history, because you are getting it all wrong' (*The Guardian* 2014).

However, it could also be argued that while Bailey has granted a voyeuristic power to the audience, he also kept a sense of performative agency through the presence of the live performers who are able to return the audience's gaze. Perhaps, to adopt the language of Petra Kuppers, the performers are 'guiding the audience's gaze rather than being the immobile object of its stare' (2004). Either way, this is a highly charged political work that makes us think about how art engages with race in the twenty-first century.



Holly Sloan  
BA Drama Student



# BOBBY BAKER

Bobby Baker is a woman (as she always reminds us at the start of her performances) and an artist whose radical performance work has included feminist disruptions of the 'everyday' and challenging yet humorous explorations of the experience of mental illness. Examples of her early work include: *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home* (1976) where she constructed a life size version of her family from cake and meringue and invited the audience to consume them; *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1988) which explored Baker's autobiographical narrative of motherhood and post-natal depression whilst constructing a chaotic and messy Pollock-esque painting from everyday foodstuffs; and *Kitchen Show* (1991), part of the *Daily Life* series of work, where she invites the audience into her kitchen and explains how she uses various fruits and vegetables to stay calm and manage her life (describing in minute detail how to hurl a ripe pear at a cabinet for anger management). Baker's more recent work explicitly deals with the experience mental ill health. In her performance *How to Live* (2007), Baker offers funny, yet disturbing strategies for surviving mental illness and the psychiatric system whilst challenging normative attitudes to mental ill health.

Baker's work employs an astute layering of autobiographical narrative, the performativity of daily life and familiar materials (often foodstuffs)

allowing the spectator an immediate pleasure of recognition, of beauty and comfort in the familiar. As a performer she plays with this, luring audiences in with her approachable directness and storyteller like demeanour. Then, in a Brechtian style, she disrupts and dismantles the comfortable, exposing the often hidden trauma in such everyday experience (through unanticipated, sometimes taboo actions, through obvious omissions or repetitions in the narrative). This way Baker, draws her audience into understanding then startles with familiar yet uncomfortable observations and revelations, challenging our preconceptions of the role of the woman, the mother, the mental health service user.

For the spectator, Baker's work is filled with the pleasure of both recognition and contradiction, hinting at both the wonder and trauma of domestic life. Baker's performance is crammed full of different levels of engagement and understanding, both political and accessible. Her performances are at once comfortable and disconcerting, funny and tragic, simple yet complex.

Elanor Stannage  
PhD Student



... YOURSELF



# BBEYOND

Beyond Monthly is a constructed situation for performance artists run by Bbeyond, an arts organisation based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Taking place in public spaces every month for an hour or so the event allows anyone to participate actively or at a distance. Audiences are transient and often accidental. Artists at different levels of their practice (from absolute beginners to veteran legends) work alongside one-another, simultaneously performing. This act makes visible the processes and practices of time-based artists.

This public monthly meeting for performance practice creates a situation for (an) encounter. 'Kunst der Begegnung' i.e. 'Art of Encounter' is performance artist Boris Nieslony's term for the unique encounter of audience, artist and situations in performance art. Specifically explicated in the work of the performance art group Black Market International such interventions are not driven by the impetus to consume but to produce: and to not produce commodities for profit but time-based provocations, temporary situations for interruption to occur for the viewer and the performer. Artists use the opportunity presented in the Monthly to test ideas, to practice responding to the present moment in performance, to collaborate and meet other artists. The simultaneous nature of the encounter facilitates opportunities for overlaying material, juxtapositions, cross fades,

interruptions, combinations, superimpositions, and thus realisations.

The Bbeyond Monthly meeting presents the opportunity for radical encounter and transformation. In performance art there is an opportunity for transformative experiences, due in part to the retraction of signification, the performance art situation is open to change precisely because its primary concern is the present moment, one that is constantly negotiating the here and now, consistently contingent on audiences and spaces. In an artistic and formal sense these interventions allow artists and audience a space for encounter and are truly radical situations that advance the form of the work and provide an essential opportunity for engagement, dialogue and transformation.



**Nathan Walker**  
Senior Lecturer in Theatre



## POLITICAL SATIRE

If you look past the backhanded deals, manipulation and global corruption, the practice of politics is a process of governance. In its most charitable sense, the job of government is to work within the political, social and economic structures of the time to give its citizens basic human rights and an acceptable standard of living. While democracy prides itself on conforming to the will of the people, this becomes complicated when a wide variety of opinion resides in the public sphere.

When our leaders fail in their duties, we are obligated to hold them accountable and this can be done in many ways. By marching, or striking. By ranting at them, or laughing at them. Political satire is a form of critique designated for the systems humans make and the humans systems make. There are regular examples of this concept presented on television, theatre and radio. While the aesthetics and targets of political satire can vary greatly, its main attributes – mockery, imitation and ridicule – are not prone to change.

Over the last five years, there have been many who have questioned the effectiveness and importance of satire in a world too absurd to mock. Donald Trump is the President of the United States; Boris Johnson is the British Foreign Secretary; and Jeremy Hunt, who co-authored a book calling for the privatisation of the NHS, is currently Secretary of State for Health. Scarier still for the left of the

political spectrum, the main creators of satirical realities, we are entering a paradoxical world of post-truth. The next 'leader of the free world' is on record questioning the place of birth of Barack Obama, yet denies he ever did so. Our understanding of fact, our trust of news sources, confidence in politicians: all of these are being undermined. Yet, who can we really blame for this outcome?

It would be very simple, from within my elitist university bubble, to concentrate on the right-wing media. The essence of political satire is a fight between wrong and right, so my moral compass dictates that I must attack and discredit what I believe to be wrong. From my perspective it is the conservative way of thinking that is to fault for the production of fake news and the populist euphoria growing in many European countries and beyond. The real perpetrators, however, consist of the political establishment. An assortment of public figures whose failure and dishonesty has led to a concoction of distrust and apathy for political processes. As the landscape of politics changes in the following years, we must not allow our reality to be beyond satire, for dangerous ideas and irrational people must not be allowed to be beyond criticism.

