

## Abstracts

### **Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre**

*Theron Schmidt (Queen Mary, University of London)*

Both academic and popular critics identify something paradoxical in the work of Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players, in which there is a disparity between the emotional content of Maxwell's plays and the company's distinctively "flattened" mode of acting. This paradox is often expressed in terms of an opposition between reality and artifice, and attempts to resolve it suggest that Maxwell is aiming at a higher form of the "real" through his artificial style. In this paper, I use selections from various interviews with Maxwell to argue that his interest lies not in attaining on-stage "reality" through the transcendence of artificiality, but in maintaining a mode which is simultaneously real and artificial. Markus Wessendorf has likened Maxwell's work to Hans-Thies Lehmann's description of "postdramatic theatre," but I suggest that the paradoxical experience which Maxwell evokes might go much further back, to Diderot's 1773 *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*.

### **N.F. Simpson and the "Theatre of the Absurd"**

*Neema Parvini (Royal Holloway, University of London)*

In the wake of a recent West End revival, this paper explores the work of N.F. Simpson. Once heralded as Britain's most promising playwright, Simpson has not enjoyed the same reputation as his one-time collaborator, Harold Pinter. Simpson's plays are now seldom talked about or performed; they are often dismissed as being enjoyable yet shallow stylistic exercises or elaborate games of logic. The paper has two principle aims. Firstly, to establish the extent to which Simpson can be considered a writer of the "Theatre of the Absurd" by reading his work in relation to Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter. It also attempts to provide political and philosophical contexts for the post-war absurdist movement in drama. Secondly, the essay seeks to challenge the long-established notion that Simpson's plays, whilst undoubtedly funny, essentially say nothing. By drawing out the latent social satire in Simpson's seemingly *non-sequitur* plays, this essay argues that they remain relevant for both performance and criticism today.

### **Mascots: Performance and Fetishism in Sport Culture**

*Mary C. Daily (Boston College)*

Mascots exist in sports ranging from high school track to professional football, and their role has never been academically questioned. From a cultural standpoint, mascots serve as entertaining aspects of sport culture; however, upon deeper examination, one can conceptualise mascot performance as representing fetishization. Mascots correspond to single facets of sport society and this paper brings their fetishistic status to the forefront in order to initiate an academic discussion as to why and how these performances perpetuate themselves in modern culture. The discussion includes theorists ranging from

Joseph Roach and his work on effigies to Karl Marx and commodity fetishism. Through working to elucidate relationships between mascots and other fetishized objects, readers are encouraged to see mascot performance through an innovative lens.

### **Female Skateboarding: Re-writing Gender**

*Dani Abulhawa (University of Northampton)*

Focused on the male-dominated and socially/spatially provocative skateboarding subculture, the article presents the argument that skateboarders locate themselves at the “edgelands” of mainstream culture, which is also the position occupied by female subjectivity within skateboarding. Considering female involvement as a performance intervention, the article explores representations of women in skateboarding from an industry perspective, followed by an analysis of several progressive female skateboarders as exemplary of a performance of gender that problematises the dominant “alternative” masculinity displayed by heterosexual male participants.

### **A Queer Reading of Euripides’ *Bacchae***

*Natalia Theodoridou (Royal Holloway, University of London)*

This paper investigates the various ways in which queer theory can be applied to Euripides’ *Bacchae* and focuses particularly on three points: the cross-dressing of the ancient Greek actors who played female roles and its effect on the creation and reception of tragedies, Dionysos’ effeminacy, and Pentheus’ famous cross-dressing scene. The subject is examined through the lens of both ancient Greek tragedy’s socio-cultural context and contemporary queer culture.

Ancient Greek theatre is often characterised as “transvestite theatre” because of the all-male cast and it is customary for feminist critics to attack the ancient female impersonation as biased and oppressive. However, this paper explores the possibility that this may be a case of internal critique of the representation of women, a challenge to the binary opposition between male and female, facilitated precisely by the Dionysiac context in which the performances were taking place. The *Bacchae*, as a play in which the representation of women by men is taken to an undisputable extreme, could be seen as either appropriative or subversive of gender roles, deepening the divide between male and female or effectively deconstructing both.

### **Ezra Pound’s *Women of Trachis*: Modernist Translation as Performance Text**

*Stephe Harrop (Royal Holloway, University of London)*

*Women of Trachis*, Ezra Pound’s version of Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, stands as testament to the poet’s commitment to the demolition of previously existing rules of translation. The play also provides a blueprint for some of the ways in which a genuinely modernist relationship might be achieved, not only between the dramatic literatures of the past and the present, but also between the organization of words upon the printed page, and the

kinaesthetically expressive body of the performer. *Women of Trachis* is a complex, little known and seldom performed version of Sophocles' play, but within its idiosyncratic text are to be found intriguing clues about the ways in which its author envisaged the relationship between poetic text and the motion of the theatrical body in performance. This article explores some of the distinctive ways in which Pound attempted to re-make ancient Greek tragedy as a credibly modernist performance event, drawing upon my own experiences as a physical theatre practitioner in rehearsing and performing Pound's Greek choruses.