

## Editorial

This issue of *Platform* considers ‘the body’ as it appears or is experienced in theatre and performance. ‘On Corporeality’ is partially inspired by the second biannual interdisciplinary symposium, *Trans.form@Work*, hosted by the Department of Dance, Film and Theatre at the University of Surrey in May 2012. Corporeality emerged as a persistent theme in this symposium, as it has in a number of other symposiums, conferences and publications across the humanities, especially over the past five years. This proliferation of engagements with corporeality – part of what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone calls ‘the corporeal turn’, in a book of the same name – testifies to a burgeoning interest in the body: not only as a site of inscription, but also as a vehicle of expression and possible transgression or resistance. Our concern with bodies also stems, then, from the belief that the debates of the corporeal turn are not only still revolving, but evolving as a consequence of such possibilities. Consequently, this issue marks an attempt to engage with and seek multiple understandings of this politically charged field.

First and foremost, ‘the corporeal’ refers to physical bodies. Besides well-known theoretical approaches to the body, such as Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ‘lived body’ and Foucault’s ‘disciplined body’, corporeality remains a persistent subject of enquiry. This is exemplified by the manifold ways in which the body materialises in theoretical discourses, so as to give birth to what Chris Shilling calls ‘the rise of the enigmatic body’ (1). The notion of an enigmatic body encourages us to render strange the ways in which our own body, or the bodies of others, might be experienced or apprehended. Moreover, it prompts reflection on the possible ways in which the discourses serving to elucidate corporeality might in fact fortify its enigma. Research on the ‘commercialised body’ of the early 1980s and 1990s approached corporeality in its relation to capitalist consumer culture. In the hands of the ‘second wave’ of the feminist critique, the body was denaturalised and became the main

player in the battleground of sex versus gender. The fleshiness of the body has also come to play a pivotal role in discourses on cyber-(post)humanism and digitalization, while the (im)materiality and the porosity of the corporeal – perhaps the most enigmatic expression of corporeality’s seemingly opaque reality – is also pertinent to a recent rise of interest in affect. Lastly, the body’s enigma has been upset by debates congealed in the cognitive sciences, particularly by proponents of the ‘embodied mind’ thesis. But one still wonders whether the body’s enigma is likely ever to be solved, no matter which weapon in a critical arsenal is deployed. Is it even right to think of corporeality as something that needs explaining? To think about the body is to think at the threshold of subjectivity and objectivity. As such, it seems important to maintain openness to the possibility of multiple, interrelated or divergent insights offered by a plurality of approaches to the body.

This issue has looked to be sensitive toward the concern that writing about the body may overshadow the meaningfulness of corporeality. A rich repository of approaches to corporeality is addressed in what follows in both theoretical and practical iterations. The articles presented engage with varying theoretical currents and critical concerns and attend to the similarities and differences between theoretical and practical means of representing and discussing corporeality. As a consequence, the now firmly established ‘Artist’s Documents’ section that *Platform* has, in the past, taken great pride in defending gains renewed urgency; as will become clear later in this editorial, this has even resulted in rebranding that section. Both difficulties and rewards derive from taking the body seriously in performance studies, where the body assumes, even more than in other disciplines, the material role of protagonist.

In ‘Absent Friends: Edward Bond’s Corporeal Ghosts’, James Hudson innovatively explores the enigma of the body by considering representations of ghosts in Edward Bond’s plays. The paradoxical materiality of the ghost in a range of Bond’s plays is examined by

considering these unsettling beings as the living dead. Various representations of the ghost are addressed through Hudson's original reading of Bond's work, where the ghost is understood as a means of exploring a coherent philosophy that critiques the violence of living. In the interplay between material bodies and ghostliness, the author shows how Bond troubles the relation between corporeality and liveliness, problematising not only what it means to be alive, and morally so, but also what it means to be a body.

Matt Cawson's contribution, 'Corporeality and Subversion in Post-Renaissance Italy: The Inquisition and the *Commedia dell'Arte*', digs into some wonderfully unexpected sources. This article explores how the emergence of the *Commedia dell'Arte* can be seen to have constituted a bodily resistance against the Holy Roman Inquisition. Cawson traces Catholicism's condemnation of the corporeal to the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions and shows how the *Commedia* took the body's materiality as a point of departure to oppose a hegemonic valorisation of the spirit. Setting in counterposition mind and body, the spiritual and the corporeal, Cawson identifies one of the main debates relating to corporeality in theatre and performance studies. At the same time, he does justice to the identification and examination of social, cultural and spiritual pressures, at a particular historical juncture, that are pertinent to the arousal of interest in the body as a meaningful and potentially subversive resource.

In 'The Performance of Biopower and Liveliness: The Life and Death of Terri Schiavo', Renée Newman-Storen engages with the ethically sensitive and politically troublesome debates surrounding the right to life or death of the American woman Terry Schiavo. Schiavo was kept in a persistent vegetative state for fifteen years as her family and husband engaged in a legal struggle and moral debate regarding the removal of her feeding tube. This debate became the subject of national attention and received extensive media coverage, providing a forum for deep-seated opinions to be expressed regarding the place of euthanasia in the United States. Newman-Storen uses Michel Foucault's

concept of biopower as a means of exploring this controversial media storm, thinking about Schiavo's body not only as the silent receptor of governmental policies, but also, through licit or illicit propaganda, as an actively resistant force to those policies. The body is consequently pitched as a battleground and the author clearly shows how nature and culture play against themselves in such a dispute over life and death.

In place of the 'Artist's Documents' section, this issue of *Platform* includes a section simply titled 'Documents'. Reflecting on the demands that an issue on corporeality raises, it is not just artists, but audiences as well that are considered here as potential co-producers of an artwork. We wanted to include intimate reflections on the corporeal fact of spectating as a creative practice. 'The corporeal' pertains as much to those witnessing as those instigating theatre and performance.

This 'Documents' section, then, considers corporeality as something practiced in the context of two very different spaces: the theatre and the street. These articles point towards current debates surrounding practice-as-research by asserting the validity of corporeally defined and apprehended meaning in theatre and performance scholarship. In 'Forum Theatre, Disability and Corporeality: A project on sexuality in Zimbabwe', Nehemia Chivandikwa and Ngonidzashe Muwonwa reflect on a forum theatre project in which they were both involved, called *Visionaries*. This contribution brings to the issue a necessary and important discussion relating to the disabled body in connection with notions of sexuality, beauty and gender. The play was performed by disabled students from the University of Zimbabwe for an audience of staff and students at the same university. As well as providing an intervention into received understandings of disability and sexuality in this context, the efficacy of the event is considered in terms of political resistance, accountability and institutional organisation. In "'Try to follow the sound of my footsteps...': Walking and the theatricality of imaginative geographies in Janet Cardiff's *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*', Jane Frances Dunlop reflects on the experience of an

audio performance set in London's East End. What makes this contribution relevant to the 'Documents' section is its onus on the experiential, creative act of participation. If the corporeality of the audience experience is to be taken seriously, if it is to be understood as a creative and participatory process, then it might, the editors believe, be usefully and informatively approached in terms of practice. Focusing on her own corporeal experience of Janet Cardiff's *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, Dunlop develops an experiential narrative which reflects on the corpo-reality of movement, space and temporality. Her account of this performance can be seen to contribute to a growing discursive interest in walking as an engagement with the affective texture of a city.

The editorial board at *Platform* would like to express a note of deep and sincere gratitude to the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. Their support of the journal has been unflinching, despite the ongoing threats to financial stability being imposed on universities at the present time. However, it is not just the financial, but also the academic support that needs to be acknowledged and thanked here. Thank you also to our peer reviewers, who generously contribute to the academic rigor of the journal. We would also like to thank Methuen, Performance Research Books and Routledge for providing books for review. We would finally like to offer a special note of thanks to the authors, whose collective efforts have made this issue a great source of pride for all the editorial board.

Paola Crespi, Guest Editor  
Adam Alston and Arifani Moyo, Editors

### **Works Cited**

Shilling, Chris. *Body in Culture, Technology and Society*.  
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