Editor
Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier
University of Cologne
English Department
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D-50923 Köln/Cologne
Germany
Tel +49-(0)221-470 2284
Fax +49-(0)221-470 6725
email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Office
Laura-Marie Schnitzler, MA
Sarah Youssef, MA
Christian Zeitz (General Assistant, Reviews)
Tel.: +49-(0)221-470 3030/3035
email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Board
Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee,
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha,
University of Mumbai (India)
Associate Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle,
Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Ingrid Hotz-Davies,
Eberhard Karls University Tübingen (Germany)
Prof. Dr. Ralph Poole,
University of Salzburg (Austria)
Prof. Dr. Kathryn Schaffer,
University of Adelaide (Australia)
Prof. Dr. Chris Weedon,
Cardiff University (UK)

Editorial Deadlines
Spring issue:
abstracts (October 1),
completed papers (January 1)

Summer issue:
abstracts (January 1),
completed papers (April 1)

Fall issue:
abstracts (April 1),
completed papers (July 1)

Early Career Researchers Special issue:
abstracts (May 1),
completed papers (August 1)

Winter issue:
abstracts (July 1),
completed papers (October 1)

About
Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, gender forum offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. gender forum also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in gender forum are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of gender forum.

Submissions
Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing
The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to Gender forum.

Authors retain copyright of their work and articles are published under a Creative Commons licence.

There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.
## Detailed Table Of Contents

**Anna Furse**: Editorial  

**Deirdre Osborne and Mojisola Adebayo**: Missing in Action. Fathers Making a Quick Exit in Mojisola Adebayo’s *Muhammed Ali and Me*  

**Katharine E. Low**: Risk Taking in Sexual Health Communication and Applied Theatre Practice: What Can Happen?  

**Jane Bacon**: Sitting / Walking / Practice. Reflections on a Woman’s Creative Process  

**Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X]**: Annie Abrahams’s Experiments in Intimacy  

**Anna Furse**: Don Juan. Who? / Don Juan.Kdo? From Cyber Space to Theatre Space  

**List of Contributors**
Editorial
By Anna Furse, Reader, Goldsmiths, University of London

1 For those working in the theory and practice – or both – of performing arts today, we can no longer speak only of drama or even theatre to describe what is actually going on before spectators. A shift of critical and creative interest from dramatic theatres to performance began to infiltrate the Northern hemispheric academy in the 1970’s. In the USA, Joseph Schechner (e.g. Performance Theory. New York: Routledge 2003), in the spirit of Grotowski, Brook, Barba and other theatre leaders’ interest in inter, cross and multiculturality, influentially applied sociology and anthropology to reconfigure what ‘performance studies’ could and should articulate beyond a euro-centric cultural frame of reference. Into this brew we must add of course group theatres, ensembles, experimental and devised work by a new post-1968 generation, many of whom were moving beyond the realms of new writing (though this has remained a force for change in some quarters) to find what a non-bourgeois theatre could mean. Liberation movements and their many ‘isms pushed forth new voices and new dramaturgies. Writing about our discipline, in terms of critical theories to describe and interpret developments in theatrical performance in the last forty years (during which the Women’s Liberation Movement emerged), is becoming as heterogeneous, intercultural and interdisciplinary as its practice. It simply had to, in order to keep up.

2 Gender has remained, controversially, on the agenda for practice and theory alike. Among some key theoretical shifts that help in understanding ‘post-dramatic’ developments (a term recently coined by Lehmann in: Postdramatic Theatre. Trans. Karen Jurs-Munby; Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2006), Butler’s groundbreaking arguments on gender and performativity have provided tools for examining the specific ways in which women’s performance praxes might be read, broadening the scope of enquiry into what ‘gender and performance’ suggests. (e.g. Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.” New York: Routledge, 1993 and Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge, 1999) whilst Auslander has written key essays on what the transition from acting-in-plays to postmodernist genres of performance mean in terms of the performance presence and modes of presentation/representation in contemporary theatres (e.g. From Acting to Performance. New York: Routledge, 1997). Such critical trends lend some greater and helpful dimension to comprehending women’s contribution to contemporary performance and its development, as well as how to write about it, specifically.

Each of the five women authors contributes a uniquely different response to the call for writing about gender and performance now. From highly subjective to socially engaged processes, from plays to devised works, from live performance to the telematic, each of the articles express the vivid engagement of its author(s) to their subject matter. That the contributions cover such an eclectic range of topics reflects in turn how varied and multi-voiced our discipline has become; also, how, in our (so-called) ‘post-feminist’ times, there is no stable consensus of what either feminism or gender might signify, or what might constitute works on/about gender and performance. Consequently none of the pieces here argue didactically nor assume a cultural consensus. Rather, each is infused with specific perspectives on the politics of gender, nodding rather than pushing, asking rather than telling, establishing a place and space from which to question norms of mainstream hegemonic theatrical practice, employing instead, new strategies by which to question and explore through artistic practice: gender relations, race, intimacy, rape, abuse, identity, parenting, technology, the body, and the artistic imagination itself.

I consider this a sign of the times, a ‘crisis in the theory and practice of political art […] brought about by uncertainty as to just how to describe our cultural condition under multinational capitalism’ (Auslander: 59) and a symptom of there being no consensus about what it means to be ‘a feminist artist’ today. This crisis is productive however. The drive for exploring performance as refracted through the lens of gender hasn’t left our stages, our workshops, our galleries, our contemplation, our questions, our action: our work.

In "Missing in Action: Fathers Making a Quick Exit in Mojisola Adebayo’s *Muhammad Ali and Me*" by Deirdre Osborne and Mojisola Adebayo, Osborne offers an analysis of Adebayo’s "Afri-queer" storytelling style of writing via her play – that explores absent fathers, familial violence through the story of a mixed-race girl Susan who copes with intolerable domestic abuse by identifying with the pugilist Muhammad Ali. Osborne comments that this device means that boxing becomes not only "a parallel for her protagonist’s life performance" but a metaphor for connections between training for the sport and theatrical training – each in themselves performance modes; boxing is of course also, traditionally, an *extremis* rite of the mystique of masculinity (cf. Carol Oates, Joyce. *On
Boxing New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1994), and so, just as the female boxer appropriates a male sport, this play incorporates it (sic) to speak of identification. Adebayo’s play, that draws on autobiographical material, thus refers, through the metaphor of sport, to her own journey as an actor and into her own performative creation and activity. The inclusion of passages from the original play text offer a vivid insight into the whole, whilst Osborne’s essay, provides insight into understanding Adebayo’s work in the context of contemporary Black British theatre writing.

7 Katherine Low’s “Risk-Taking in Sexual Health Communication and Applied Theatre Practice” offers a detailed account and analysis of workshops she has conducted in a South African township as an applied theatrician, using techniques derived from Augusto Boal, including his highly influential *Forum Theatre*. The workshop in question, based at Etefani, an HIV/Aids organisation in Nyanga, employed participatory techniques to stimulate awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues. Low charts the way in which participants of this project address – via role-play – a situation in which a young woman comes to have high-risk unprotected sex. The debate centres on whether or not the young woman was raped by the man with whom she had been drinking in the shebeen and with whom she subsequently agrees to have unprotected sex. The fine lines between choice and coercion are traced in detail by Low, and the participants’ opinion that in the end the young woman was to blame is contextualised in her discussion of both Mary Douglas’ theories on ‘danger beliefs’ and a broad understanding of how this particular community views women’s sexuality and consensual sex. Low’s struggle with the workshop’s outcome is an honest reflection of her own role as facilitator. She notes both how the performative process of the workshop itself actually, paradoxically, became a means of controlling young women through the expressed opinion of others in the group (in this case an older woman who stigmatises the young woman protagonist). Her conclusion admits to a sense of frustration at this outcome (“it goes against how I would wish women in this community to live”); at the same time, she notes that, despite any aspirations applied theatre might have to solve and resolve issues, as this case proves, the workshop leader is in effect an outsider who cannot ultimately control the narrative nor its social and political consequences.

8 From a township to the natural environment, Jane Bacon’s very different, private, contribution as an auto-ethnographer, dancer and Jungian analyst-in-training, “Sitting/Walking/Practice: Reflections on a Woman’s Creative Process” explores issues of the woman’s body from the other end of the spectrum, drawing on her work in Jungian dream work and processes including Focusing and Authentic Movement – practices that involve the
somatic as well as the imaginative. Her discourse doesn’t address social, political or health issues, but concentrates, rather, on her own psychophysical processes as an (older) dancer in the form of a brief "art book”. Here the mover isn’t performing dance but moving through a natural landscape, walking, resting, running, and "musing on the processes of practice-as-research in performance and screen when ‘self’ is the source of creative inspiration”. Here performance is not witnessed but auto-observed and thus the term comes to have meaning as personal ritual, action and gesture rather than as spectacle for others to witness. Bacon’s journey on foot through this Neolithic space, through wind, towards the sea, is a contemplation of how the imagination works, how her body responds to the environment, what is going on inside, "for me a process of therapeutic, artistic and spiritual significance”.

9The conscious subjectivity and intimacy of Bacon’s piece is counterbalanced by another kind of intimacy in Maria Chatzichristodoulou (AKA Maria X)’s exploration of the work of networked-performance artist Annie Abrahams "Annie Abrahams’s Experiments in Intimacy". Abrahams’ work is involved in her own telepresence, in cyber-connectivity and its failure. Unpicking the term "intimacy" Maria X suggests that in performance, normal usage as meaning "inward", "intrinsic" and – by its sexual connotation - "private’ is reversed so that the private may be repositioned as public and thus be ‘invested with political potentiality”. Noting how the one-to-one/spectator-performer event has become a subgenre of contemporary Live Art, this article develops a fascinating study of two of Abrahams’ works that expose us to both how visceral and embodied the Internet becomes and also, to how the artist’s concerns do not provide us with technophilic utopian proposals, but ‘ to the vulnerable beauty of the glitch, and she reminds us that yes, networks fail, as do bodies – human and/or post human’. Woman’s artistic presence in the new "posthuman" landscape is significant and Maria X ‘s pioneering research into cyberperformance has uncovered some fascinating examples. Here, the writer shows how the artist questions the technology of her medium whilst inhabiting it and employing it for her "mundane, almost uneventful performances” that pose questions, amongst other things, about "our aching bodies that are not yet obsolete, and the question of sex post-menopause”. As Maria X concludes "Nothing comforting about that."

10 Finally, my own contribution "Don Juan.Who?/ Don Juan.Kdo? From Cyberspace to Theatre Space" introduces a project I conceived and directed in which geographically dispersed collaborators used the intimacy of cyberspace to generate text that in turn became the source for a devised piece of theatre, performed by its’ (anonymous) co-writers. This work, like Abrahams’, actively used the mechanism’s "glitches" as a narrative strategy: our
co-writing that happened simultaneously, on-line and as a form of masquerade, was sequenced by the whim of the technology in which we worked – our CyberStudio that harnessed the programme Upstage towards the long gestation of our project that was always and only exploring contemporary gender relations form the perspective of the over-40s. Here, cyberspace became a fabulous arena for our purposes, a forum in which, unseen, and only visible via our words, we could gender-bend, imagine, and project ourselves into a collective construction.

11 I am grateful to all contributors for coming up with such original takes on the topic of gender and performance modes today, that span one woman walking on a beach, an African township community, netizens and live theatre itself.
Missing in Action: Fathers Making a Quick Exit in Mojisola Adebayo’s

Muhammad Ali and Me

By Deirdre Osborne and Mojisola Adebayo

Abstract:
Set in an English foster home in the mid 1970’s, Muhammad Ali and Me tells the story of Mojitola, a child who is abandoned by her father and grows up in care. The space her father leaves is filled through a fantastical friendship with athlete and activist, boxer and dancer, pugilist and poet, hero and hate figure, sportsman and disabled man, Muslim and magician, the legendary, Muhammad Ali. Muhammad Ali and Me follows the parallel lives of this gay girl child and a Black male hero, tracing their struggle for survival and self definition in a system set against them. The play invites the audience to consider the complex relationship between children, absent fathers and father figures; the establishment, war and Islamic masculinity; the Black community and gay identity; the USA and urban Britain today, through what Adebayo describes as an ‘Afri-Queer’ multi-media accessible storytelling style. Deirdre Osborne provides an introduction which examines Adebayo’s work by investigating representations of sport in plays by Black writers; Black, Mixed and ‘trans’ racial identity and the experience of the care system in performance; Black male heroism and the marginalisation of Black women writers on the British stage.

Introduction (by Deirdre Osborne)

1 “What am I doing writing about all these men?” asks playwright and performer Mojisola Adebayo, a woman whose personal and artistic profiles repeatedly defy and redefine the constraining categories of social and cultural norms. (Adebayo 2010) Reflecting that her work seems to be thematically fixed upon searching for the unattainable father and maelstroms of maleness – a dynamic at odds with her counter-patriarchal politics - Adebayo finds herself disarmed by this discovery. Does a woman writer have a duty to write good roles for women?

2 As with Adebayo’s previous well-received monodrama Moj of the Antarctic (2008), where a sole woman actor plays multiple roles, Muhammad Ali and Me articulates controversial and confrontational topics. Muhammad Ali and Me takes epic themes centred around the quest for self-validity using iconographic heroes, survival against the odds, the havoc wrought by violence (by the state or domestically) upon an individual’s life, family fracture and betrayal - and directs them through a very local lens. The play represents the experiences of a South London girl Mojitola from aged seven to forty as she struggles to cope with growing up in a foster family where she is renamed Susan by the foster mother and sexually abused by her son. Her coping strategy for surviving in this unbearable situation is to identify with Muhammad Ali, his trajectory to fame as a boxing prodigy, his trials at the
hands of American racism and his ultimate transcendence of the tribulations he faced to become one of the most beloved and celebrated figures of the twentieth century and beyond.

3 The male-dominated world of boxing might appear a curious choice for a woman writer and performer. Adebayo’s exploration of familial violence (from both biological and surrogate sources) and her accompanying experimentation with form, style, and subject matter in its aesthetic execution means that Ali as poetic pugilist serves as the perfect and poignant parallel for her protagonist’s life performance. This is further enhanced by the connections between performing (and fighting) in the ring and performing in the theatre, where years of training hone one’s skills for the physical delivery of what is always a unique performance in front of spectators. Moreover, sport has traditionally been a cultural arena in which black people both in the US and UK have sustained visibility and the use of boxing as a central thematic and staging motif evokes Howard Sackler’s *The Great White Hope* (1967) which Ali saw and praised at the time he was resisting the draft to Vietnam and recently, Black British playwright Roy Williams’s *Sucker Punch* (2010) whose staging shared with *Muhammad Ali and Me* the same conception of the audience on both sides of a ring. Sackler and Williams used boxing as a means to explore politics and in particular racism, the struggle of black men against white racist society. Adebayo’s treatment offers a more nuanced and subtle representation of under-represented lives as this is reconfigured through the in-betweenness experienced by a mixed race female protagonist whose story is beyond the typical national or familial narratives that are habitually staged. In doing so, she asserts black, mixed and queer experience as more universal than marginal.

4 Black is an identification that many people of mixed origin, African-descent have adopted often due to political and social frameworks that limit or deny the possibility of metissage and mixing in order to preserve the power binary of black and white. This is differently played out in different geographical contexts. Gary Younge (2010) has insightfully explored this in relation to the most powerful mixed race person in the world today, Barack Obama, an American man with a white mother (whose white parents raised him) and a black father from an African country (not African American) who deserted the family. America’s one drop rule means as Lenny Kravitz notes, “You don’t have to deny the White side of you if you’re mixed. Accept the blessing of having the advantage of two cultures, but understand you are Black. In this world if you have one spot of Black blood, you are Black.” (Hoyles and Hoyles 2006: 14)

5 Britain’s long history of problematic and uneasy responses to non-white people means the routes to self-definition for Black and mixed people have not been smooth but in relation
to mixedness, this is intensified as prevailing essentialist paradigms (which reduce or deny the experience of multiple identities) demand an affiliation to a single selfhood. Overwhelmingly, contemporary Black British women writers such as SuAndi, Jackie Kay, Charlotte Williams, Joanna Traynor, Maud Sulter, Zadie Smith and Leone Ross have explored these multiple identities of mixedness across literary genres demonstrating a unique British manifestation of African diasporic inheritances produced by writers who embody a protean identity in terms of racial and cultural knowledge and standpoints.

6 “Trans-raised” is a term coined by writer and performer Valerie Mason-John to describe a generation of people who grew up in Britain in the 1960s and 70s who self-identify as black or mixed race but were reared by white people: adoptive or foster parents or in white-run care institutions. This distinct cohort within the UK population characterises a period of British socio-cultural history which will probably never be repeated due to the less prevalent practice today of placing black children with white families, which Mason-John explains is now “something to avoid wherever and whenever possible.” (Mason-John 2007:339) As the primary caregiver in most children’s early lives (whether as birth mothers or caretakers in foster homes), white womanhood is the first experience many dual heritage British children have. Nearly twenty years ago Tizard and Phoenix’s research explored “the racial identities of young people of mixed black and white parentage”. To the question posed, “Which Mixed-Parentage Young People Identified Themselves as Black?” They report that, Defining oneself as ‘black’ was associated with a more politicised set of attitudes towards racism, for example, defining it as discriminatory behaviour by white people towards black people. […] 60 percent of the sample had a positive racial identity. […] [N]early three-quarters thought of themselves as ‘mixed’ rather than black. They were proud of their mixed parentage. […] [P]articularly in their ability to feel comfortable with both black and white people, and to see both points of view. (Tizard, Phoenix 1993: 161)

7 However, in the time in which Adebayo sets her play, the 1970s, it is clear that white society perceives mixedness as black. As Tizard and Phoenix also found, their participants were not always accepted as black by black people. Thus, looking into society, they see no reflection or validation of themselves. […] For those who regarded themselves as black this was a disturbing experience, which in some ways parallels the rejection in the last century of mixed-parentage people who tried to ‘pass’ as white. Further, opting for a black identity entails discounting the white part of one’s inheritance. Most (but not all) of the young people’s closest attachments were to their mothers, who were generally white. [my italics] (Tizard, Phoenix 1993: 164)
As first hand recipient of this 60s/70s social policy, Adebayo renders the individual human consequences of emotional and cultural impoverishment wrought by being trans-raised, in her protagonists’ searches not only for an authentic sense of validated social self as coupled with an artistic identity, but she also develops a different perspective towards acts of ancestral reclamation. Adebayo draws upon autobiographical elements to craft her unique responses to contextual and experiential factors and yet, is clear that the work is only ever based upon such influences and is not her only identity-experience. It is material which she consciously and creatively shapes as it serves her artistic design and hence informs but is not contingent to her aesthetics. The parameters of Mason-John’s “trans-raised” can be extended beyond the late-twentieth-century, social services category (Trans-racial-adoption), to add the “trans” dimension of mixed-origin experience to (looked-after) children born to parents of different or intermixed racial lineages. These children have similarly, historically disturbed any straightforward categories of upbringing and cultural affiliation. The conundrums of political identification and self-terming produced, was frequently at odds with social nomenclature - which aimed to do this identifying for them - indicated by the indiscriminateness of 1980s social policies where black and Asian people for example, were housed under the same (discriminatory), multicultural umbrella. “Trans” thus embraces dual strands of subjectivity: one’s social scope and one’s biological compass as they are woven together through the twist of cultural creativities.

Adebayo’s pioneering experiential aesthetics is in no small part due to her placement beyond the shared, rehearsed narratives of socio-cultural identity. Her disenfranchisement, subordination or displacement from those foundational stories which tell us both who we are and who we are not, is distinctively refracted through the prism of race. Set apart from the white-dominated canon and its black British challengers, she operates within a space of being originally dislocated from hetero-social norms of family and other black people yet, also absorbed intimate, intuitive, knowledge of white cultural institutions. The daughter of a white Danish mother and a black Nigerian father who identifies as black British, Adebayo states, “Being raised in care might mean we have a certain awareness, an access to a certain education. We have to negotiate our way within a white institution from an early age – it’s much more acute in a children’s home. Your tools are sharpened – a little like insider information […] we know how to be white.”(my italics) (Osborne 2009: 8). Trans-raised children are thus paradoxically conversant with the norms of whiteness. I write paradoxically because these very norms (with attendant pathways to longevity and critical legitimacy) are
processes which have historically sidelined or discounted black writers’ and performers’ work in Britain’s cultural landscape.

10 The relationship between identity obliteration and reformulation via casework files testifies to the power of the pen in the lives of looked-after children. It is noteworthy that trans-raised writers have found their own routes to authorship that reworks the social services paperwork that initially defined them. Adebayo shapes her experiences with compelling resourcefulness to acknowledge the fine line between drawing upon autobiography to assert a disregarded or marginalised identity and yet, not allowing the sociological reduction of her work to being a didactic indicator of social issues to dominate its reception. An advocate of Pan-Africanism, Black British playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah accounts for the term black as a ‘catalyst for debate’ and has commented upon what he feels to be the ‘chameleon-like nature of Black British experience’. (Kwei-Armah 2004) Adebayo’s female protagonists are chameleons, negotiating not only their lack of moorings to formal family structures as they are raised by stand-in parents care of the social services but also readings of them laden with legacies of passing, and heteronormativity. Although beyond the discursive parameters of this introduction, it should be noted that the multi-tasking performance demands of the roles of Mojitola and Corner Man, (the two main characters) and the integration of a British Sign Language performer into the playing space, further serve to challenge assumptions, expectations, and stereotyping regarding age, gender, sexuality, race and disability in relation to casting and performing.

11 In staking Mojitola’s survival of her trauma to that of a vocal, defiant black male, Ali, who can only ever be her imaginary ally, Adebayo testifies to the vital lifeline that creativity plays in surviving annihilating forces. Adebayo might well be seeking to construct the powerful black male father figure that she confesses she will never have or has had. Ultimately, although this remains viable only in the ephemeral context of performance, Adebayo stages a black male hero who triumphs in a contemporary British theatre context where such depictions are rare. This disturbing fact is no better illustrated than by the number of plays produced in London in the new millennium which featured a young black male character dying of wounds, centre-stage. In 2008 alone, four such examples were: Frontline by Che Walker, (The Globe Theatre), Gone Too Far by Bola Agbaje, (Royal Court Theatre) and the film of Roy Williams’ Fallout (aired on Channel 4 as part of the Disarming Britain season on gun and knife crime). With a different approach, debbie tucker green’s random records the teenager’s murder off-stage. Arguably, the successful break through into mainstream theatre of the new millennial playwrights, Kwei-Armah (Elmina’s Kitchen, Fix
Up) and Williams (Little Sweet Thing, Joe Guy, Angel House, Category B) resides in their gangsta, drugs, dysfunctional families, male violence and crime-related themes. Furthermore, theatre reviewers’ tendencies to focus upon these themes, overshadows other possible critical receptions or other possible dramatisations of black experiences.

Black women’s writing in British theatre has traditionally experienced little mainstream success when compared to that experienced by white women (since the end of the twentieth century) and in the new millennium, black male playwrights. Although limited opportunities exist per se for Black dramatists and performers within the compass of contemporary theatre, when sex-gender dimensions are highlighted, the marginality of women is pronounced. Notwithstanding the fact that Jamaican feminist poet, playwright, journalist and broadcaster, Una Marson wrote the very first play by a Black woman to be performed in London’s West End, (At What a Price, Scala Theatre) in 1933, the fact today that merely two Royal Court Theatre commissionees, debbie tucker green and Bola Agbaje have been allowed passage through the current hegemonic sieve proves that Black and mixed women still do not receive the nurturing mentorship nor critical recognition that corresponds to their artistic innovativeness. It is not perhaps a “duty to write good roles for women” but more a fundamental necessity to right this imbalance and write!

Works Cited


**Selected Extracts From Muhammed Ali And Me**

**Authors note:** These extracts are not to be performed or produced without the author’s permission. For further information contact Mojisola Adebayo at m.adebayo@gold.ac.uk

*Muhammad Ali and Me* was first produced in 2008 at Oval House Theatre in London. It was directed by Sheron Wray, designed by Rajha Shakiry and performed by the following cast:

Mojitola (M) and Muhammad Ali (Ali) were played by the same female actor – Mojisola Adebayo (the Fighter).

All the other speaking parts were played one male actor – Charlie Folorunsho (the Corner Man).

A British Sign Language interpreter was fully integrated into the show and – Jacqui Beckford (The Referee).

*The following extract is from early in the play on Mojitola’s 5th birthday. Mojitola is playing outside when Daddy calls her in.*

**Daddy:** *(Calling from the balcony)* MO-JI-TO-LA!

**M:** *(calling up to him)* Daddy I did my sums already it was just a little bit hard!… *(She is consumed with her new bicycle).*
Daddy: MOJITOLA! Come along!

M: Aaaw… is it time to pray now??

Daddy: Ah-ah! *(a telling off).*

*(M reluctantly goes inside with her bike).*

M: Is it time for prayers?

Daddy: You do not shout about prayer in front of the whole of Colchester Court. Do you understand?

M: *(She doesn’t understand)* Yes Daddy, not really.

Daddy: Be seated.

M sits. Daddy stands. He addresses the child with the following speech in a certain pained formality but trying to keep emotional control.

Daddy: There are rumours of war. Home is calling me. You are no longer a little baby. You will be starting school in September. You know your ABC. You count. I have seen you can multiply. You will eventually divide. I am satisfied I have made good progress with you, despite all of the… distractions. From now on England will provide. She will be your mother. You will receive the best education in the world. As for time outside of school, I have appointed an English lady to be responsible for your welfare. Mrs Groom. In all probability there will be many African children like you there. We are often faced with few alternatives in this life. My father too had his own struggles. But step by step, by the grace of God, we do our best. *(He looks at her during the following).* I have invested a substantial sum in Mrs Groom. So as we step to the door tomorrow morning, do not cry. If you cry, you will be severely punished. Do you understand? *(M shakes her head, ‘no’).* Remember who you are. Act – always, as a good girl. Eat no pork. Study hard. Stay away from boys.

M: Yes Daddy. *(Beat)* When are you coming back?

Daddy: At the right time. God willing. *(Small pause).*

M: Daddy when?

Daddy: Be upstanding for scripture.

*(Daddy indicates ‘Get the bible’. M gets the large book. She is upset).*

M: Daddy… Is it a story?

*(Small pause. Then with a rare tenderness…)*

Daddy: No my daughter, it is not a story.
The following extract is taken from where Mojitola’s new foster parent, Angie Groom, (a white woman, played by Charlie Folorunsho) leaves Mojitola alone for the first time with her grown-up son Jimmy (also played by Charlie Folorunsho).

**Mummy Angie**: Jimmy! Make sure the little one settles in. We’ll call her ‘Susan’. I’m off down the Elephant with this lot. I’ll be back in time for the Spaghetti Western at 3 and if you don’t mind por favour I plan to place my plates of meat on that poof with a Peter Syvestant and a nice cuppa Rosie and I don’t expect to hear a peep out of any of yours. Comprehendo? (To M who looks baffled) Didn’t they teach you English? (Then softer). Uncle Jim’ll see you right.

**Jimmy**: Ha, ha… (he starts to sing the theme tune from the following advert) Everyone’s a ‘Fruit and Nut’ case… I like a nice bit a chocolate. (He stares at M). So how long you gonna be with my old Mum I wonder?

**M**: Until my daddy gets back from Africa.


**M**: Daddy!

Daddy come back!

Save me!

Daaaaaaadddddddddyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!

She shakes uncontrollably until she freezes on a loud boxing ring bell. A huge puff of smoke, a pyrotechnic, lights go wild. Muhammad Ali (played by female actor also playing Mojitola) suddenly appears. Jimmy magically disappears….

**Ali (played by M throughout)**: TIME OUT!

**M**: Muhammad Ali?! What, what are you doing here?!? I thought you was in Zaire!

**Ali**: My rumble in the jungle’s over with a long time ago. I don’t fight no more. I have Parkinson’s disease. (Ali starts shadow boxing and dancing)

**M**: I saw you arguing with him on the tele. Did he make you sick?

**Ali**: No, it has nothing to do with that old Yorkshire bro. Parkinson’s means I shake, and over that I have no control. Some said I was traumatised in the boxing ring but that, unlike my title, is disputed. Sure the fight game didn’t make it no better. But I’m done fightin. I don’t
move too good or talk too good and I put on a little weight, but don’t you dare feel sorry for me, I’m not bitter. And I’m still pretty. Pretty as a girl… (Ali stops to look in the mirror. Then takes a piece of rope and starts doing a rope trick). I mostly do magic now, give away my money, try to be a good Muslim: defend women, look out for orphans, tend to those in trouble, care for the sick, how do you like my trick? (Ali completes the rope trick).

M: Wick-ed!

Ali: Now it’s late, and time for all God’s children to go to sleep.

M: Don’t go! Everybody goes. (Trying to amuse him into staying) Last night I turned off the light switch I was in bed before the light was out. (M jumps into bed). I’m faaaaast!

Ali: You baaaad! (He goes to leave, she stops him with her words)

M: Ali I get really scared. Sometimes I wake up in the night and I don’t know where I am. And I don’t know who I am. And it looks like there’s a man in the corner of the room but I don’t know if he’s real or if he’s there. Can you tell me a story to help me sleep please? Sometimes in nice times my Daddy tells me stories…(Daddy re-emerges as an African Griot / storyteller. It is as if Mojitola is dreaming her father. He wears an African hat and sash. African instrumental music e.g. kora) …like about Moses, the little baby in the basket and the burning bush and the two mums and the man splitting their child in half and Samson cutting his hair and loosing all his strength and the writing on the wall and the lion’s den and locusts and plagues and Pharoahs and slaves and techni-coloured coats and dreams and parting the seas and the salt and the thou shalt not and the wife of Lot who turned to stone when she looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah with the men and the men and the women lying down together with the angel and all stuff like that… But can you tell me a new one please?

Ali: Sure we’ll tell you a story - the greatest of all times!

Ali hands over the storytelling to Daddy as Griot who in turn tells the story of Muhammad Ali...

Later, there is a merging of Daddy telling the life story of Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Ali boasting and baiting journalists, Jimmy attempting to abuse Mojitola upstairs.

Daddy Griot: Out of 21 fights,

17 of the Prince’s predictions were precise.

Ali: I am a scientist! I am a scholar!

Daddy: The sports scribes hated him, the press just baited him -

Ali: It’s scientific evidence! You ignore it at your peril!
**Mummy A (calling and watching TV):** For christ sakes will you shut your cake hole!!

Ali: I am greatest. The best that’s ever been born!

Jimmy (in M’s bedroom): Can I touch you?... I just want to touch you.

Ali: I am the greatest. I’m in a world of my own.

Jimmy: Let me touch you… I just want to touch you.

Ali: As pretty as girl I’ll be the champion of the world! The champion of the world –

Jimmy: - who’s a pretty little girl?

**Mummy Angie:** (Annoyed because she can’t hear the TV) I don’t Adam n’ Eve it.

M: See me... Save me...

**Mummy Angie:** I don’t friggin believe this!

Jimmy: Its only my thumb.

M: Come back Daddy!

Jimmy: Come on bitch come on…

M: Where’s my mummy?

Jimmy: A little taste, a little tongue.

M: Why did you leave me?!

Jimmy: A teeny touch won’t hurt.

M: I need you ALlllllllll! (Mojitola shakes vigorously which summons Ali again)

Jimmy: You little Black cunt.

Ali / M: You can’t touch me! Nobody can touch me! Your hands can’t catch what your eyes can’t see!

**Mummy Angie:** I am trying to watch the TELE!!!

*Years later, another birthday, Mojitola has been getting into trouble at school. She attempts to phone her father in Nigeria, from the London foster home but another relative picks up the phone. Simultaneously Muhammad Ali hears a phone ring in his apartment in the United*
States, picks up, speaks to a journalist who is giving him news about being called to fight in Vietnam. Again, Mojisola plays Mojitola and Muhammad Ali, Charlie plays all other parts.

Ali: Ali…

M: Hello, Daddy?

(Pause)

M: Daddy?

Ali: Don’t call me that.

Journalist: Mr Ali.

M: Is it you?

Ali: Yes.

M: I want him not you.

Ali: Who are you?

Journalist: Sports Illustrated.

M: I need to talk to him. They might suspend me. And it’s my birthday.

Journalist: How do you feel?

M: I really need to talk to my dad.

Ali: About what?

Journalist: About being re-classified for the army?

M: I’m going fucking mad here.

Ali: What did you say?

M: You’re not listening.

Journalist: A boxer on the battlefield.

M: Where is he?!

Ali: Fight-in the war, me?

M: Please! Tell me.
Journalist: They have lowered the level.

M: I don’t wanna stay here.

Journalist: So are you saying won’t serve?

M: No. They’re are nasty to me.

Ali: How can they do this?

Journalist: It appears it was just for you.

M: At home, in school…

Ali: They said I was dumb. Why do they want me now?

M: Why you asking me? I don’t know -

Ali: Because I am a Muslim! Because they’re scared of me. Because I speak up for my people and they wanna stop me. Because it’s the only way they can draw blood!

Journalist: Will you accept the draft?

Ali: No way!

M: This is a waste of time.

Journalist: Any further comment?

M: Just give him this message -

Ali: This conversation’s over.

M: Don’t hang up!

Ali: (To someone off the phone) Get my lawyer on the line.

M: Tell him to come back and get me! Come back -

Ali: - now!

Ali now speaks to his lawyer on the phone. The male actor puts down the phone, and speaks into a mic. He is now a TV or radio news reporter outside Ali’s house. Cameras flash.

Ali: You heard the news? What the hell is going on?

News Reporter: The most disgusting character to appear on the sports scene.

Ali: How can they re-classify me when they haven’t seen if I’m better or worser or smarter or dumber?
News Reporter: Join in the condemnation of this unpatriotic, loud-mouthed, bombastic individual.

Ali: For two years, they told everybody I was a nut, and made me and my parents ashamed.

News Reporter: Should be held in contempt by every patriotic American.

Ali: I don’t know nothing about the war.

News Reporter: A sad apology for a man.

Ali: Yeah I know where Vietnam is, its on the TV.

News Reporter: All time jerk of the boxing world.

Ali: Asia, man.


Ali: Man, I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet-cong.

News Reporter: Nothing but a yellow bellied / nigger’

Ali: They never called me / nigger!’

News Reporter: Self-centred spoiled brat of a child

Immediately back to the foster home. News Reporter switches to being Mummy Angie in an instant. She is fuming. M is now 16 years old.

Mummy Angie: Self centred spoilt brat of a child! You heard the latest Jimmy? It’s her birthday right. So I give her record vouchers. She gives me a moody school report. Then she throws the present back in my face, says she didn’t want vouchers for her birthday she wanted driving lessons! She’s having a bubble bath! (to M) You’re having a laugh. Where d’you get that idea? Ungrateful little madam. I ask ya…

[cut to later in the scene]…

Mummy Angie: Why don’t you call Daddy and ask him to buy you driving lessons?

Jimmy: - and teach you some manners while he’s at it –

Mummy Angie (calling round the room and then picking up the phone): “Daddy?!... Daddy?!... Daddy?!...” (Sarcastically) Oooh no answer. How strange…

Jimmy: Cheeky little monkey.

(M is enraged).
M: You only want me for the money anyway, poxy bit of money you get out of me and my name. If I wasn’t here to look after you’d be nothing. If I wasn’t here to have a go at you wouldn’t even have a job. I come from a longlonglonglonglong line of h-educated people. My grand-dad was the very first Nigerian accountant…

Jimmy: (Overlapping M) One banana, two banana, three banana four…

M: And my dad is an accountant too, or he will be soon when he comes back from Africa and takes his exams.

Jimmy: (Overlapping M) Five banana, six banana, seven banana more.

M: …I can do anything. I can be anything. And without me and all us Black kids in care you’d be nothing. You didn’t make us! We made you! I don’t come from you! I don’t belong to you! I don’t even look like you. And thank God, cos for your information, read the poster, Black is Beautiful… (M ignores Jimmy).

Jimmy: Who you trying to convince?

M: (ignoring him) Black is best!

Jimmy: (sarcastically nice) Thought you was half Danish Princess.

M: Africa is the birth place of the human race. We built the pyramids. This ain’t my home! This is a dirty little pre-fab meant to be knocked down after the Second World War! Dirty nasty smelly pissy little bungalow on a nasty shitty tiny little island (indicating her small finger provocatively) that everybody wishes was AMERICA! Jimmy: Now that’s below the belt!

M: You’d know all about that wouldn’t ya?!

Jimmy: Say that again?!

M: BELOW THE BELT!!!!!

Jimmy punches M in the face. She is knocked out.

Years later, Mojitola has left home and gone to study drama at University. She has come out as gay. She has just performed in her first play. Simultaneously there are visuals of Ali’s fight with George Foreman, the ‘rope-a-dope’ in the Rumble in the Jungle. Ali wins. Wild Applause. M takes her bow. The following dialogue M moves rapidly between playing Mojitola and Ali, the male actor moves between playing Ali’s Corner Man and Mummy Angie.
Mummy Angie: (She is very emotional) Oh Susan! I always knew you had it in ya. And I always said it would come out one day. I always knew you’d grow up to be a thespian! *(pronounced like ‘lesbian’).*

Ali: Yes! I am the three time champion. I’m the only man to win it three times. I fooled him with my rope-a-dope. George boxed himself out! He boxed so hard he got tired. I said George this ain’t no place to get tired. I am the greatest champion of all time!

Corner Man: Of all time.

Ali: Of all time.

*(To Angie after a show)*

M: Was I pretty?

Mummy Angie: You was pretty.

M: Say it Angie! Say it!

Mummy Angie: You was pretty, you was pretty! You was the greatest.

Ali: Was I moving? Was I fighting? Was I sticking? Was I a Master?’

*(Now as themselves, 3 Black actors Mojisola, Charlie and Jacqui, celebrating Ali)*

M: Impossibilities!

Charlie: Black possibilities!

M: Pacifist,

Charlie: Antagonist,

M: Butterflies

Charlie: and bees. Necesaaaary…

M: By any means. Contrary,

Charlie: Revolutionaaaary,

M: Sexyyyyyyyy,

Charlie: Masochist.

M: Is there something I have missed?

Charlie: He’s the ‘smiling pugilist’ [Ali as described by Marianne Moore]
Charlie & M: Eat your words!

Eat your words!

He shook up the world!

I shook up the world!

You shook up the world!

(Charlie repeats the words ‘shocked the world’, and ‘shock’ in Ali’s speech below):

Ali: ‘When I beat Sonny Liston I shocked the world. When I joined the Muslims I shocked the world. When I beat George Foreman I shocked the world. I am from the House of Shock’

(M starts to shake until all but her left hand is frozen. Charlie is now Mummy Angie).


M: There’s a man.

Mummy Angie: Where?

M: There’s a man.

Mummy Angie: Who?

M: I don’t know. I don’t know who he is. Or what he means.

Mummy Angie: Susan…

M: There’re a man

who sits

in the corner of my life.

The corner man.

Mojitola is now 40 years old and has become a somewhat jaded television actor. One day, after the last take, her father walks into the studio whilst she is in her dressing room. Daddy returns slowly. Like a ghost. Mojitola pops back into the studio to pick up her jacket. Daddy speaks. She hasn’t noticed him until now. She is stunned.
Daddy: MO-JI-TO-LA.

M: Daddy?

Daddy: What are you doing?

M: Daddy?

Daddy: What is this place?

M: (She looks around) My home. (Beat). Where have you been all this time?

Daddy: ‘I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the March wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted’.

M: I said where have you been?

Daddy: ‘Again I looked and I saw all the evil that was taking place under heaven. I saw’ –

M: (finishing the sentence) ‘I saw the tears of the oppressed and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors, and they have no comforter’. Same scripture? Same script. Someone else’s words. Where have you been old man?

Daddy: What did you say?... Who are you?

M: ‘I can’t say who I am, unless you agree I’m real’.

Daddy: What did you say? I don’t think I can take any more blows.

M goes to leave, then stops and says:

M: I said… I said… (quoting Ali) I know where I’m going and I know the truth, and I don’t have to be what you want me to be. I’m free to be what I want.

Long pause.

Mojisola & Charlie & Jacqui: Aaaaaaah…. Rumble woman rumble!

Ali: Now you’re talking. Time’s up. We’re done. See my trick. See me. Me. We.

By Katharine E. Low, Our Place, Our Stage project, South Africa & UK

Abstract:
This article argues that risk-taking can be an essential part of applied theatre practice as when it is coupled with a dialogical approach, it can result in a situation where people "encounter risks on their own terms" and engage with discussions around sensitive and controversial subjects such as non-consensual sex. With reference to Beck’s notion of a risk-sharing community, it suggests that in the process of partaking in discussions on such issues, such a community can be established, whereby people take risks by challenging different views as well as taking action by discussing the subject outside of the performance space.

1 Examining the social risk associated with HIV infection, Green and Sobo note that little attention has been paid to considering the impact of the illness on a person’s social relations (2002:3). Additionally, they remark how a person’s social relations may be at risk because of the stigma surrounding the syndrome, which indicates that illness or perceptions of danger can lead to social risks whereby the ill or dangerous person is excluded from the community. This is similar to Douglas’ description of how communities can be insular and oppressive in their desire to protect themselves from the risk of attack or infection (1979; 1992). Undoubtedly risks and concerns over the outcomes of particular activities are both powerful forces that influence people’s daily encounters. For example, Beck argues that ‘risks are related directly and indirectly to cultural definitions and standards of a tolerable or intolerable life’ (1999:135), i.e. that risk can be a perception influenced by a person’s particular living conditions and cultural practices. Yet risk itself is not necessarily bad: Douglas questions the idea that risk can only result in negative outcomes, arguing that this perception is due to the ‘language of risk [being] reserved as a specialized lexical register for political talk about the undesirable outcomes’ (1992:24, original emphasis).

2 Risk is also treated differently by different fields. For example, sexual health education is mainly concerned with preventing risks, providing avenues for people to learn and discuss the potential outcomes of risks in order to avoid taking them. Sexual health communication is thus predominantly focused on risk avoidance, such as how to prevent HIV infection or avoid teenage pregnancy. Yet, within applied theatre, participants are encouraged to take creative risks if they desire to do so and if they feel comfortable doing so. Moreover, theatre practitioners encourage participants to own and lead the content of the practice (Jackson 2007:183), aiming to reduce the power imbalance and create a more dialogic
exploration (Mlama 1991; Bury et al. 1998; Lihamba 2004). This is done in order to avoid
the dual risk that the facilitator dictates the story and the participants do not discuss what they
are interested in. So when these two opposing approaches meet is the risk-taking dangerous
or does it lead to positive outcomes?

3 I will respond to this question using as an illustration a particular moment from my
PhD practice, where a scene devised by the participants about non-consensual sex caused
considerable debate between themselves and their audience and, in some instances was used
as a moral narrative to scare young women into staying at home at night. Following a
description of the scene, the impact of the participants’ creative risk-taking is then
considered, where questions surrounding the dialogical approach taken in this practice are
examined. Subsequently, the possibility that a risk-sharing community began to be developed
through the debates is explored and is proposed as a possible positive outcome from the
practice. Nonetheless, it remains that the nature of some of the discussions and the use of the
story also appeared to be limiting or controlling of young women’s behaviour. Accordingly,
the rest of the article will consider how these events put at risk the dialogical focus of this
practice, beginning with a description of the context of transactional sex in South Africa.
Theories of contagion will be employed to analyse the participants’ responses to the scene
before considering the suggestion that such reactions were a form of protection.

The scene

4 The moment of practice in question arose during one of the Our Place, Our Stage
(OPOS) projects, based at Etafeni, an HIV/Aids organisation located in Nyanga, a South
African township infamous for its high rates of violent crime and rape. Part of my doctoral
research, the OPOS projects employed participatory theatre and performance techniques to
engender conversations and better understandings of particular sexual and reproductive health
topics the participants had chosen.

5 Having decided to examine teenagers’ sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy, the
participants’ improvised scene where Javas, a young gangster in Nyanga, approaches a group
of girls in a shebeen (a local bar) and buys them all drinks. Eventually Javas singles out
sixteen-year-old Brenda and suggests that she comes to his house. In the next scene, they find
themselves in Javas’ room and Javas wants to have sex with Brenda, which she agrees to,
providing a condom is used. Javas does not have a condom and in any case wants sex with
‘no wrapper’. Brenda eventually succumbs to Javas’ pressure, particularly when he reminds
her of all the drinks he bought her, and they have unprotected sex.
In the next workshop, after having explored different positions of power, we returned to this scene. This time we approached the story with the aim of Brenda succeeding in negotiating safe sex. Accordingly, we played through this scene a number of times with participants taking on the different roles, changing Brenda’s position, moving her from the bed to the chair, with her standing up and Javas sitting down, and so forth. Yet, it was apparent that in most of the attempts it was difficult for Brenda to negotiate safe sex, despite the changes in positions. Concurrently, I also observed how challenging it was for some of the women to move when they were in role as Brenda, even when they were in a position of power. Over the next two workshops we continued to investigate this scene, examining the different power relations present in the story, attempting to negotiate safe sex, and debating whether or not this was an example of rape.

These debates were important as they illustrated the difficulties of discussing non-consensual sex and the diverse views within the group on young women’s behaviour. For example, following the initial improvised scene, I asked the group if they thought Brenda had been raped. The group was practically unanimous in saying ‘no’, explaining (participants’ names in brackets):

- *No, they were in love at the time and she was attracted by the money* (Nwabi).
- *No, she didn’t cry – if she cried [Javas’] grandmother would have come out and helped her. She was enjoying it* (Nomvulo).

Following unsuccessful attempts to get Javas to agree to safe sex, the group then set out definitions of what rape meant for them, using words like ‘force’, ‘powerless’, ‘hurt’, and ‘attacking’. Yet, when asked the question again, the majority of the group stated that Brenda had not been raped. In response to this, the youngest participant, Wandisile, an eighteen year-old man, asked the group:

*What is the conclusion? You say no, she wasn’t raped, but you use the same words to describe rape and to explain why she wasn’t able to negotiate safe sex.*

Although this comment reignited the debate, the group’s answers barely shifted: twelve participants thought she had not been raped, two people disagreed, believing she had been raped, and one person could not decide. A week later, this scene was performed for a larger audience predominantly comprised of elder women who, in response to the same question, gave similarly diverse responses.

Reflecting on these debates, it was clear that further analysis of the situation was required. Of particular interest was why so few women viewed Brenda’s story as rape, how my viewpoint had influenced the proceedings, and whether this creative risk-taking was
dangerous for the participants? Accordingly, I now turn to an analysis of the situation beginning by considering the danger behind the participants’ risk-taking, before examining the possibility that this creative risk-taking had a desirable outcome: a series of in-depth debates on the sensitive subject of teenage pregnancy.

**Creative risk-taking**

9 Within applied theatre practice, particular attention is given to creating a dialogical environment ‘in which people feel safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability’ (Nicholson 2005a:129). Of utmost importance is that the participants are not placed in danger or are hurt by being part of the creative process. Part of avoiding this potential problem is through the establishment of open dialogue between the facilitator and the participants, so that each party is able to communicate their views. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that there are six prerequisites for dialogue to exist: love, humility, faith in humankind, trust, hope, and critical thinking (1970:71–3). Considering applied theatre practice, in particular the creative risk-taking element, I believe that Freire’s consideration of humility and trust are two important ways of ‘creat[ing] a genuine climate of dialogue and reciprocity’ (Preston 2009:68). Humility on the part of the practitioner, an acknowledgement that they do not know the ‘right’ answer for the group, and an emphasis on establishing trust with the participants are vital aspects of applied theatre practice, particularly if the facilitator desires to develop a strong working relationship. Nicholson notes the importance of ensuring ‘that the research process neither betrays the participants’ trust nor inhibits their creative contributions to the drama’ while also trying to ‘maintain the rich inter-personal relationships’ being built in the workshop space (2005b:119). Additionally, such a dialogic approach can heighten the group’s creative exploration. Discussing interventionist theatre, Jackson refers to Bakhtin’s concepts of the ‘dialogic’, where each utterance we make ‘is made within an interpersonal and chronological context’, and of ““heteroglossia” (or multi-languaged discourse)’, to illustrate how the different ‘voices, ideas, cultural forces embodied in human actions and feelings’ located within an artistic frame, form the dynamism which is at the centre of ‘resonant and aesthetically pleasing theatre’ (2007:183-4, drawing from Bakhtin 1994:85-113). Here Jackson’s focus is on the dynamism produced when different concepts, voices, and cultural narratives engage in genuine dialogue within an artistic framework. It is this dynamism, he argues, that produces the ‘conflict, tension, debate and intellectual stimulus’ that challenge the spectator to reflect on the different voices and experience uncertainty (and not ‘neat, easily decipherable meanings’).
Although Jackson is referring to the relationship between the performance and the audience, I believe that a similar intent can be aimed for within the workshop space. In these spaces, the facilitator works towards this dynamism and generates opportunities for genuine dialogue between the participant and herself in order to explore ideas by engaging in debate and not searching for a ‘correct’ answer. Nonetheless, a common risk is the possibility that one party’s words (e.g. the facilitator’s) do not match those of the others, resulting in a circumstance where the dialogue becomes one-sided as one party overemphasises their viewpoint (i.e. a loss of humility). Therefore, by not working towards an environment of humility and trust, dialogue will be one-sided and limit the creative output. But how feasible is it to work in a dialogical manner when the practice develops into an outcome that appears (in the facilitator’s opinion) to be limiting for the participants and what risks do the participants face as they embody characterisations that are powerless?

Engaging in discussions of power and rape can be emotionally risky for participants, especially when working with different genders and age groups – a young man may feel intimidated performing in front of an older woman, while the same woman may feel uncomfortable portraying a sexual relationship with a young man. Additionally, there exists the risk that having developed ‘rich inter-personal relationships’, the participant feels obliged to share more than she means to, or does so unwittingly. For example, reflecting back to the moment when this scene was initially improvised, I observed that Nontombi, an older woman, was uncomfortable portraying Brenda having sex with Javas. Clearly this was in part because simulating sexual activity in front of other people can be embarrassing, but it also remains risky as it exposes the participant to potential ridicule. However, it is also possible that Nontombi felt uncomfortable by the action she was unable to prevent – in that moment, Brenda was trying to negotiate safe sex with Javas. Moreover, Nontombi was not alone in appearing uncomfortable in the role of Brenda, other women also seemed to find it difficult to move out of their particular positions: Nomvulo appeared trapped by Javas’ (Thobela’s) hand holding her, and Pamella, despite being seated higher than Refilwe’s kneeling portrayal of Javas, seemed glued to her chair. The women’s stances appeared to suggest a physical discomfort with being so close to the character of Brenda, an idea which resonates with something Thompson has noted in his work. Describing a mural exercise in which participants volunteer stories over what the mural depicts, he observes that the ‘act of reading twisted bodies in a particular way had affected the participants bodily because many felt physically connected to the story told’ (2005:30). This concept of the body being physically
connected to the narrative indicates that the participants may risk embodying a role that they are not comfortable with or which is perhaps too similar to their lives.

11 These actions created a concern about the safety of the participants involved, particularly in the repeated portrayal of powerless women. Having witnessed a few scenes in which the woman portraying Brenda appeared frozen, I stopped the action and repeated the instruction that Brenda could move if she needed to (to follow the impulse the participant felt), at which point Nomvulo appeared able to move. This situation seems to suggest there was something holding the women back and it was only once they were reminded that they could move or when a third character entered the stage (e.g. Javas’ grandmother) that they were able to begin attempting to negotiate safe sex. Nonetheless, I remained concerned by the powerlessness being performed and what this meant for the participants. Although it was worrying to see so many powerless performances, attempting to understand why the women portraying Brenda were so frozen resulted in a discussion about how men and women negotiate sex and the position of young women in the participants’ community. Moreover, despite legitimate concerns that the participants were being placed at risk by embodying powerless women, when considering the space and the inter-personal relationships established within it, it seemed that one of the outcomes of the risk-taking was a spirited discussion on the topic of non-consensual sex. Creative risk-taking forms part of applied theatre practice and if the space is open and trusting, Hunter argues that it can be a site where ‘individuals in a collective environment can be empowered to encounter risk on their own terms’ (2008:18-19). Similarly, if the space is open to genuine dialogue and reciprocity, then, as practitioners, we can be less concerned about the participants’ risk-taking. Concerns are further reduced by the involvement of the facilitator, who can prevent excessive risk-taking. A certain involvement is justifiable: Salverson warns against facilitators indulging in ‘constipated self-examination’ because ‘sometimes the fear of appropriation can become an excuse not to act, not to risk engagement’ (2008:250). Therefore, while some concern and self-examination is necessary on the part of the practitioner, it needs to be conducted in moderation and in a linear relationship with trusting the creative space.

A "risk-sharing" community?

12 Considering Douglas’ argument that ‘now risk refers only to negative outcomes’ (1992:24, original emphasis), I propose instead that the risk-taking illustrated above actually resulted in a positive outcome: many open-ended debates over a sensitive subject. The perceived powerlessness of Brenda, portrayed by many different women, thus became a way
of initiating discussions regarding understandings of non-consensual sex, young women’s needs, and how others perceive young women’s behaviour. These debates happened both within the workshop space but also following the group’s performance to a larger audience at Etafeni. Indeed one audience member described the group’s show as:

*A very good start of opening a debate to empower other youth within our community, because this is the true reflection of what is happening. You know if we can get to this [we can] fight it together.*

Accordingly, the risks taken in performing the role of a powerless woman appear to illustrate the potential dialogical environment of the theatre practice: the participants were engaging with a subject of their choice and, despite numerous debates about the scene, no victors emerged, only further ideas for consideration. The young men and women and the older women all took risks and shared their views on teenage sexual behaviour with each other and an external audience. These risks (of sharing too much or being ridiculed for having different views) had a positive outcome in that they created a ‘dialogical performance’ which Conquergood describes as ‘a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them’ (2003:143, cited in Loudon 2005:235). Indeed, these dialogical performances are linked with Beck’s theory of a ‘risk-sharing community’ which in turn opens up another possible gain from risk-taking.

13 In *World Risk Society*, Beck views risk in an optimistic light, describing it as being ‘intrinsically connected’ with responsibility, trust, and security (1999:6), a view which resonates with Freire’s conception of dialogue. Beck proposes that: ‘risk-sharing […] can, in my view, become a powerful basis for community’ (1999:16, original emphasis). He explains the notion of a risk community further, suggesting that it can be seen as a sharing of ‘the burden’ of risks and a ‘taking of responsibility’ (16). In this light, the different debates (or dialogical performances) during the workshops and at the performance can be viewed as a step towards those people present becoming a risk-sharing community. The responses of some of the audience suggest that although these individuals were taking risks, they believed that this debate was important to participate in and that the community needed to discuss the subject. The arguments put forward by the audience and the discussion that followed can potentially be seen as an acknowledgement of the high risk of non-consensual sex in their community and a step towards taking responsibility as a community of that risk:

*I don’t think that I would call it rape, but she is not free to be herself and people don’t take what she says seriously… and so it is a rape of a person’s right to be heard. If someone buys you... whatever, that doesn’t give that person the right to whatever. It is always your decision. So stick to whatever you decided.*
These views, combined with Hunter’s notion of a ‘collective environment’, seem to indicate that these debates formed part of a dialogical performance, as there was a dialogical relationship between the participants, the audience, and myself as the practitioner, in that we all contributed to the debate.

Moreover, within this dialogical performance, participants and audience members alike took action by taking risks and sharing their ideas. In both the workshops and during the performances, the participants performed different roles in the scene and in doing so took the risk that they may have been reflected in the character they were portraying (White 2006). By taking these creative risks, they opened up the discussion, creating a debate around a topic which has no easy answers. Wandisile in particular took a significant number of risks: as the youngest member of the group, he repeatedly questioned the majority over the disparity between their views on the act of rape and their definition of rape. In challenging the group, predominantly comprised of women, Wandisile faced potential ridicule as well as possibly jeopardising his social position by supporting the ‘wrong’ behaviour. In their discussion of the social risk of HIV, Green and Sobo note the implications of taking a social risk:

Social risk-taking, then, involves taking an action, engaging in a behaviour, or adopting an identity or an identity component that might alter one’s social relations and so one’s place in one’s various social networks (e.g. familial, sexual, income related, etc.) and one’s position in society as a whole. (2000:40-1).

In this situation, as a young man who stepped out of the mould of dismissing Brenda, Wandisile took a social risk. However, this act of challenging the group’s definition helped to energise the debate within the workshop, whereby other participants began to consider different viewpoints. This energy and conflict over the story fed into the performance where the participants shared the risk of performing a problematic subject and generated a debate. These creative risks emboldened others to share their opinions and experiences. For example, in a group interview following the performance, Zukiswa, an audience member, spoke of how her daughter had been raped in similar circumstances the previous year. This kind of sharing can be considered as a step towards becoming a risk-sharing community as the participants and audience were sharing the burden of the risks by discussing the subject. In terms of sexual health communication, the debate following the performance was an important outcome, because the group engaged with a broad spectrum of the community (young children, teenagers, women of various ages, and a few men). This is an important occurrence as research on social communication approaches has proposed that increased social communication, within community groups, on specific health issues can have a positive
impact by encouraging openness and discussion (Low-Beer & Stoneburner 2004; Green 2003).

15 Another outcome of this debate was that some of the audience took action and spoke about the story with family and friends. Of the eight audience members interviewed a few days after the performance, three had discussed the play with other people. One man shared the story with friends and two women (Zukiswa and Sylvia)¹ discussed the dilemma with young women. However, the nature of some of these discussions were problematic in that Brenda’s narrative was used as a means of warning young women about the dangers of going out. In their interviews, Sylvia and Zukiswa explained how they employed the story both as a warning in Sylvia’s case (for the daughter of a friend), and as a reminder for Zukiswa’s daughter of the risk of being raped if you go to shebeens. It is this use of the narrative which creates a challenge for applied theatre: how can a dialogical approach result in an outcome that may be limiting for the participants? Rather than engaging in a conversation that may have had some form of positive impact on opinions held about non-consensual sex, Sylvia and Zukiswa used the narrative as a means of controlling a behaviour they perceived as being dangerous. Beck warns ‘many risk communities are potentially political communities in a new sense – because they have to live with the risks that others take’ (1999:16). In this instance, the dangers associated with the risks (which have been discussed and shared) were being employed for a particular purpose: to control behaviour. It appeared that Sylvia and Zukiswa had employed Brenda’s story as a means of protecting the community they live in, because ‘they have to live with the risks that others take’. Yet, this was an outcome that appeared contrary to the dialogical aims of this practice.

16 Additionally, while reconsidering the views shared in the workshops, it was apparent that the majority of the participants did not believe Brenda was raped and held, in my view, dismissive attitudes toward Brenda. Correspondingly, a proportion of the audience shared also these attitudes, with one woman arguing ‘it is not rape, she also invited what happened to her’. At the time I noted my confusion with these viewpoints and, during the workshops, I repeatedly asked the group whether or not what had happened to Brenda was rape, despite rarely hearing the affirmative answer I was hoping for. Reflecting on my approach now, it is possible that I disrupted the dialogical communication between the participants and myself by not trusting their responses. In repeating my question on three different occasions, did I lack humility by not accepting their answers and through my response, did I establish a ‘dominant

¹ Their names have been changed because of the private nature of these discussions.
discourse’ (Loudon 2005:134)? Herein lies the challenge for applied theatre – how to facilitate a process which, in my view (based on a Western understanding of liberation for women and what constitutes rape) appears to have a limiting outcome without crossing over from facilitating into activism. More specifically, how to avoid putting the dialogic process of the practice at risk because the outcomes of the creative risk-taking do not tally with your assumptions of what positive social change would look like.

At this juncture it is clear that there is a need to investigate these debates further and what their outcomes were. That this applied theatre process did result in a dialogical performance is not in question – this was a key outcome – but, as I have begun to illustrate, there is more to this story. The larger narrative in South Africa

Discussing storytelling and community-based theatre, Salverson questions how much facilitators understand what occurs ‘in the act of listening to and telling “risky stories”’, pointing to the importance of considering the contexts in which these stories are recounted, and to query the origin of the frameworks surrounding the telling (Simon & Armitage-Simon 1995, cited in Salverson 1996:181). Indeed, clearly there is a need to situate the social narrative of Brenda’s story within the larger narrative surrounding sexual relations in South Africa and to consider the frameworks surrounding the telling of Brenda’s story.

Sexual relations in South Africa are complex and there are multiple definitions of sexual relations that are not necessarily desired by all parties involved, including transactional sex, non-consensual sex, rape, prostitution, and coerced sexual intercourse. The South African Law Commission have proposed a redefinition of rape to include a sexual penetration committed ‘in any coercive circumstance, under false pretences or by fraudulent means, or in respect of a person who is incapable in law to appreciate the nature of an act of sexual penetration’ (2002:117). However, defining what rape or non-consensual sex is remains difficult. Studies of sexual relations in South African townships have concluded that the sexual relationships of adolescent girls ‘are often contractual in nature’ (Wood & Jewkes 1997:42) and that ‘gifts play a ‘vital role… in fuelling everyday sexual relations between men and women’ (Hunter 2002:100). Moreover, poverty also plays an important part in both non-consensual and transactional sex; daily activities such as fetching water, collecting firewood alone, and walking home from work alone at night, as well as limited recreational pastimes, put women at risk of rape (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002:1239; Krug 2002:158; Ramphele

2 Discussing the challenge of working in post-colonial environments, trying to located ‘oppressed voices’, Loudon questions how a researcher can ‘encourag[e] an open debate without further imposing or creating a dominant discourse?’ (2005:134).
In the informal settlements, sex is linked with subsistence, as women exchange sex for food, rent, and clothes, while in the more established townships, sex is more notably related to consumption, where consumer goods, fashion, and cellphones play an important role in establishing a person’s social standing (Hunter 2002). Furthermore, because prostitution is illegal in South Africa, many women have little or no protection against rape and have little recourse to justice (Pauw & Brener 2003).

Indeed, it has been suggested ‘that the experience of non-consensual or coerced sexual intercourse at some stage in a South African woman’s life is certainly the norm and may be little short of universal’ (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002:1240). However, this is not unique to South Africa: Doyal argues that for many women in Africa sex is a survival strategy, with both women and schoolgirls rely on the money and the ‘gifts’ they receive in return for having relations with men (1994:14-17). In Tanzania, for example, Bujra has observed that protection and safer sex has become for many women ‘a matter of hope/aspiration, that is, trust, rather than a goal consciously planned and achieved through negotiation between equals’ (2000:69). It is clear that gender relations play a key role in sexual relationships and there is an agreement in the literature that there is a pressing need to consider gender roles and gender power with regard to sexual and reproductive health (Wood & Jewkes 1997:43; Ramphele 2008:106).

Returning to this project, by connecting the scene between Brenda and Javas with this larger narrative, it could be argued that this is a story about transactional sex, as Javas bought Brenda drinks in the shebeen. Alternatively, considering the events which unfolded during the scene – Brenda could not leave as it was impossible for her to return home safely, which coupled with Javas’ ‘persuasion’ and his status as a local gangster – it could also be contended that this was a story about sexual coercion or non-consensual sex. Yet, most of the participants were unsympathetic towards Brenda’s situation, believing that Brenda had made her decision about whether or not to have sex with Javas earlier on in the evening, when she chose to go home with him, thereby leaving the ‘protection’ of her friends. As Refilwe commented:

*From my point of view, I think that Brenda was not raped. She was at a nightclub without her parents knowing. She sneaked out, yebo [yes]? She could have avoided the situation by sticking with her friends and go back home. And not going with strangers, strange guy to his place, yebo? And at the end of the night, she did agree to having sex, unprotected sex with Javas.*

During the workshops, the group defined rape as having sexual relations in a situation where you have no physical or emotional power to prevent it but, despite Wandisile’s evident
frustration, for most of the participants this definition was not applicable to Brenda’s situation. In this scenario, for a sixteen year-old girl to be in a gangster’s bedroom at two o’clock in the morning, there was no room to turn back. Using a forum theatre approach, the group attempted a few different ways to get her out of the situation, such as walking out with attitude or calling her brother to come and fetch her. Yet these were not deemed realistic by the rest of the participants in that she could not walk home by herself at night (she would get raped) and she could not call her brother (she had no phone credit and he would not risk angering a gangster). Ultimately it appeared that as Brenda had willingly accepted alcoholic drinks from Javas, danced with him and then accompanied him home, she knew what she was letting herself in for. As one of the participants stated: ‘she was drunk and she went home with a drunken man to his house, she understood what she was doing, she could have avoided the situation’. For the majority then, Brenda and Javas had engaged in transactional sex.

In many of the improvisations and discussions which followed, there appeared to be very little empathy for Brenda and I was confused by the almost dismissive attitudes the participants held about Brenda’s behaviour and situation. This was particularly so because I assumed that as the group was predominantly comprised of women, there would be more support for Brenda’s right to say ‘no’ at any point in the proceedings. Rather, the women were particularly vocal in stating that Brenda knew what she was doing and had made her own decision. A conflict developed between what I was expecting in terms of ‘positive’ responses and the actual views held by the participants, which challenged my view of what the outcome of the practice was and what I thought it should achieve. Thus, with reference to Douglas’ theory of contagion, this article will now explore the frameworks surrounding the larger narrative of transactional sex and the tellers’ (the participants’) attitudes.

Contagion and discipline = a means of protection?

The somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the protagonist in what is potentially a rape situation is not just confined to a South African audience. Gesser-Edelsburg describes a similar response in her article about an Israeli educational play about gang rape, but in this case it is the playwright (Edna Mazya) herself who is dismissive of the rape victim, explaining she ‘was expecting games’ (2005:142). Gesser-Edelsburg’s analysis of the

---

3 This scenario can be viewed as a firing squad situation as Brenda had no room to escape. Indeed, following a Boalian approach, the story would not have reached this point and would have focused on the earlier scene in the shebeen where Brenda could have still left safely. For Boal, the purpose of forum is that ‘the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality’ (2000:142), i.e. that the theatre is a form through which change can be rehearsed. However, this was not the case with this practice, rather the theatre’s purpose was to stimulate discussion, which it did, and to respond to the participants’ desires to examine such a subject.
production’s aesthetic and the feedback from the audience concluded that the play portrayed girls as ‘provocative victims’ and reinforced the view that teenage boys are ‘sexual beings who need relief in any possible way’ (139, 151). Similarly in Uganda, Mbowa recounts how, following a drama-based training programme on HIV/AIDS, a group of young men requested that girls stop wearing mini-skirts as it excited them and made them desire sex. Although the community leaders acknowledged that freedom of choice existed, in response to this request, the leaders warned ‘that young girls should … not jump on any fashion that comes, they should know the risks they are taking in putting on things like that’ (Mbowa 1997:45). In this instance I am not attempting to generalise that Israeli, Ugandan, and South African attitudes towards rape are the same, only to illustrate that in these examples, the woman is portrayed as being in the wrong, alongside a suggestion that she ‘knew’ what was going to happen.

24 This notion of ‘expectance’ suggests that there may be an unspoken agreement that occurs when a woman accepts a man’s drink or when a young girl plays a game with a group of boys, because by agreeing, the woman has consented to some form of transaction. Within my practice, I think that the crux of the issue was that the participants perceived Brenda’s story to be an example of transactional sex and not survival sex, which is viewed differently in South Africa. Stadler’s ethnographic research into the secrecy and suspicion surrounding AIDS-related deaths in the Limpopo Province, explains this point further (2003). His findings demonstrate that there is a difference in how community members perceive young women who have sex for survival and those who have sex for pleasure. In one example, he notes how a young woman was described as ‘hitting the jackpot’ because through her sexual relations with different men, she was able to contribute to the household’s finances and maintain its survival (133). Yet another young girl, who died of AIDS, was labelled a prostitute by the community because ‘she is the kind of girl who goes to shebeens and… hangs out with the guys who have cell phones or maybe cars’ (134). This label is similar to the one that was assigned to Brenda: a young woman happy to take the risks associated with drinking and spending time with men. Here, through an understanding of the larger narrative, the frameworks surrounding the story begin to appear, but the attitudes of the participants and the ways in which Brenda’s story was employed need to be examined further.

25 In Purity and Danger, Douglas presents the concept of ‘danger-beliefs’ as being constructions that humanity has developed in order to maintain and protect the ‘ideal order of society’ from potential transgressions. She suggests that ‘danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness’ (1979:3). In her later collection of essays, Risk and Blame,
Douglas furthers this by suggesting that ‘[a] common danger gives [members of the community] a handle to manipulate, the threat of a community-wide pollution is a weapon for mutual coercion’ (1992:6). Thus, according to Douglas, danger-beliefs are employed to keep people in check and behave according to the social mores. This proposition of Douglas’ may start to explain the indifferent responses of some of the group, in that the ‘danger-beliefs’ associated with Brenda’s story were being used both as a way of controlling social order and as a means of protection, specifically using fear to force other people to conform and behave appropriately. More explicitly, within the South African context, it could be viewed thus: if young women go to shebeens and drink, they are putting themselves at risk of being raped, an occurrence which would be a repercussion of their socially inappropriate behaviour and one which would put the community at risk of infection.

26 Douglas’ argument that ‘danger is defined to protect the public good’ (1992:6) is important to recall here when considering the existing context of the location of the project, where Aids, non-consensual and transactional sex, and crime are common. In Nyanga and the surrounding townships, people may fear for their safety and therefore need to find ways of protecting themselves and their families. This fear could arise from a person’s proximity to a ‘polluting person’, whom Douglas describes as ‘always in the wrong’, having transgressed a line and thereby ‘unleashes danger for someone’ (1966:113). For example in this story, since Javas was a local gangster, people would be wary of helping Brenda for fear of angering Javas, therefore here Brenda has transgressed as association with him is risky and hence also makes her a risk. The main concern of the community is to prevent danger and therefore fear becomes one way of controlling people. This is an idea which fits into the broader narrative of contagion in South Africa, which can be regarded as a legacy of apartheid, where ‘Tuberculosis and syphilis provided a foundation on which to construct theories of black inferiority and African sexual promiscuity’, thereby allowing the government to rationalize the implementation of its racist segregation ideology (Fassin 2007:xviii-xix).

27 Like Douglas, Fassin is concerned with the impact of contagion (or the apartheid regime) on the individual’s body and how the body and its story are used for different purposes. Both place a great deal of importance on the influence of culture on ideas of contagion, the cultural theory of which Douglas scrutinizes in relation to Aids:

4 A real example of this was Refilwe’s account of how no one helped while she was being mugged on a busy street in the afternoon. Although Refilwe was not in the ‘wrong’, at that moment she was a polluting person as she had attracted the attention of tsotsis (gangsters) and people would have been wary of assisting her for fear of unleashing danger on themselves.
Try to see the fragile cultural project from the community’s point of view. Their idea of the body includes a weak immunity conferred by the double envelope, the body’s own skin, and the community’s skin. The theory of infection is miasmic. Within the community a person can be safe, so long as entry to the body and entry to the community is controlled. (1992:115).

Contagion encourages fear and anxiety which leads to avoidance of the ‘polluting person’, which may be a reason why few people believed that Brenda was raped. Additionally, significant emphasis was placed on the fact that Brenda should have known what could happen and thus should have expected it. Some of the participants’ responses indicated that when she made her decision to accompany Javas home, she would have known what the outcome would be. As Refilwe described it: ‘If a girl accepts the money, there is a “must” feeling to sleep with him. And she is also hoping for another time’, that is to say that he will come back to her again, buy her drinks and be with her. Shared openly, this viewpoint echoes the one described in Mbowa’s (1997) example and can be seen as a form of control or a step towards outlining appropriate behaviour: in order to protect the community, its parameters (its ‘skin’) are guarded. Controlling entry helps to protect the community from infection and viewed in this light, Brenda invited danger in by stepping away from the community’s protective skin. She put herself at risk by leaving the protection of her friends and therefore she and, by implication, the community were no longer able to control entry to her body. It is this act that places her, and, by extension, the community, at risk of contracting HIV. In witnessing the performance of this story, the majority of the community (in this case made up of other group members and, later on, the audience) responded to Brenda’s behaviour with indifference: they criticised her behaviour and they were not sympathetic to her fate, perhaps because her actions were deemed inappropriate and therefore threatening to the moral views the community employed for protection.

28 As mentioned above, two audience members employed the story and retold it to young women of a similar age to Brenda, and it was in these moments that the storyline was employed as a tool. In an interview following the performance, Sylvia explained how she had changed Brenda’s story into a ‘real’ story as she told it to a friend’s fifteen-year old daughter, Molly (2008). According to Molly’s mother, this ‘true’ story had a great impact on Molly – that weekend she stayed at home and did not venture out. Sixteen months later, Sylvia mentioned how Molly’s mother was glad Sylvia had shared the story as Molly ‘needed to hear it’ and be shown how she could ‘end up the same way’ as Brenda (2009). Similarly, Zukiswa spoke of how she discussed the play with her daughter, reminding her that she ‘had the same problem from that play’. Zukiswa repeated the moral that if she had not gone out
drinking with her friends, she would not have been raped (2008). Now, Zukiswa reports her
daughter ‘don’t have friends now’ and stays at home to study (2009). In this instance, the
theatre practice became another means of controlling the community. In the name of
protection, a story was used to scare young women so that they do not become polluting
stigmatization of those with a bad moral record clearly can function as a means of formal
social control’ (1990:165). Thus, perhaps Brenda was being used as a danger-belief as her
story was put forward as a moral for others to be aware of.

In my view, by deciding to use Brenda’s story in such a manner, Sylvia and
Zukiswa’s actions helped to reinforce existing attitudes about gender relations and sexual
stereotypes, which in turn served to increase the stigma surrounding rape and non-consensual
sex. The use of the character of Brenda both as a ‘danger-belief’ and as a means of control is
a worrying outcome for applied theatre practice. Not only is the theatre providing the space
for such an act, the manner in which the story is recounted limits potential dialogical
possibilities. One of the purposes of this practice was to facilitate dialogue, however, when an
older woman lectures a younger woman in such a manner, dialogue is not possible. Here the
protective skin of the community is being closed: in order to keep the young women safe, the
older women employed the narrative in a disciplinary manner rather than as a communication
tool to discuss non-consensual sex, which may have been a more ‘positive’ outcome for the
practice. In one view then, the creative risks taken in the performance of a controversial
subject led to a restrictive and potentially dangerous outcome, where in the retelling of
Brenda’s story, the theatre became another means of controlling young women. In the name
of protection, a story was used to scare a young woman and prevent her becoming a polluting
person. Thus, it could be argued that the debate was an opportunity for the women to verbally
condemn Brenda’s behaviour in an attempt to ‘force one another into good citizenship’
(Douglas 1979:3). This outcome, in terms of a sexual health communication framework, was
a means of demonstrating how to limit risk-taking by staying at home. Yet, it seems to me
that the theatre practice resulted in a reinforcement of a moral discourse on the behaviour of
young women. This outcome is one that challenges the dialogical ideal desired for in this
project, as it does not provide an opportunity for all parties to share their words. Therefore, as
a facilitator, how does one respond to such a situation without setting up a dominant
discourse or assuming ownership of knowledge? Perhaps the answer lies in the reason behind
the disciplinarian approach (why did the older women retell Brenda’s story?), whereby the
outcome may be viewed in another light.
In a review of violence against women, Krug noted that for many young Southern African women, their first sexual encounter ‘is often unwanted and forced’, with one study reporting that over 70% of the teenage respondents (at an antenatal clinic in Cape Town) ‘feared being beaten if they refused sex’. It was also observed worldwide that the more educated (and therefore more ‘empowered’) a woman was, the higher the risk of sexual violence (2002:152-7). Moreover, if we consider the context in which the women live, there are not many means of protection available to the young women’s mothers: the streets are notoriously unsafe, there are few safe locations (other than their homes) for young women to be in, and there are limited ‘safe’ recreational activities. Consequently, it is perhaps understandable that the older women, as mothers, were indifferent to Brenda’s plight, as one of their sole means of protecting their children is to keep them at home and therefore they could not afford the risk of being seen to condone Brenda’s right to go to a bar and accept a drink from a man with no other agreed-upon transaction. Accordingly, in a public arena (the performance and outside of Etafeni), women had an opportunity to protect their community and they chose to use Brenda’s story as an example – setting out a moral stance which was used as a means of discouraging young women from leaving their homes in order to keep them safe. In the moment of retelling the story, Sylvia and Zukiswa were being tactical – they were aiming to keep the young women they cared about safe.

**Conclusion**

This article has argued that risk-taking can be an essential part of applied theatre practice as when it is coupled with a dialogical approach, it can result in a situation where people ‘encounter risks on their own terms’ and engage with discussions around sensitive and controversial subjects such as non-consensual sex. With reference to Beck’s notion of a risk-sharing community, it was suggested that in the process of partaking in these discussions, such a community was established, whereby people took risks by challenging different views as well as taking action by discussing the subject outside of the performance space. However, it also emerged that the narrative was being employed as a moral discourse to control young women’s behaviour. This outcome, coupled with the seemingly dismissive attitudes held towards Brenda’s situation prompted a questioning over the challenge of maintaining dialogical relations when the end-product of the creative risk-taking did not tally with the facilitator’s expectations for the project. Yet, considering the larger context of transactional sex in South Africa and, Douglas’ theories of contagion and danger-beliefs, the participants’ attitudes and Sylvia and Zukiswa’s use of Brenda’s story can be understood as a protective
response (guarding the community’s mores). Indeed, while the use of Brenda’s story as a moral discourse challenged the dialogical ideal of the project (as it did not allow all parties to voice an opinion), considering the limited means of protection and young women’s difficulty in negotiating sexual relations, this seemingly repressive outcome was actually a tactical means of protection and possibly the most appropriate response for this situation. Although it goes against how I would wish women in this community to live, as an outsider I cannot – and do not wish to – create a dominant discourse about how they should live.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to all the participants in the Our Place, Our Stage projects and the staff at Etafeni, without whom there would be no practice or research.

Works Cited


Sylvia. Interview with the author on July 9 2008. Etafeni, Nyanga, Cape Town. (Digital recording in possession of author).

Sylvia. Interview with the author on November 10 2009. Etafeni, Nyanga, Cape Town. (Digital recording in possession of author).


Zukiswa. Interview with the author on November 10 2009. Etafeni, Nyanga, Cape Town. (Digital recording in possession of author).
Sitting/Walking/Practice: Reflections on a Woman’s creative process

By Jane Bacon, PhD, University of Northampton, UK

Abstract:
This article is a “musing on the processes of practice-as research in performance and screen when ‘self’ is the source of creative inspiration” and is a poetic attempt to give form, in word and image, to creative process. The writing is informed by and emerges out of experiences of Authentic Movement, Focusing, Jungian dreamwork, walking and photography. The aim is to articulate something of my creative processes when engaged in an explicitly subjective practice-led research process. This article embraces the imaginal and the somatic in an attempt to bring together symbolic material generated from a uniquely woman’s experience.

1 The world of the body, of making and of creativity; of images, words and movement is a territory within which I inhabit and embody my research imperative. These pages comprise a sort of musing on the processes of practice-as research in performance and screen when "self" is the source of creative inspiration. In other words, this musing is a sort personification of the imaginal, hewn into word and image form, that might allow ego to know it too is merely a personification of personhood.

2 Maybe I thought there would a way in which the questions would find the air they needed and answers would arrive on the wing of a bird hovering on the current of the wind. New questions arrived, or should I say, both a new and an old part of me arrived. I am in a place that is both real and not real. Here surrounded by present, past and future. Here mythologies and histories, both mine and others’, collide and coalesce. In this place I become present and alive to ‘the profound and archetypal need for experiences of ecstasy and the transformative fullness of emotion and vision such experiences may produce’ (Brinton Perera
I walk, back to the wind, and see the sand being forced toward the sea forming tunnels just above the ground converging and colliding as they approach the sea edge. I am part of the wind tunnels hurtling toward the sea, too small to make much difference, too insignificant to fight against the mighty wind. Then I sit for a long time looking and listening, then looking and listening melt into seeing and hearing. Maybe this is what Sara Maitland was searching for in *On Silence*. In her documenting of a personal journey and treatise on silence Maitland suggests there are two kinds of searching for silence, one shores up the ego boundaries and the other is a non-boundaried encounter that invites the Other. She continues

I have come...to use the terms ‘permeable’ and ‘boundaried’ selves, or identities, to sum up the two positions [...]In the West, we tend to see ‘normal’, healthy people as firmly, thought not excessively, boundaried. Permeable selves...tend to be less rationalist and less atomised...a modern narrative will say that anyone who lets the (divine or delusional) Other too far in, who weakens their own boundaries, or has them weakened, is ‘mad’...[w]hile in a religious or spiritual narrative will tend to sense that those who will not consent to be used by the forces of the Other are the mad ones. (252-3)

Perhaps the search for silence, as described by Maitland, articulates the human desire for experiences beyond our ego selves. Brinton Perera (2001) would have it that our ‘symptoms can be read as symbolic expressions of our misaligned relations to archetypal structures’ (19). And if that is so then even the search for silence, or I might call it a futile search for expansion, speaks to a search for realignment to something not yet known. Is this my artistic imperative? Is this what I am doing here? This *not yet known-ness*, is what Jung would have called the archetypal structures.

In this deeper stratum we also find the *a priori*, inborn forms of ‘intuition’, namely the archetypes of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary *a priori* determinants of all psychic processes...The instincts and the archetypes together form the ‘collective unconscious’...Instinct is an essentially collective, i.e., universal and regularly occurring phenomenon which has nothing to do with individuality. (Vol.8, 133-4)

My walking could be her walking or your walking or their walking. It seems to be a search for expansion, for something beyond ego boundaries that I long to experience and the words and image perhaps just a vague and inconsequential attempt to hold the experience, like an alchemical vessel. Eventually this walking leads to thinking of a sort I did not previously have access to and I find all the questions are different and realising this, I deduce that the answers might also be different, if there were answers in this never ending scheme of altering questions.
When I begin the return journey with the wind against me, the sense of being inconsequential is still present. It is almost impossible to walk, there is no space in me for thinking, only the present moment kind of thinking that knows to put one foot in front of the other whilst keeping an eye on the horizon. But that kind of being in the present moment has its own kind of forwarding impulse.

5 Wait, look again. Who is this that has arrived? Brinton Perera suggests that ‘whenever there is a sense of a living spirit, ecstatic relationship to it may be expressed and contained in rituals’ (387). Perhaps this ritualistic kind of walking and sitting, contemplating, taking photographs that capture my moving experience, attempting to be present to the visceral experience of what I can know in the here and now, invokes that which I do not know, invokes the archetypal realm. Now, here in this moment, a woman arrives, she is my own woman but also the Woman from before and beyond. The one from before is also the one present and future. I made you in 1999, performed you for several years and yet here you are again. Realising she is present allows me to come to know that there is much still to be done. The words from the performance piece The Woman (1999) are much the same, ‘one foot stuck, head looking up wondering how long she has been standing, waiting’, but also radically different. That old haggard woman screaming her insanities and scraping the crap from beneath her nails still speaks to me from within and without. I don’t scream or dance
much anymore. Well, not like that. Now it is an internal dance, a dance with an inner and unknown landscape that captures my attention.

6  Pause, notice...Now the body is different - less able, less willing, less, just less. And there is something there that wasn’t there before, perhaps it is the green wellies and purple raincoat, perhaps it is the landscape. Anyway, she feels different to me. The processes of invocation are different now. No longer dancing in the studio,

now walking in this place where Neolithic tombs and artefacts litter the landscape. Can you see me?

7  When you sit and just look it is as though seeing is for the first time. The tiniest of moves don’t escape me now. I see sudden shifts in hue and intensity, I feel the alterations in my bones. Wait, what about recycling...there is a lot that is still unused. I don’t want to waste.
Another beginning...It seems such a long distance to travel, such a very long way. Or is it that I have been so far away from myself that travel in the landscape can only act as a personification for my own sense of distance from myself. It is as if I am constantly losing myself. I am reminded of Oliver Sachs (1985) and wonder if this is some version of his abnormalities. Am I somehow losing parts of myself like I might lose a favourite coat or a beloved scarf? It has not come to mistaking my wife for a handstand but who is here when the cereal can no longer be found in its usual place but has somehow taken up residence in the tumble dryer? Or who is it that drives for an hour and then finds herself somewhere unintended and yet it is I who sit in the driving seat? What would Damasio say about this? How is it that I have lost all connection to my ‘somatic markers’ in this moment? How could I allow this bodily inattention, this unminded body?

Another part of me seems to be saying that I need to keep tabs on myself – like scattering a leg here and an arm here, finding stomach lining in the branches of a tree and a liver buried in the back garden. Where will it end? Soon there will be no visceral sign of my self. Then what will happen? I can hear my daughter ‘mum, mum…mum, where are you? Mum…?’ And she has a point, it is such a good question…where am I when all these body parts begin to disappear, when the internal furniture is being replaced without ego permission?
It was the way of the 60s, we all gave our bodies away
for something that we hoped might be love.
The body’s resistance
in defense of integrity.
Dissociation
a sanctuary,
sometimes so vivid as if
the past were still present.
Mannequin dolls sell sex, for love
political resistance is little
as girls become mothers all too soon.
And the body remains
resistant of false authority.
Dissociation
a sanitarium,
sometimes so vivid as if
the present were still past.
(Bacon, 2007)

10 Yes, I am still elsewhere, present in the past, and lost in the present. This isn’t a place that can be explained or described. Not like the place I am now. This I can describe, and this place is a place where I seem to be able to find all my parts, this is a place where the creative is at my fingertips. It is as if all my internal furniture and all my bodily awareness comes flying back into me through some unconsciously manifest magnetic field that calls them forth. But only in this place…

11 That place is different... That place is a place where I am in constant motion, hardly sitting, hardly allowing my mind to rest in any one place for longer than a few moments. And when it is at fever pitch, as it was just the day before yesterday, it seems impossible to hold still even for a few seconds, impossible to allow my mind to settle anywhere. Like a hummingbird that keeps its wings constantly moving up and down so that it looks imperceptibly like stillness, like hovering in front of a flower in search of nectar. Not so…not me…no hovering imperceptibly for me…more like a rabbit in the headlights or Bambi waiting for the hunter to shoot. Stop…
Begin again in another place... Today I walked and as I walked I looked at the patterns in the rock, in the textures, the colours. Somehow it is possible for hours to pass and I am absorbed but if you were to ask me what I had done the stories I would tell you might sound foolish. I walked, I sat, I looked, saw, heard, felt, smelled, tasted. I was alive. There was no flapping of wings, staring at headlights or waiting for a hunter. Today there was only the woman that I am and the Woman.

If James Hillman is right, and I think he is, then it is not the job of ego to confront images of our inner world in order to train the personality or the job of the therapist to provide the discipline of a structure, method or process that allows the individual to journey into the unknown and bring up its riches and henceforth lead a more meaningful life. What that seems to do is to prevent the soul’s freedom to imagine and our imagination is one of the foundations that makes us human. It is the bedrock of art, science and culture.

There are many methods for exploring our inner world and I guess mine is creating images, sitting, contemplative walking and Authentic Movement; but the aim, therapeutically rather than artistically speaking, of these methods would appear to be “less the realization of the images…than it is the realization of the personality performing the exercise, i.e., the ego” (Hillman 39). Hillman believes that the ultimate therapeutic aim is to depotentiate the figures and a “strengthening of the feeling-ego” (38). He goes on to say that “we sin against the imagination whenever we ask an image for its meaning, requiring that images be translated into concepts” (39). But this sounds to me like an artistic aim too. So my job is not a program of work with the internal images where ego trawls for meaning but more an attitude of giving over to the images and cultivating them for their own sake. Like Gendlin’s ‘noticing’ (1978) that can give rise to something that we previously had no language to articulate. With this change in attitude we bring the imaginal perspective to all we see and so everything is transformed into images of significance and with that view we see ourselves differently and somehow we must overcome our own egocentricity. The ego will fight for wholes and unities and “will not want to admit that the imaginal realm and all its persons are actual presences and true powers” (Hillman 41). And so I guess I am trying to explore what happens when I bring this imaginal perspective into the world and try to ‘allow’ the images and cultivate them for their own sake. For me this is a process of therapeutic, artistic and spiritual significance. Here is a space and place where I can be present with the ebbs and flows, with the processes of my creative spirit, to a giving over to my embodied felt and imaged experience. Stop again...
15  *Another beginning*...Eventually I am running toward the sea, the sky opens out into the sea and my vision expands with each pace. Time, I hear ego saying, there isn’t enough of it…then something more arrives and the ‘problem’ of my life is expanded and scattered about the landscape as imagination takes hold…who is here?

![Image](image.jpg)

16  Seeing who is here is sometimes a more difficult thing to do that could possibly be imagined. If Hillman is right then the psychological territory is like an artistic process, it isn’t a meditation but a working relationship. So what am I doing on this contemplative walk, in this sitting practice, in these poetics and images? Perhaps a word I am searching for is *process*, an artistic process imaged in both inner and outer realities. It is not the product created but the process of creation that enlivens. ‘Queen Maeve’s portrait is the land and its features… as well as the seasonal and transformative processes of nature’ (Brinton Perera 195). Immerse myself in the imaginal and to do that I must allow imagination, welcome, accept and cultivate it but not necessarily *attempt* shape and form, simply *notice* and be *present*. The Woman that is Queen Maeve is present in the landscape, in the air, in my Woman. Perhaps the images and films I make are both a manifestation of my inner landscape and the landscape itself? Perhaps they are a personification of Queen Maeve or of personhood. Like Brinton Perera, I too want to ‘relate to the physical/spiritual geography and its processes (and)...perceive both sensately through experience and intuitively through visions’ (195) in order to support life in all its manifestations.

*Long held positions give way to vague, mindless lapses as sky blue begins to haze and meld.*

*Sea floating upward into sky*
opening outward in linear progression
as if the union of sea and sky suddenly
split open - expansion Earth.
(Bacon, 2008)

Works Cited


Annie Abrahams’s Experiments in Intimacy
By Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X], University of Hull, UK

Abstract:
This article explores the work of French-based pioneer of networked performance art, Annie Abrahams, in relation to notions of intimacy in mediated performance practice. Specifically, it explores two of Abrahams’s pieces Shared Still Life / Nature Morte Partagée (2010) and L’Un La Poupée de L’Autre (One the Puppet of the Other) (2007). The article suggests that, unlike a plethora of other technologised practices, Abrahams’s works resist the celebration of utopic notions of technologies of connectivity and interactivity. Instead their focus is on the broken links, the miscommunications, in short, the failures of both technological and human connectivity. The article argues that the acceptance of failure as an element that is embedded in the make-up of the networks is what renders Abrahams’s Internet embodied and visceral, “an Internet of emotions.” (Catlow Intimate Collaborations n/p). It further argues in favour of a “banality” that characterises Abrahams’s work –this banality is not the safe zone of intimacy that Johnson has identified, but a far more troubling manifestation of it (n/p). Finally, the article proposes that Abrahams belongs to a generation of female artists who, as Morse has suggested, seek to challenge their very artistic medium (16-33).

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. (…) Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human (...). (Butler 17)

Annie Abrahams: In fact, all my work emanates from one big question: how can we live in a world that we don’t understand? (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p)

Annie Abrahams
1 Annie Abrahams was born to a farming family in the Netherlands as the eldest of five daughters. As it was not socially acceptable for her to study arts at the time, she chose to become a scientist: Abrahams holds a PhD in biology, a science that sought to understand the world, and which her father could accept as a profession. Her love of Dostoyevsky, and her colleagues’ contempt of his literature in the aftermath of May ’68, directed her towards retraining in fine arts (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p). Abrahams has been based in France since 1985. Her artistic practice most often employs networking technologies: she produces networked performances, net.art pieces, collective writing projects, videos, as well as installations and performances in physical space. She started using technology in her work around 1991; her first telepresence piece took place in 1996 in a gallery in Holland. Her works have been exhibited and performed internationally at institutions such as the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, New Langton Arts in San Francisco, Centre Pompidou in France, Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki and many other venues (Abrahams, “Please Smile
On Your Neighbour In The Morning” n/p). This article discusses Abrahams’s networked performances following her first solo show in the UK, If Not You Not Me, which took place at the HTTP Gallery in North London in February and March 2010 (HTTP n/p).

**Shared Still Life/ Nature Morte Partagée**

2 In visiting Abrahams’s show at the HTTP Gallery last winter, I found it inspiring in its subtle, low-tech sensitivity of inter-connectedness. Amongst the new works created for this exhibition, *Shared Still Life/ Nature Morte Partagée*, appeared to be the central piece. This was a telematic installation that connected the HTTP Gallery in London with Kawenga-territoires numériques in Montpellier, France. The piece was extreme in its simplicity, almost stark nakedness: a table, a cloth, a plant, some fruit, a clock, a dictionary, and an LED display were more or less the objects that formed the still life composition. There was also paper, marker pens, crayons, and blu-tack, inviting visitors to contribute paintings, messages, marks, and written traces. Visitors could compose their own messages for the LED display, as well as interfere with the installation in any way imaginable since there were no instructions telling us what we could and could not do with the still life or, indeed, our own presence in front of the camera. Visitors unavoidably became actors in this piece: to reorder the objects on the table one had to stand in front of the camera contributing fragments of one’s body (a turned head, a hand, one’s back). As the still life was shared (people in London could see the still life in Montpellier and the other way round), new LED messages or re-orderings of the still life arrangements at one site provoked responses at the other.

3 Abrahams’s piece cannot be described as innovative: Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz created the first telematic “public communication sculpture”, Hole-In-Space, in 1980, using satellite technologies (Electronic Cafe n/p). *Hole-In-Space* linked the two coasts of the United States for the first time, bringing together people from New York City and Los Angeles in life-sized, televised images. Since the emergence of the Internet, telematic art and performance has become widely accessible and rehearsed, with iconic works such as Paul Sermon’s *Telematic Dreaming* (1992) and *Telematic Vision* (1993), and performances by the Chameleons (UK) and AlienNation Co. (USA), amongst many others (Sermon n/p, Dixon n/p, AlienNation Co. n/p). With skype and other internet telephony protocols linking us to dispersed family and friends, teleconferencing has become a commonplace feature of our everyday lives.

4 What is it then, I asked myself, that makes Abrahams’s piece –so simple, almost “basic”– poignantly relevant today? To me, it is the very stark simplicity and understated
nakedness of Abrahams’s work that makes it moving in its subtle, and often futile, attempt at interconnectivity. Abrahams’s *Still Life* is commonplace, messy and malleable; it is about the inconspicuous trivia of everyday life, time passing by, and people crossing paths in fractured, desperate or indifferent attempts to communicate. *Shared Still Life* is about the few achieved moments of intimacy—banal and humble though they might be—as much as it is about the many connections that fail. This everyday quality opens up Abrahams’s piece to movement, dust, miscommunication, shared absence—and network failure.

5 I spent more than an hour playing with *Shared Still Life* at the HTTP Gallery. It was no more or less interesting than real life. I observed. I interfered, changing things to my liking. I hoped for a message, a sign of life on the other side, some response. It didn’t come. I sent more messages. I ate some of the composition’s fruit. I made balls of paper and threw them at the beautifully arranged tablecloth. I added the peeled skin of my fruit in the mess. I smiled at the camera while consuming the last slice of the *Shared Still Life*’s mandarin. Nothing happened. Nobody told me not to touch (or, indeed, consume) the artwork. Nobody prompted me to interact with it either. Finally something happened. “Tu es là?” (“Are you there?”), I had written on the LED display. “Oui, oui, je suis ici” (“Yes, I am here”), came a message from the other side. Someone was there. Someone rearranged their own still life composition. Someone was trying to talk to me. Too late—I didn’t really want to respond any more; I didn’t want to have a dialogue with this someone.

6 I experienced *Shared Still Life* as a piece that is as much about intimate (one-on-one, though publicly exposed) communication and exchange, as it is about the lack thereof: physical absence, shared loneliness, the hope for a presence that never fully materialises (not the way you had hoped to, at least, not the way you expected). Someone’s fragmented presence, delayed, compromised, fleeting, crosses your path for a moment, in an attempt to link, to communicate, to exchange. Will it happen? The answer is subject to network functions and failures, randomness, and lu/ack. I appreciated the freedom that Abrahams gave me, the viewer/participant/actor, in her *Shared Still Life* composition: she allowed me to be there with others, but also on my own; she invited me to communicate, and to hide; she did not stop me from consuming the artwork, or messing it up to leave my own traces, banal and everyday—as banal as the piece itself; as banal as life, and relationships. This is a piece about connectivity that is as fully functional when connections fail, as it is when they succeed. There are no superimposed expectations, no stress to perform, no euphoric projections into a shared future. Just the simple, fragmented, unsatisfactory, fleeting exchange of everyday life.
**Intimacy**

7 I have exposed the intimate nature of my encounters with Abrahams’s works; but what does this entail? Generally understood as intertwined with feelings of closeness, trust, familiarity and affection, intimacy occurs through effective communication between people in some kind of relationship. Intimacy enables two sentient beings who feel comfortable enough with each other on an emotional and/or physical level, to reveal something about themselves and connect in some form of affective exchange. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the “intimate” as “Inmost, most inward, deep-seated; hence pertaining to or connected with the inmost nature or fundamental character of a thing; essential; intrinsic.” and “Pertaining to the inmost thoughts or feelings; proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one’s inmost self; closely personal.” The term “intimate”, the same dictionary instructs, is a euphemism of “sexual intercourse”; or it can be said “of a theatrical performance […] that aims at establishing familiar and friendly relations with the audience.” Although, as those definitions suggest, broad notions of intimacy are generally located “in the familiar spaces of friendship, love, sex, family, and feeling ‘at home’,” Lauren Berlant has introduced into the equation a set of intimate circumstances and encounters that can be connected to “estrangement, betrayal, loneliness, and even violence that may accompany the demise of relationships, both personal and political” (*Intimacy* n/p). I suggest that sensing intimacy –as either a positive (here, meaning ‘pleasant’) or painful experience– in performance relocates registers of affect from the public sphere to the private experience, and the reverse: the private is repositioned as public, thus being invested with political potentiality. This relocation triggers a number of questions around the nature and e/affect of contemporary performance practices.

8 I ask Abrahams how consciously she pursues the overarching idea of intimacy in her practice. At first, she declares that she has no interest in intimacy. In fact, she strongly expresses her discomfort about the very use of this term. This is because “intimacy indicates a situation where one deliberately relinquishes control –to some extent– in order to approach another person.” (Chatzichristodoulou, *Annie Abrahams* n/p). She considers this to be a dangerous situation during which anything can happen. This is why, she says, she avoids the use of the term intimacy in talking about her work. Her thinking revolves more around ideas of communication: about, on the one hand, the desire of being close with someone and, on the other, the necessity of restricting one’s openness, of retreating from intimacy (Chatzichristodoulou, *Annie Abrahams* n/p). As we continue to discuss, she starts to reconsider. “The more I think about it”, she says,
the more it seems that, indeed, I have been creating instances of intimacy in my work for a very long time […]. Maybe now I am beginning to consciously try to create the circumstances for intimate exchanges in my performances; maybe now I should say “yes, I am concerned with the idea of machine-mediated intimacy” […]. In doing so I sometimes violate conventional communication rules. I always look for situations that make any attempt at escaping from exposure impossible. (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p).

9 I first met Annie Abrahams in December 2007, in the context of a three-day festival and symposium that I initiated and co-created together with Rachel Zerihan, Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance (Goldsmiths, Laban, The Albany, Home London, online). The Intimacy event responded to an observation that Zerihan and I made at the time: we suggested that the last few years (2005 onwards) were seeing a proliferation of both visceral and digital performance practices –live and recorded, mediated and immediate– which sought to establish some form of intimacy between one and other (be it between two co-performers, a performer and an audience member, or between two audience members). Zerihan has since further discussed the dramatic increase in the numbers of One to One performances programmed in festivals such as the National Review of Live Arts (4), leading to the One-on-One Performance Festival at the Battersea Art Centre in South London in July 2010: the first international performance festival of its kind (BAC n/p). Back in 2007, Zerihan and I had suggested that “those proliferating practices of intimacy respond to the cultural climate of acute (in)security in contemporary environments of extreme closeness and heightened connectivity, where technologies of inter-subjectivity function as the settings for both beautiful and threatening encounters.” (Chatzichristodoulou and Zerihan, “Report on Intimacy Event”). I see Abrahams’s work as directly addressing those same issues that we identified as concerns shared by makers and audiences invested in exploring notions, experiences and practices of intimacy in performance –that is: issues around bodies of data and flesh; presence as aura and representation; desire as embodied condition and disembodied fantasy; the human and posthuman self; furthermore, intimacy as an experience that can be both public and political.

10 On first impression, the notion of intimacy and figurations of socio-political processes might not appear a close pairing. Julia Kristeva approaches “the intimate” etymologically in her book Intimate Revolt, by referring to the Latin root of the word: “intimus” from the superlative of interior, meaning “the most interior” (45). Kristeva articulates “the intimate” as an interiority that includes the unconscious, but warns that it should not be reduced to it, arguing that “the intimate […] is that which is most profound and most singular in the human
experience” (45). She goes on to claim that intimacy is “similar to the life of the mind, that is, the activity of the thinking ego [...] in opposition to social or political action” (45). Kristeva’s definition of “the intimate” as an interiority that is opposed to social or political action is one I grapple with. This is because my own interest in intimate performance encounters derives from an understanding of those practices that directly opposes Kristeva’s approach to intimacy as a state that cannot claim any degree of socio-political agency. In fact, I argue that “the intimate”, “that which is most profound and most singular in the human experience” becomes once performed –that is, once it is given a public status which launches it back into the “public orbit”– endowed with both political agency and social potency. Shared Still Life for example, is a piece that consists of unfulfilled desires for connectivity, fleeting exchanges and broken links –that is, a series of minute, private instances of mediated intimacy between one and other. Were those instances uniquely private, un-witnessed, and contained within one’s personal “bubble”, they might well have been the internalised state that Kristeva suggests (although one could refer to some of Allan Kaprow’s Happenings as uniquely private and un-witnessed instances that are, nonetheless, intensely and actively political). In Shared Still Life those instances are exactly that –shared. Moreover, they are not only shared between one and other, but they are constantly exposed to the public eye as they occur in public space. Furthermore, they don’t just “occur” in public space; they are, in fact, publicly staged. This is, I think, Abrahams’s main artistic pursuit: the public staging of mundane, private and intensely intimate encounters. But once those intimate details are “blown up” for all to witness and observe they become political acts, as they register questions of social and gender dynamics. As Berlant has argued: “The personal is the general. Publics presume intimacy.” (The Female Complaint vii).

The Poetics of Failure

11 Margaret Morse has discussed the poetics of interactivity, specifically within media or technologised work authored or created by women artists. She explains:

The theorist Jeanne Randolph has proposed that the primary ideological assumption about technology is that it should work. No wonder the term interactivity presupposes a fait accompli – that links in networks of connections have been successfully made. However, unintentional failures of interactive hardware and software and of the humans that design and employ them occur at every level of cybersociety [...]. The term interactivity thus refers to a state that occurs after or is incognizant of painful effort and myriad unsuccessful, broken, and invalid connections and attempts to interact that simply don’t work. (22).
I find Morse’s discussion of the poetics of interactivity as a poetics of failure, or a poetics of the unsuccessful, enticing. This is because failure is, indeed, so rarely acknowledged as an inherent element of networking technologies; an element native in the technologies’ make-up much in the same way that certain illnesses, or ageing (and following that death) are inscribed within the human DNA. Back in 1998 Jensen suggested that “expectations of ‘interactivity’ and new ‘interactive media’ have been pushed to the breaking point in terms of what will become technologically possible […] The concept seems loaded with positive connotations […]” (185). I suggest that, though expectations of cyber-utopias have clearly subsided in current times, digital technologies, interactive media and social networks are still loaded with romantic ideals of personal emancipation, empowerment, freedom and, success. Abrahams’s work, on the other hand, talks about failure: the failure of technological connectivity vis-à-vis the failure of human connectivity, fragmented intimacies, unfulfilled desires, glitches and mistunings. As Ruth Catlow points out: “Where social networking sites make us think of communication as clean and transparent, Abrahams creates an Internet of feelings – of agitation, collusion, ardour and apprehension.” (Catlow, *If Not You Not Me* n/p).

I want to argue that once failure (and all that comes with it, such as obsolescence and death) becomes accepted as embedded in networked processes and functions, networks are more likely to emerge as embodied and visceral phenomena. Failure as inscribed in the networks can ensure that utopic (or dystopic, depending on one’s viewpoint) cybernetic visions of downloadable consciousness and immortality are put to bed. In her essay “Embodied Utopias” Elizabeth Grosz questions the validity of the very term she uses as her title, that is: “embodied utopia” (131-150). She wonders whether this might be an oxymoron and argues that embodiment is “that which never had its place within utopias” (Grosz 131). It is not so much that utopian discourses have not dealt with the question of bodies, says Grosz, as the fact that utopias, due to their direction towards a goal and their neglect of process (and thus time) seek “a future that itself has no future, a future in which time will cease to be a relevant factor, and movement, change, and becoming remain impossible.” (143) For Grosz, a utopia is a place fixed in some never-existent moment, a place that is still, and frozen, like a still image. That place necessarily excludes embodiment: our bodies can only be in time as we live time (Lefebvre 95). I suggest that Abrahams’s work strongly foregrounds the body – and thus the time to be, the time to move, the time to cease– by its insistence on the minute detail of the everyday (including everyday bodily functions), and the lack of prescribed narratives about technological successes. Considering the visceral qualities of her practice it is no surprise that Abrahams declares herself as “allergic to utopias” (Chatzichristodoulou,
Annie Abrahams n/p). Her work is far from technophilic, idealised notions of technology, far from the impressive and spectacular; far from being lured by utopic visions of technology, Abrahams exposes us to the vulnerable beauty of the glitch, and she reminds us that yes, networks fail, as do bodies—human and/or posthuman.

13 Berlant has proposed that “intimacy involves an aspiration about something shared, a story about oneself and others” (Intimacy1). All Abrahams’s performances aspire to something shared, a story that is not of one (the teller) but of many (the participants, the performers, the observers, and the voyeurs). Her shared intimacies are particular and, I suggest, gendered, because they are (allowed to be) marked by frustration: the frustrations of mediated communication, broken relationships, disparate attempts to achieve a meaningful connection with the present-absent other, the body lost in digital space, physical and emotional distance, and unfulfilled desire—life, as it is, today, in the networks. This is why I see Abrahams’s work as poignantly relevant today, within the intensely technologised, media-saturated, hypernetworked environment that has become, for many of us Western subjects, a “natural” daily habitat. The opposite of spectacular, Abrahams’s performances promise no networked utopias, no euphoric futures, no smooth connections; muddled and uneventful, mundane and flexible, they are of and about the “banality” of intimacy, and of our everyday life. It is not, I think, accidental, that this type of work is produced by a female artist: Morse, while careful to avoid claims about generic unities or common aims in the work of women media artists, points us to “the uneasy situatedness of women in the worlds of art and technology that promotes a reflexive and ambivalent relation to media and incites production that self-consciously sets its own premises in question.” (23). She offers several examples of such works by artists Christine Tamblyn, Marjorie Franklin, Paul Tomkins, Lynn Hershman, Sarah Roberts, Sonya Rapoport, and Coco Fusco among others. I think that Annie Abrahams fits the bill as another female artist who sets out to question and challenge her own artistic medium. Abrahams’s relationship to the technology that she employs for her performances is, indeed, ambivalent—and she is not here to pretend otherwise.

L’Un La Poupée de L’Autre (One the Puppet of the Other)

14 Abrahams’s piece L’Un la Poupée de L’Autre (One the Puppet of the Other) (2007) consists of two igloo tents in public space (originally the piece took place in Centre Pompidou, Paris, France). The piece is a One-on-One performance, though the exchange does not take place between a performer and an audience member, but between Abrahams and her co-performer Nicolas Frespech. The audience take on the role of voyeurs of a very intimate,
occasionally painful exchange between a man and a woman that are together, and apart: the two tents function as two domes that shelter the artists and separate them from each other. Abrahams and Frespech are in close physical proximity, but each resides in his/her own universe (bubble). The pair can only attempt mediated forms of communication through the use of webcams, headphones, microphones, and computer screens. Abrahams and Frespech go on to plunge themselves into a game by which they become each other’s living puppet. As Cyril Thomas has suggested, in this performance the tents and the technological interfaces act as the skin that makes touch possible: “The dialogue as well as the images lead the spectator to the ontology of the gesture that exists before contact.” (n/p). Linked by the technology’s “third skin”, the artists are face to face via their webcams (Prince 13). Two solitary human beings, they appear to be floating each in his/her own world, so close but miles apart, preoccupied with opportunities for intimacy but never quite achieving the touch. The public follows the performance in physical proximity (rather than online); nevertheless, the performers are concealed from public view. All the public can see is the performers’ shadows from inside the lit tents in some kind of high-tech puppet show; and the projection of the two webcam images, side by side, on the wall behind the tents. “All that remains for the audience is a contingent and vulnerable human interaction expressed through request, action, request, action.” (Catlow, “Intimate Collaboration” n/p). A discomforting one-on-one networked encounter that is launched back into the public orbit by inviting audiences to witness the touch that occurs before or despite the lack of touch. The performance starts and the artists launch into a gentle interrogation of each other, which gradually becomes a gendered power-game between human and avatar, or master and slave:

00:26
Annie Abrahams: Nicolas? Nicolas
Frespech: Yes?
AA: Would you like to say hello?
NF: Hello.
NF: Annie?
AA: Yes?
NF: Describe yourself please.
AA: I am in my bubble [...].
15:46
AA: Close your eyes the way you want to.
AA: And tell us what you see.
NF: (silence)
AA: Do you want to tell us what you see?
NF: No.
AA: Would you open your eyes?
NF: Annie? Can you dance for me?
AA: Yes.

23:21

AA: Nicolas?
NF: Yes?
AA: Do you want to say “I love you” together with me?
NF: No.

(L’Un La Poupée de L’Autre)

15 In L’Un la Poupée de L’Autre Abrahams and Frespech become each other’s living avatar. Like in a virtual world such as Second Life or in a video game, each person can manipulate their avatar into speaking certain lines and undertaking certain actions. The difference here is that each artist is both the puppet and the puppeteer –both the person manipulating the avatar, and someone else’s puppet. Furthermore, in this performance the avatars are made of flesh and blood. Try as one might to make his/her avatar perform specific actions, the avatar is independent from the puppeteer’s control. As the performance develops, the master’s control slips. Though the piece –like Shared Still Life, and like all of Abrahams’s work– remains unspectacular (no big dramas, no revolutions, no insurrectory action on the part of the avatar), there is a gradual and subtle challenging of the puppeteer’s power. The avatar claims instances of independence, where his/her own will becomes the dominant one. Abrahams is yet again questioning her medium. Through this performance she puts mediated communication under the microscope –like the scientist that she is, she dissects it to examine its every aspect, its minute detail, the instances where the technological skin succeeds to connect, and the ones where it doesn’t. Both the protocols and the failures of mediated intimacy come to the forefront. Abrahams sees this performance as a gesture that aims to reveal the playfulness and perversity that can result from the sense of proximal distance in mediated intimacies (“L’Un La Poupée de L’Autre (One the Puppet of the Other) n/p).

The Banality of Intimacy

16 Dominic Johnson argues that “we have almost no language, other than banality, to describe intimacy.” (n/p) This is because:

Intimacy seems to be uncomfortably tied to risk. Generally, our assumptions about the anomalous condition of being intimate with another person are restricted to the safest mid-point of what might be called a continuum of intimacy. This continuum reaches from meagre moments of contact, to the most challenging situations in which a subject demands something from someone else. In common parlance to be “overly intimate” with another’s body implies abuse, and clearly positions the experience of intimacy in proximity to physical or emotional discomfort. (n/p).
Johnson further suggests that Live Art practices often confirm one thing: “The conventional understanding of intimacy has drawn its scope of representation too closely, naturalizing a banal, feel-good figuration that represses the discomforting diversity of intimate human relations.” (n/p). I do not disagree with Johnson’s suggestion that intimacy (both physical and emotional) is often considered, within the context of Western culture, as an “anomalous condition”. Nor do I wish to contest his argument that it is often, in everyday life and in art, restricted to a safe middle ground, which ensures that there is not too much giving, not too much touching, not too much exposure, not too much penetration of the boundaries between self and other – but also, not too little: just enough to allow for the intimate encounter to occur without challenging one’s boundaries, without disturbing too much one’s comfort zones. Nevertheless, what I propose here is that the banality of Abrahams’s intimate work is, in fact, the very element that makes it troubling and discomforting. Abrahams’s mundane, often domestic and always uneventful performances do constitute a safe zone where nothing spectacular or overtly troubling ever happens. Rather than becoming the safe middle-ground for feel-good figurations of intimacy though, they become evocative of our daily, commonplace frustrations. Abrahams stages our (fragmented) intimacies, complete with all their baggage: emotional unavailability, broken links, hitches, glitches, misunderstandings, failed attempts at communication, dysfunctional connectivity, aching bodies that are not yet obsolete, and the thorny question of sex post-menopause. (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p).

In a way, the comforting banality of Abrahams’s work functions as a springboard for emotional elasticity, where intimacies gradually transform from familiar and everyday to uncomfortable, troubling and discomforting. This setting of domestic “softness” is what allows Abrahams to really probe into the other; to demand, and proceed at staging an “unveiling” of one’s secrets in public. This becomes explicit in works such as A Meeting Is A Meeting Is A Meeting (2010): a telematic performance between Annie Abrahams and Antye Greie, which consisted of nine “domestic streaming sessions” of five minutes each (Abrahams “A Meeting Is A Meeting Is A Meeting” n/p). Each meeting focused on a different thematic strand, such as “preferences”, “patriotism” and “love”, while the overall theme of the piece was “misunderstandings”. The majority of the performances were being streamed from the performers’ domestic environments, and the performers appeared to be having an intimate discussion. Watching this piece, I felt like a voyeur of a mundane private exchange, such as a skype conference between friends or family members. This position, in itself, could be discomforting at times. Furthermore, it gradually became clear that the
performers were gently pushing each other towards a zone of emotional or intellectual discomfort. According to Abrahams:

In my last series with Antye Greie, A Meeting Is A Meeting Is A Meeting, we explicitly challenge one another. We push each other towards new terrains, and into unknown, unrehearsed actions. We did not aim to produce an intimate encounter for this work, but the fact that we enter unknown realms makes it intimate because we cannot control the image of ourselves that we broadcast to the public. For this performance we both accept a discomforting prerequisite: something that we don’t want others to know about us, something secret, will, no doubt, escape. The moment this condition of discomfort suddenly and unexpectedly occurs is maybe one of the most intimate moments one can share: when a secret escapes during a performance, the minute it reveals itself to us and to our observers, this secret cannot but be unstaged. It is a moment of nakedness within the performance. [...] In a certain way, the format of the performance itself stages our intimacy, before this becomes unpurposefully unstaged. (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p).

Desire

On occasions Abrahams’s work inhabits the edge between registers of intimacy and the realm of desire. Steven Shaviro has discussed desire, following Kant’s analysis in the Critique of Judgment, as that which “determines the will” (6). He explains that whereas Hegelian and Lacanian definitions of desire approach it as “lack”, in Kant desire “cannot be understood in terms of negativity and absence, for it is an active, autonomous power of the mind. [...] Desire produces the real.” (Shaviro 6, original emphasis). Furthermore, Grosz has discussed erotic desire as “an otherness in the subject, triggered by an other, something that overtakes one, induces one to abandon what one has planned, and even what one understands [...] The other erupts into the subject and interrupts all the subject’s aims and goals.” (“Animal Sex” 286-287). This is why, Grosz argues, desire is not simply about receiving recognition, communication or exchange; it is not simply about the “transmission of intimacy” (“Animal Sex” 294). More than that, desire “is a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations, intensifications, a becoming something other.” (Grosz, “Animal Sex” 294). I think those understandings of desire are relevant to the way Abrahams describes the nature, purpose and intensity of her exchange with the other performer –her co-player:

I try to find ways to penetrate the other performer –just for a second I want them to expose themselves to me (and to our observers) in an action, or a response, that is out of their control. I want them to unveil something they usually hide or only disclose in situations of complete trust, of complete intimacy. I want to know how they function, not by them telling me, but by me almost forcing them to reveal an instance of their “hidden code” in public. I want us to go beyond self-representation and the control that this requires. Am I really forcing them to do this?... No I am not. What happens is that the situation in itself –that is, the telematic performance interface, the protocols,
the flaws in the streaming connections– rewrites the conditions of communication in a way that makes this revelation possible, if not inevitable. (Chatzichristodoulou, Annie Abrahams n/p).

19 “Emotional open-source” –this is what constitutes both the appeal and the discomforting element in Abrahams’s work: the fact that every single one of her performances seeks to penetrate the other, just for a second, in order to unveil a tiny bit of one’s secret code in public. This exposure is not something that Abrahams orchestrates as a vice. She does not harbour a wish to purposefully provoke a painful unveiling, a “skinning” of one’s protection that exists below the “third skin” of technology. Instead, the affective power in Abrahams’s work is, I think, compounded by desire’s capacity to “shake up, rearrange, reorganize the body’s forms and sensations, to make the subject and body as such dissolve into something else.” (Grosz, “Animal Sex” 296). Here, desire demonstrates its active, transformative force in both the creation of one’s reality and the destruction of one’s reality as it was, before the performers erupted and dissolved into one another. I think that the most substantial skill that Abrahams demonstrates in the creation of her work is the fine balance that she achieves between the banality of the mundane intimacy, and the tension that keeps this uneventfulness constantly alert to the transformative intensities of desire. In Abrahams’s work desire is not fulfilled as an event, but present as a potentiality that is – oh so close to one’s fingertips.

21 Homosexuality and anal penetration, we can argue in conclusion, destabilises the sacrosanct position that has been occupied by macho masculinity. As such, homosexuality undoes “the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave […] in which the masculine ideal of proud subjectivity is buried” (Bersani 29). Homosexuality, and the inherent emergent masculinity, challenges not only the salience of gender in social stratification but more importantly the policing of desire and sexuality.¹

¹ A short part of this article has appeared in a different version as: Chatzichristodoulou, Maria. “If Not You Not Me: Annie Abrahams and Life in the Networks”. May 2010. Digimag. 54. 29 September 2010.
Works Cited


Johnson, Dominic. “Live Art and Body Modification”. Invited Lecture at the School of Arts and New Media, University of Hull. 17 May 2010.


Don.Juan.Who?/Don.Juan.Kdo?: From Cyberspace to Theatre Space
By Anna Furse, University of Goldsmiths, London, UK

Abstract:
This article traces the genealogy of the production Don Juan. Who?/Don Juan.Kdo? by Anna Furse. This was a co-production between my company Athletes of the Heart UK and Mladinsko Gledalisce, Ljubljana. The emergence of the production concept and its development by writing anonymously in cyberspace over eighteen months prior to live rehearsals is contextualised in consideration of the Don Juan archetype as he appears in historical and contemporary culture. The article is accompanied by a brief background to Don Juan in the culture in various media and the Production Programme.

"Don Juan. Who? set off with the most challenging of desires – to build bridges between artists across the cultural and linguistic divides, and to focus on one of the most provocative of our common myths – that of the priapic man himself – the expression of a force that permeates all our histories. And, courageously, to leave open what the final meaning might be, to enter into unknown territory. Literally. The group dived into the myriad possibilities of cyberspace, exploring the dangerous freedom of a medium where players could hide, and risk, create and re-create themselves – the modern equivalent of Don Juan’s Masque Balls."

Stephen Lowe

1 Like so many things we make, this project began with the smallest of ingredients – a word and a hunch. In 1997 I was in Vienna with a production I had directed for the city arts complex Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana. An adaptation of Peter Handke’s Kaspar (Speech Torture), created in an ex-Yugoslav country with the brutal Balkan conflict still rattling on in the east. Our project referred to the rape camps, ethnic cleansing, as well as the rapid modernisation and Americanisation of former communist countries such as was evident in Slovenia. In one of many conversations during the process with one of the actors, Zeljko Hrs, about men and war and sexual politics, I learnt the word inat that translates amongst other things as ‘pugnacious male stubborn pride’ – the stuff of warmongering, by which Zeljko would explain how his former country had fallen apart.

2 Our dialogues continued over the next year or more of this production’s life, mostly, being geographically separated, on email that was beginning to take root in our ordinary lives, in that strange location that we call cyberspace. What is cyberspace? It is imagined, it simulates, it is both there and not there, both dream and reality, a notional realm and a site of trading. Crucially it is a place of communication and transmission. For Donna Haraway, cyber space is the venue in which the cyborg might perform. The cyborg being ‘a hybrid of machine and organism’ that she claims we have all become since the late 20th century, with

1 (UK Playwright) Programme Notes to the production 2007
the advent of technology in our daily lives. Haraway in her "Manifesto for Cyborgs" also argues that the cyborg is a creature in a post-gendered world, for she can actually operate outside or beyond her purely physical, material reality. She is a condensed image of both "imagination and material reality" (Haraway 50). As I became a cyborgian habitué of cyberspace in the 1990’s I was struck by, and became increasingly curious about, the effect this virtual space might have on our sense of who we are as presences for each other, how ideas of gender might shift as we evolve with new technology, indeed about the impact on intimacy itself. I wanted to put cyberspace at the service of our work on sexuality and gender relationships.

3 The idea for Don Juan. Who? began took root. Zeljko and I agreed to making a new work on this still loose concept as we drank brandy next to a freezing Austrian ice rink on a break from production duties. Our project was initially called A Balkan Don Juan, since our original question was how Balkan masculinity had exerted itself through appalling acts of violence, machismo and brutal sexualisation of the enemy. But why Don Juan? He is not a warmonger, yet he kills without remorse. He is not a rapist, yet he seduces without love. He is never a territorialist, preferring to vanish from places he has inhabited without a trace, a man without possessions and perpetually on the run, a nomad. Why? Because Don Juan is a protean masculine figure, a noun and an adjective, describing what I would like to suggest as the “problem” of masculinity – the phallic-driven machismo that has not yet left our collective consciousness. So he could become a reference point, a mirror if you will, in to which we could all look and find ourselves in all our contradictions.

Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart,
’Tis woman’s whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
Men have all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone. (Lord Byron 71)

4 Don Juan the man is a legendary fictional libertine, whose story has been retold by authors of plays, poems, novels, operas, and films over five centuries. The name is used figuratively as a synonym for "womaniser" – generous with his appetites:

To be faithful to one woman
means neglecting the others.
My feelings are so
wide-ranging and extensive,
I’d have all the women share them.
But they, alas, can’t grasp this fine conception; my generous nature they call deception. (Mozart Act ii, scene i)

Many thousands of websites today will attest to the deeply rooted idea of a Don Juan as a virile seducer. As an existential anti-hero he represents Man for whom conventional morality and religious authority hold no sway, hence his irrepressible need to escape marriage and reproduction. Psychoanalytically he is the *puer aeternus* (eternal boy) who can never let intimacy mature into relationship and who has a compulsion to keep returning to the seduction game (repetition neurosis) where he can replay out his opening moves, always in control. He arguably survives most vigorously in contemporary popular culture as James Bond, a high-tech version of the swashbuckling hero – sexy, adventurous, invincible – and always on the move. Except that Bond saves us from evil, whereas Don Juan, classically, is punished for his sins.

I wanted to explore this complex, challenging and stubbornly enduring archetype in terms of the paradoxical intimacy of physical absence. In the virtual world we might find an environment for extending ourselves beyond any of the controlling mechanisms our better, cleaner, tidier, politically correct selves might bring to the topic. Cyber space can function as a confession box, a fantasy world where, because we are both untouchable and invisible we are free to roam in our unconscious, unbridled imaginings. And If Don Juan is protean, then so could we be in order to ‘get inside his head’. We too could come and go as we please, enjoy our online encounters without having to justify them or even own up to them. Crucial to the project, we could remain anonymous. And so we partied textually together, ludically, on-line, playing with our Don Juan without writing a play, performing ourselves and others, imagined and real, met and unmet, gender-bending and free-associating. If I wanted to speak of Men and masculinity today, then of course I would want men to speak of this as well as women. And we cannot speak of men without speaking of women, for we cannot speak of gender without speaking of how it is constructed, both out there and deep inside ourselves. Don Juan as an archetype suggests primarily a heterosexual paradigm. He expresses a sexual force between men and women, men’s phallic drive, and, importantly, the unlocking of women’s desires. This idea of Don Juan as the liberator of women is perfectly dramatised in the 1934 Korda film with Douglas Fairbanks’ *The Private Life of Don Juan*. Don Juan is rumoured to be coming to town. A cinematically brilliant sequence shows woman after woman coming out onto her balcony in a flurry of feminine gossip and giggle to share the good news with other women that He is coming, presumably to penetrate them all. There isn’t a shred of jealousy, though in another scene one woman desperately wants to outstrip
her rivals and, for him, be the best. Later, Don Juan has feigned his own death and turns up at
his own funeral to see the whole town, hundreds of women, processing in tears—those that
had known him, as lovers, and those who were grieving because they hadn’t. In this one
ironic scene we have the important idea of Don Juan as the man who really knows what
women really want, who unlocks women’s desires and permits her to feel in control of her
sexuality, unhooked from the pressures of marriage and fidelity.

Marina Warner warns that we might to take care with this kind of lure. She points out,
when discussing Valmont

a fantasy of control will always seduce the disenfranchised […] prostitutes solicit
business by boasting of their dominatrix methods. This is perhaps the final twist in the
seductions of Don Juan, that the victims are flattered into believing themselves in
charge. (Warner 105f.)

This sleight of hand in which the powerless believe themselves powerful is
provocative. Given the contemporary ‘post-feminist’ discourses into whether for example
pornography oppresses or liberates women, the debate in our field about feminist neo-
burlesque and the even more troubling images of female soldiers torturing prisoners in
Guantanamo Bay, we seem to be currently at a very muddled and confusing moment in
considering female power. Ideas of ‘woman’s erotic power’ and ‘the empowering features of
seduction’ mean little if they are uncoupled from discussion of the economics of social
relations. Further, promiscuous, non-reproductive sex, based on a pleasure principle is one
thing (for both sexes), for certainly (sexually transmitted diseases aside) consensual sex can
be fun-for-all so long as contraception and emotional detachment are also on the agenda. The
connection between sex and babies is quite another matter, implying the imperative of
remaining in, or at least returning to, the cave so as to participate in rearing the young.

With the story of Don Juan as an irresponsible seducer, follows the story of Don Juan
the quitter. For Don Juan – as our performance returned to again and again – “doesn’t stay for
breakfast”. In our text a woman performer says

I have to imagine each man is Don Juan somehow, loving and leaving me, jumping
from windows post-coitally, foregoing scrambled eggs and coffee, all that shit. I have
to imagine each man is Don Juan unless proved innocent.²

Later in our performance after a huge and violent physical fight (played as a fugue
simultaneously by 3 couples) a man apologises to a woman for not staying for breakfast, for
"letting eggs go to waste." She apologises to him for wanting babies. The scene ends with her

² Don Juan.Who? Production text (to be published, in Theatre in Pieces, Methuen, 2011)
telling the audience that "eggs are a metaphor"—for not staying for breakfast also means not marrying, not reproducing, in short not conforming to religiously controlled social tradition. Though in our piece, women are also ambivalent about whether they want this man to remain in their lives. Sometimes in charge and sometimes victim, or hurt, angry and abandoned, we acknowledged that even these roles could fluctuate in any one life.

10 The abandoned woman is an enduring theme in the Western tradition. Lipking suggests:

The majority of great heroines and prima donnas, in Western tradition, have been abandoned women. Even the word ‘heroine’ reflects that tradition. It derives from Ovid’s Heroides or Heroic Epistles, the classic book in which fifteen famous women, from Penelope to Sappho, write letters of passion and despair to the men who have left them. Again and again the pattern is repeated: the lover stamps his image on the woman’s heart and goes; she stays, pursues him with her thoughts, and gradually turns her sense of abandonment into a way of life. … It was only with the rise of the libertine, however, that the modern abandoned woman really came into her own. For the business of the libertines is precisely to make as many abandoned women as he can. (Lipking 37f.)

11 Don Juan is not only enjoying his conquests but is running away, from responsibility, monogamy and reproduction. In fact, he is constantly on the move: Renos Mandis proposes that this jumping is part of a kind of hyperactive syndrome, an inability to remain, to stay put: Don Juan is in perpetual motion. He cannot stop. If anything, masculinity is experienced as a "lack". It is something that you have to have which means that you don’t "have" it. And you can "have" it only by doing it, in the sense that to know that you have to it, you have to have an outward manifestation of it, and outside guarantee that you have to acquire again and again. In other words, it is only other people [who] can guarantee your masculinity. Or, you need this guarantee and feel you have to have it in order to survive.3

12 Of course, aside from anti-bourgeois promiscuity and contra-bourgeois mobility, our libertine Don Juan is above all anti religious, existential even. By ignoring social laws he is rejecting a Godly world order in which a dull, married, private life is governed by religious ethics. Kierkegaard in his 1843 interpretation of Mozart’s Don Giovanni in Either/Or, dialectically opposes ethics as boring and dull to the irresponsible bliss of aesthetics. This bliss is also phallic, compulsive and possibly even perverted from Nature, for, as Foucault says, "Don Juan is human character led against his own will by the obscure craziness of sex.” (39)

---

Jonathan Miller in his *Don Giovanni Book* identifies this sexual "craziness" as human arrogance. Don Juan (in Mozart’s opera) is about the dangers of overreaching. Miller, comparing Don Juan to Faust, says that he does in fact come to grief in Hell by failing to recognise that human powers are bounded. You cannot include all experience in one life, know all women. We can’t have everything, for, as the comedian Steve Wright has joked "where would we put it?!" Don Juan’s unquenchable sexual appetite, phallic and pleasure-driven, is also, I would argue, melancholic. This lack that Chesler is talking about, this compulsion to move to the next conquest, is also surely a quest for something that he can never quite find, or hold on to. "Don Juan is forever in search of perfection, in other words something that does not exist in the world" (14) says Von Horvath in the preface to his *Don Juan Comes Back From The War*:

> And time and again women want to prove to him, and also to himself, that it is possible for him to find in the world everything he is searching for. The misfortune of these women is that their horizons are worldly – Only when they suspect, to their horror, that he is not searching for life but yearning for death, do they recoil from him. (ibid.)

Don Juan as a depressive, with promiscuous sex as an anaesthetic against existential pain is a provocative, contemporary interpretation of the presence of Don Juan in our contemporary psyche. Though this harks back to the Romantic rebel character as a loner, a suicide, and a saint.

The impulse to rescue such a Man is many a woman’s motive for getting involved. In our piece, in a section we called "The Don Juan in Your Mind", one of the men says:

> "I am the Don Juan in your mind and I’m depressed…" (cf. *Don Juan. Who? Unpublished Production text.*)

The chorus of women run to him compassionately “ohhhhh” and he snaps them away with:

> "I’m sick of all the lies people tell. I wish I could make you all happy but nobody wants to know. They all want a cat and a casserole." (ibid.)

Women do run out of steam caring for a restless Don Juan, however charismatic he might be, however good a lover, and however they might hope he will eventually settle down and "choose them". For who is Don Juan when the aging process kicks in? In Jim Jarmusch’s film *Broken Flowers* (2005) a middle-aged, crumpled, Don Johnson protagonist, mooches on his suburban couch watching the Douglas Fairbanks movie. None of his old girlfriends wants to know. He is alone. Existentially. In our piece Don Juan declares he is leaving with (forced) bravado. He tries to swagger. He says he’s going to Hell. She begs him to go to Hell, saying

---

4 cf. Miller, p. xxi
she’s exhausted. We suddenly see a Man who cannot easily leave. Once she has let go of him, he vacillates. The whole company yells at him to go, to leave, to take the leap, till finally he reluctantly jumps off the ledge into a pile of pillows.

16 How did a geographically dispersed company, with all such ideas of Don Juan confront these themes from our own experiences, not all of which are purely heterosexual, to produce a text about gender, ironically in an environment that offered the possibility of being gender-less, many-gendered or simply many. If Don Juan the figure was a thematic tool, our research instrument was what I call our *cyber studio*. This was intended to mimic all the requisites of an ideal theatre base: studio, reflective space, and research archive. With a small grant from the British Council I was able to commission a Slovene designer to programme this which in fact was an assemblage of existing programmes using the *Linux* operating system. This included a cyber-performance programme created in New Zealand called *Upstage* ([http://www.upstage.org.nz](http://www.upstage.org.nz)). *Upstage* permitted privacy and anonymity. By adding to our site *wiki* and storage possibilities as well as a blog, we were able to write live together and store all our logs for everyone in the company to refer to whenever they wanted. People also wrote offline in the interim, anonymously if they wished. We could, in our studio, upload movies and share texts.

17 Each week for eighteen months, every Sunday evening, for two hours, the company of performers, translator, and occasional invited guests, such as an ex-professional dominatrix, would encounter each other in that virtual, imagined space, where real, visible words would flow. I would set a theme and writing structure and then sit back and enjoy the dissolution of my directorial guidance – for the most part – only occasionally stepping in and identifying myself to refocus the work, if it had gone astray.

18 There was a certain pleasure (that Helene Cixous has called "jouissance" – an untranslatable word combining joy and orgasm) in this collective, anonymous writing process. As words tumbled in front of our eyes, we learnt to hide in the screen, to nest, to flirt, to challenge, to argue, to flaunt, to cry and laugh "out loud", to cheat, to lie, and most vitally, to masquerade and mimic each other in an environment in which there was, by design, no gender stability. Most of us admit to metaphoric cross-dressing. Many have now forgotten our individual authorship, such was the writing-pleasure-trance that we plunged into, losing ourselves as *cyborgs* for a brief hour or two each week. We collaborated in building our text, its poetry and its rhythms by removing censors and allowing ourselves to be interrupted by the unpredictable timing of words becoming visible as dictated by our on-
screen tool. We learnt to play with interruption. We became, accidentally, a Chorus. Though virtual, the experience was undeniably embodied. As Zeljko wrote of this process:

The word is my body as I enter into the screen. The word signals my point of view, my emotional state, my view of the world. (Don Juan. Who? Unpublished production text.)

To return to Cixous, we were writing from our bodies in the sense that our grammar, our syntax was vomitic, impulsive, ebullient and uncensored. We wrote what came out. But vis Haraway, even our gendered bodies, in the moment of writing, might be said to have ceased to be corporeal. For as we wrote, we found ourselves in a heightened state, a period of intense concentration and cooperation, alone in our rooms across several countries and even continents at times, but connected, a condition where distinctions between our individual identities and the writing tool we were using became leaky. As Haraway says, the "boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us." (53) Binaries borne of the mind-body split, the difference between the artificial and the natural, the self-developing and the eternally designed, she argues, are all rendered ambiguous by our lively machines, our computers. If we were consciously using mimicry and masquerade in our writing together, we were also using dis-appearance. We were and we were not. Present and absent. He and She. Self and Character. Autobiography and Fiction. I could go on. We might have entered into the world of Jean Genet in which the hall of mirrors that is appearance and reality is both eternal and erotic. Here is what we, the collective voice wrote of the experience of being in the moment of live writing together:

as I touch the keys, I jump into darkness as I touch the keys, I feed myself a new form of lonely nearness When I touch the keys I am not I my flesh melts, evaporates and am only words when I touch the keys, I realise, that through them I can only express fragments of my thoughts and emotions to touch is to echo, the touch is a word and different from a word it tells stories, feelings, longings ... (From the 24th live writing session, 29/9/2006, unpublished.)

Zeljko wrote of the heightened state we found ourselves in:

Words flowed through the screen, sometimes frenetically, sometimes recklessly, sometimes just poised on the lookout, when only the cursor pulsed into nothing and announced the next torrent of words. The emotional charge one could feel from the rhythm of repeated words or the “silence”, that is, the absence of words was incredible. The stream of words was the collective result of our presence, without a guide to guide us. Everybody had to be prepared for constant adaptation and had to let their thoughts be forced into another direction, contrary to their original intention. This openness and readiness to subsume your ego for the collective together with the technology of writing itself (where words fall into a common stream with a slight time

5 cf. Genet
shift, forming unexpected meanings) produced a new alloy composed of ten points of view. For everybody involved it was a remarkable experience and a test. (Don Juan. Who? Unpublished production text)

19 Creating the raw material of our work from this deliberately non authorial strategy, these private cyborgian improvised performances on screen, was most definitely a particular, sui generis, contemporary version of collective creation an exercise in what Gestalt therapy might call "collective dreaming". But however utopian our virtual process, cyberspace was never to be used in any technophage commitment to deny live-ness when it came to making theatre for a live audience. Our protracted meditation as a company on our topic led to very old-fashioned, fleshy physical theatre, with dramaturgy and direction, hours of research and devising over many weeks of rehearsal. Where cultural policy no longer permits endless creative research, even in former Communist cultural agendas, long gestation was afforded by cyberspace and some useful functions we drew from it. This was a conscious decision on my part.

20 By the end of our luxuriously long immersion, singly and together, online and off, in our topic, we had co-written 500 pages to press into dramaturgical shape. We eventually began rehearsals in a unique way, holding in our hands a text we had voiced together. But it was a text without shape, character, scenes or narrative thread. I was jumping into the dark. For all I had was 13 weeks, 7 fabulous performers, a scenography I had already invented that included a red carpeted bare stage and 1000 feather pillows and a premiere date.

21 I began rehearsals with a Working Manifesto. You will note no mention of the virtual past we had shared. We were now a theatre company, creating a new work from scratch, but full of our research:

- Theatre is poetry
- Physical theatre is a state of mind
- The terms "dance" and "theatre" become meaningless distinctions when the performer is embodied, expressive and scenographic
- We will thus call our work "theatre" though to some it will seem more like dance or dance-theatre and we will not care for the definitions
- The actor is a creative artist
- Language is visceral
- Characters are formed on stage in front of the audience
- We have to manifest our differences
- We have to manifest our similarities
- The Chorus is a perfect strategy for ensemble ethics
- The Chorus of individuals struggling for consensus is a model of democracy
- We are always representing and showing that we are playing at pretending
- No theatrical illusion that isn’t at the same time prepared to reveal its mechanisms
- No décor, only scenography
• From the functional and the essential the poetry of the theatre is forged
• Resist the literal. Look instead for how our minds are really working
• Be prepared to sweat, jump, run, fall, cry, be naked
• Love irony
• Strategy: Seduce the audience letting them know all the while that you know and they know what’s going on
• Let the body reveal the subtext • Let the imagination run riot • Find the passion
• Enjoy the joke
• Play the game
• Learn the cha-cha (ibid.)

22 If we began with an idea for a work that would be about (Balkan) Men, what did we come to? Something else of course. Our performance was certainly more generic, more messy, intimate and personal. A piece made of pieces of all of us, of the self-conscious exploration of our experiences and fantasies of Don Juanisms. We asked: What is the mechanism of the Don Juan narratives? What’s He made of? What’s He jumping away from? What is Freedom? How do Women feel about Men today and vice versa? We wrestled with this from all sides, culturally, imaginatively, confessionally, psychoanalytically. "How can I have an authentic feeling in this culture?" one of us complained. If we are made of so many received and mediated ideas, are we also, maybe, making Love?

23 In the performance the Chorus might be a team of seven-authors-in-search-of-a-character. We return several times to what we call The Scene: a silver screen cliché of seduction and abandonment. Around this coil other emotions and conflicts within ourselves and with the opposite (sex). For our Don Juan actually doesn’t exist and nor does She. As He says in the end, He’s a construct, but a construct nonetheless that, despite any sexual-political changes n the last decades, manages to survive in millions of website-fantasies and, as we’ve discovered, lurking somewhere perhaps in all our minds.

24 I will end here with some of the company’s own words on the project, firstly Zeljko again:

The process of co-mingling in virtual space as we wrote together has, in a very special way, connected all the participants. The virtual space was a global reference space, the beginning of a dynamic dramatic process, the search for a word that might articulate your thoughts, the possibility of becoming someone else, to use masks and mimicry: the basic tools of acting used through the microcosm of the word. This collective experience has continued via different means in the search for a theatrical form in ‘real’ space, where physical action substitutes psychology as a foundation from which the word can spring. (ibid.)

Tanya Myers:

The Don Juan in my mind revealed herself/himself ripe in contradictions, challenging my "politically correct" self-held notions of sexual relations; desire versus
reason, control versus surrender, freedom versus responsibility. Don Juan: a demonic threat to status quo, an enemy to the possessed and the possessor, an irritant to people like myself seeking security in the known. As a woman, mother, wife, sister, friend how do I make this story of Don Juan my own? (26)

And finally Mare Mlacnik:

As Anna observes, opens, guides, builds, corrects, resonates, reflects on why, how, and what is happening between seven differently dressed/undressed subjects during their interaction with each other, the space, sound, music, and light, we are thankfully far from the established paradigm of twenty-first century theatre where it is assumed that "good text/good actors" are enough and where direction and experimentation are doomed. We continue to persist instead, as Nietzsche would say, “To have the courage to be unfit for one’s own time.” (25)

You can find a pdf version of the official programme for this production here: http://www.athletesoftheheart.org/images/DonJuanWho.pdf

Websites

http://www.upstage.org.nz
http://www.athletesoftheheart.org

DON JUAN LEGEND AND TEXTS

25 In the Don Juan legend, he seduced (or raped) a young noblewoman and killed her father. Later, he invites this man’s posthumous stone statue to dine with him. The statue/ghost father agrees, then appearing as the harbinger of Don Juan’s death. The statue offers to shake Don Juan’s hand, and thereupon drags him to Hell. There Don Juan meets The Devil who tells him that everyone in Hell is cast in a role, and presents him with a Jester’s suit, telling him that he would make an excellent fool. Don Juan, insulted, protests that he is unrivalled as a man who has made a thousand sexual conquests. Intrigued by this claim, The Devil tells him that if he can correctly name one conquest, he would not have to wear the suit. Thus begins a parade of women not one of whom Don Juan can name correctly. Finally, one woman stands before him in tears. Struck by her true love, he looks into her eyes, turns to The Devil and takes the suit.

26 The legend has spawned many versions over the centuries, too numerous to include all here. But to give some idea: most authorities agree that the first recorded tale of Don Juan is the play The Trickster of Seville and The Stone Guest by Tirso de Molina (publication date uncertain, 1615–1625). Molière’s comedy Dom Juan ou Le Festin de Pierre was written in
1665, and in 1736 Goldoni wrote *Don Giovanni Tenorio, Ossia Il Dissoluto*. Another famous eighteenth century version is of course Lorenzo da Ponte’s libretto for the Mozart opera *Don Giovanni* (1787). In the nineteenth century the Romantic poet Lord Byron’s famous epic version of *Don Juan* (1821) is considered his masterpiece, though it remained unfinished at his death. Other significant versions in that century include: Pushkin’s play *The Stone Guest* (1830) and Alexandre Dumas’s play *Don Juan de Mañana* (1831).

27 In 1861 another poet takes up the theme: Baudelaire in his *Don Juan Aux Enfers*. At the dawn of the twentieth century George Bernard Shaw’s play *Man and Superman* (1903) includes a substantial text ‘Don Juan in Hell’ in Act 3. In the same period we have Guillaume Apollinaire’s novel *Les Exploits d’un Jeune Don Juan* (1907) and in 1910 Gaston Leroux’s novel *Phantom of the Opera*, which includes an opera called *Don Juan Triumphant*.

28 The Second World War period re-examines the figure in relation to war – Ödön von Horváth’s *Don Juan Returns from the War* (1936) – and existentially – Albert Camus representing Don Juan as an archetypical absurd man in the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Interestingly in this same period two women approached the theme, though lesser known: Sylvia Townsend Warner’s novel *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) and Suzanne Lilar’s play *Le Burlador* (1946). Ingmar Bergman’s play *Don Juan* in 1955 was followed by his 1960 film *The Devil’s Eye*. Other cinematic versions of note include: the 1926 silent film *Don Juan* starring John Barrymore, *Adventures of Don Juan* starring Errol Flynn (1949), and in 1934 *The Private Life of Don Juan*, Douglas Fairbanks Senior’s last film, which we have quoted in this production. Other films include Jan Svankmajer’s animation version *Don Juan* in 1969 and Roger Vadim’s gender-reversal *If Don Juan Were a Woman* starring Brigitte Bardot (1973).

29 Contemporary film versions include *Don Juan De Marco* starring Johnny Depp in the title role with Marlon Brando (1995) and Jim Jarmusch’s *Broken Flowers* (2005) in which the middle-aged, crumpled, Don Johnson protagonist, mooches on his couch watching the Douglas Fairbanks movie. Finally in this non-exhaustive list, we might cite among others Peter Handke’s 2004 novel *Don Juan (As Told by Himself)*, Joni Mitchell’s song and album *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* (1977) and most recently in 2007: Douglas Carlton Abrams’s novel *The Lost Diary of Don Juan*. All of which suggest that as an archetype, whether as macho rogue/seducer/careless lover/immoralist/free spirit/existential hero/marriage breaker/sex addict or just the stuff of erotic imagination, Don Juan endures.
Works Cited


Mozart, Wolfgang A. *Don Giovanni*. (libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte).


List of Contributors

Playwright and performer Mojisola Adebayo shares previously unpublished extracts of her play, *Muhammad Ali and Me*, first produced at Oval House Theatre in 2008 by Mojisola Adebayo and the Ali Collective. The play extracts are introduced by scholar of Black British writing, Dr Deirdre Osborne, Senior Lecturer in Drama at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Jane Bacon is Reader and Divisional Leader in Performance Studies at The University of Northampton, Director of The Choreographic Lab and Joint Editor of *Choreographic Practices Journal*. Her research in ‘self as creative source’ for practice-led research in performance has taken her on a journey from improvised dance and screen work to auto-ethnography and now incorporates Jung’s "active imagination" and Gendlin's *Focusing* as well as mindfulness and notions of the spirit. She is also a Jungian analyst in training, an Authentic Movement practitioner and Focusing Trainer.

Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X] is a cultural practitioner (curator, performer, producer, writer). She is Director of Postgraduate Studies and Lecturer in Theatre & Performance at the School of Arts and New Media, University of Hull. Maria completed her PhD at Goldsmiths Digital Studios, University of London in 2010, on Cybertheatres. She is co-editor of the volume *Interfaces of Performance* (Ashgate, 2009) and of the forthcoming volume *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan). In 2007 Maria initiated, co-directed and produced the festival and symposium *Intimacy* in London (Goldsmiths, Laban, Home London) and online. In the past she worked as a community officer (The Albany) and taught at Goldsmiths, Birkbeck, Queen Mary (all University of London Colleges) and Richmond the International American University, as well as in Further Education. She also was the co-founder and co-director of the International Medi@terra Media Arts Festival as well as Fournos Centre of Digital Culture (Athens, Greece). A regular contributor to *Furtherfield* and *Digimag*, Maria also sits on the Board of the *Body, Space and Technology Journal* and is member of the Programming Committee of the Digital Resources in Humanities and the Arts (DRHA) conference, as well as the Thursday Club (Goldsmiths). She has lectured and published widely.
Anna Furse is an award-winning theatre director and published writer who has worked with feminist themes and approaches to devised and text-based works throughout her career, driven by her continuous research into issue of the body and physical training and approaches to performance making. Reader in Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London, she directs the MA in Performance Making and curates and chairs The Performance Research Forum alongside teaching undergraduate courses and supervising PhDs. Her company Athletes of the Heart produces new works for the stage and the Athletes of the Heart Laboratory company, comprising international graduates of her MA programme, perform and present researches into physical theatre (www.athletesoftheheart.org). Don Juan. Who? / Don Juan.Kdo will be published by Methuen in a new anthology Theatre in Pieces in 2011. A video of the production is available in the ArtsArchives catalogue (www.arts-archives.org).

Katharine E. Low is a practice-based PhD student in the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at the University of Manchester, supervised by James Thompson and Jenny Hughes. Through her research project, Our Place, Our Stage, she explored the role of applied theatre in sexual and reproductive health communication in the Nyanga township in South Africa, focusing on concepts of space, risk-taking and subtle resistance.