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Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

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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

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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*.

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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 multiculturalism, 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.

3 It is into this lively and complex arena, where gender, embodiment, ritual, action, participation, poetics and aesthetics, not to mention the performance of Self (cf. Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1990) – as well as deconstructed/reconstructed dramatic narrative – demand attention, that this edition of *Gender Forum* pitches in with its voices.

4 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.

5 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.

6 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 from 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.