

Body and/as contagiousness

CURATED BY PIA BREZAVŠČEK

In performing arts, beyond every representation, there has always been the body. Flesh and blood, blood and sperm, spit and sweat, scent and touch. The stage – similar to life itself – has never been sterile: we feed on its ephemeral imperfections, its each and every embodiment that becomes, through the shared event, our own bodily experience. We come to see performance art to be exposed, touched, infected. But what to do with the performing bodies during an epidemic? During the plaque or AIDS, the current coronavirus, or all the viruses still to come? What if (to paraphrase Spinoza) a body can suddenly do too much? We have to reconsider the body as a contingent organic agency of its own, a swirl of autonomous organisms we have no control over. What can we do with our bodies if we can no longer stay accountable for their every transmission? Who stays safe and who takes the risk? Who is to decide that? Is shutting down all good life to preserve bare organic life a distant echo of cartesian dualism? What do we do with the disobedient social choreographies that claim back the more and more dangerous bodies? How can we control the bodies but do not imprison the minds? Performance art has always been a risky, highly contagious business: contagious ideas, contagious sensations, contagious enthusiasm, contagious laughter. But when we are done with metaphors and face the body's real contagiousness, what do we do with performance art? Because, in performing arts, beyond every representation, there has always been the body.

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JASMINA ZALOŽNIK

In Defence of Kinesthetic Contagion or Power Games Behind the Conceptualization of Contagion

In this lecture, I will draw parallels between the notion of the contagion of diseases and the potential effect of movement as contagion, while juxtaposing some of the selected theoretical approaches that are analysing the term contagion as a threat on one hand and as a potential weapon in the processes of the sensibilization of humanity, emphasizing empathy as a tool and medium for social politicisation on the other. What does it mean to see the contagioned body as infectious toward other bodies? What is the impact of medical-epidemiological concept of virus(es) on the imaginative/metaphorical concept of sovereignty and how the metaphoric notions could be used as its counterpart? What models of governance and technologies of power were inspired and implemented on the bases of the reconstruction of infections? What are the consequences of these modalities today? How contagious are art practices today (and for whom)? What counterpart is and could be created by art, especially in the field of choreography and dance? Or how could contagions be used as a potential weapon for resistance?

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BLAŽ LUKAN

Transgression: Theatre in Times of Pandemic

In an epidemic context the intrusion of a foreign object in a performative body is unplanned; only prevention can be planned. These foreign objects – masks, plastic shields, disinfectants and increasingly vaccines, etc. – can firstly be considered the necessary functional and preventive (medical) means of protection against infection, secondly as the pacifying (political) means against the body's pathological and ideological resistance, taken out of exploitative relations, and lastly as (symbolic) props which, in addition to the function and means of coercion, represent a place of pleasure as the surplus value of a performative exchange.

Looked at from a broader perspective, the conditions of theatre and performative practices permitted during the pandemic are restrictive. The artist can negate them, surrender to them or identify a new possibility of performance and pleasure in them or an unexpected investment in a specific libidinal economy. The same goes for the spectator. This can be illustrated with two experiences of (illegal) performance attendance during the epidemic (one a dance performance, the other a narrative performance), which brought some completely new factors to the table: performing and spectating as a breach of law, i.e. in compliance with the ban on organising such events, and the only partial compliance with preventive measures (spectating with a face mask on but with a loose observance of social distancing rules among the audience). This gives rise to a completely new definition of legality, i.e. a collective submission to law: when it comes to an aesthetic experience, even in times of restrictions (or perhaps because of them), a commandment of a higher order than the one imposed by anti-Covid measures is at work, namely – shall we say – the law of subjectivisation.

BLAŽ LUKAN received his PhD from the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana in 2006. In addition to working as a dramaturg in theatre and film, he writes theatre reviews, accompanying texts in published plays by Slovenian and foreign authors as well as scientific papers in the field of drama and the theory of performing arts. He was the artistic director of the Glej Experimental Theatre (1985–1988) and Celje People's Theatre (1989–1993). From 2008 to 2012 he was the president of the Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia. He is the author of numerous books, among them *Gledališki pojmovnik za mlade [Theatre Glossary for Young People]* (1996), *Slovenska dramaturgija: dramaturgija kot gledališka praksa [Slovenian Dramaturgy: Dramaturgy as Theatre Practice]* (2001), *Performativne pisave: razprave o performansu in gledališču [Performative Gestures: Essays on Performance Art and Theatre]* (2013), *Turški lok [Turkish Bow: Essays on Slovenian Drama]* (2019).

JERNEJ MARKELJ

Infected/affected: Theorising affective contagion

“Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire”, writes Anna Gibbs, “affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion”.¹ To be able to make a claim like this, and theorise the contagion of affect, philosophy needs to stand on its head. Instead of prioritizing consciousness and its faculties, the privileged starting point for the history of Western philosophy, one has to start with the body. “We stand amazed before consciousness”, claims French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, forging the link between his admired predecessors Spinoza and Nietzsche, “but the truly surprising thing is rather the body”.² For Deleuze, the body is a living and thinking thing, a mysterious entity that ceaselessly communicates with other bodies and is in possession of powers that surpass our conscious awareness. Building on Deleuze’s materialist philosophical lineage, our seminar will seek to excavate different accounts of virality of affect. By focusing on the affective flows that are involuntarily transmitted between encountering bodies, thus breaking down their boundaries and compromising their supposed unity, our analysis will examine a variety of contagious affects ranging from compassion to paranoia. In addition to theorising their contagious nature, these affective states will be considered from the perspective of Deleuzian ethics and politics.

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1 Anna Gibbs, ‘Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect’, on *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 24 (2001), <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org>> [accessed 18 Dec 2020]

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 18.