

Editorial

Performances of sexuality and gender impact upon how theatre is created, received and historicised. Similarly, sensuality can take a multiplicity of forms in performance, including the audience's physical experience of a performance piece. This latest issue of *Platform* was, in part, inspired by the Theatre and Performance Research Association conference hosted by the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, in September 2014, where sexuality and gender were recurring topics in a variety of papers. Furthermore, publications on theatre, performance and sexuality, including Jill Dolan's *Theatre & Sexuality* and *RiDE* journal's gender and sexuality issues published in 2013, demonstrate the continuing engagement of theatre scholarship with gender and sexuality and encourages us to reconsider 'sexuality' and 'sensuality' in the performing arts.

As we had observed that theories of sexuality and sensuality have been frequently engaged with both at conferences and in publications of late, we were interested in investigating how the two may interact, overlap, or become at odds with each other in this themed issue. It seems that implicit to a sexual identity is an aspect of sensuality, whether it be directed towards one sex, multiple sexes, or none at all. However, there is sometimes a reluctance to discuss the sensual aspect of sexuality, which this issue seeks to engage with.

In working on this issue, a confrontation between these terms was observed in criticisms of National Theatre performances by *Daily Mail* critic, Quentin Letts. Letts was appalled, to say the least, by well-respected physical theatre company DV8's newest work, *JOHN* (2014), which examines the life of a British drug addict, John, and culminates in his living in a gay sauna. Subtly titled 'A National DISGRACE: Sleazy. Amoral. And paid for by

you?' (capitals original), Letts is flabbergasted that midway through the performance 'we switch to a gay sauna full of men showing us their whatnots, in at least one case semi-erect.' (He must have had very close seats). Continuing, Letts observes that: 'All the men shown—bar one who has a bit of a pot belly—are good-looking, slender, athletic,' adding this bit of hard-hitting journalistic insight: 'I bet that ain't the way things really are in gay saunas.' Letts is both offended by these nude bodies on stage, and outraged that, as part of a National Theatre production, they were funded by taxpayers!

Compare this to Letts's review of *King Lear*, also at the National Theatre in 2014. Though not as scathing, Letts was also unimpressed with this production, which included a lengthy nude scene by the character Edgar. However, Letts's includes Tom Brooke's portrayal of Edgar in things to be admired about this production, even stating 'that irritating line 'poor Tom's a cold' is given fresh life because poor Tom is at that point starkers.' It seems that in this case, frontal male nudity funded by the taxpayer is not only acceptable but also triumphant. So what is the difference? Why does Letts take issue with one case and not the other? Is it the bodies' sexualities? Were the bodies of *JOHN* seen as gay bodies and that of Edgar seen as non-queer? Or was it sensuality which differentiated them: some appearing in a bathhouse locker room and the other in a comical scene? Or does Letts take issue with the linking of both sexuality and sensuality? In *JOHN* he is sure that among the gay bodies on stage there was at the very least one 'whatnot' in a state of arousal, whereas there is no mention of any implicit sensuality in Edgar's naked body. The boundaries become blurred: can we separate the two at all?

The sexuality/sensuality overlap plays out as well in the contributions to this issue. Our first article is Judita Vivas's 'Dramaturgies of the Naked Skin: *Homo Nudus* plays Sexuality.' Vivas engages with the costume theory of Aoife Monks and histories

of onstage nudity to introduce her new term *homo nudus*, meaning the aesthetic construct and scenography of the nude body in performance. Vivas investigates cases of naked bodies and partially naked bodies in contemporary dance theatre in order to exemplify ways in which *homo nudus* becomes a tool for guiding the spectator through a performance: a dramaturgy of naked skin.

In an effort to queer the traditional journal form, we present two dialogic contributions between *Platform* members and practitioners. In “How We Read Bodies,” Catherine Love interviews award-winning writer, director and performer Chris Goode. In a lively and insightful discussion Goode dissects how he stages nakedness in his work, such as *The Forest and the Field*. Focusing on the ‘idea of nakedness as an act rather than a state of being’, Goode discusses the dynamic that a performer creates through the act of nakedness and how this can impact on an audience’s relationship to nakedness on stage. This interview rounds out the issue’s varied approach to sexuality and sensuality in relationship to how theatre is made and performances are mediated.

In a photo essay/interview which evidences his work *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*, Daniel Ploeger responds to questions by Will Shüler, to chart how his performance art/sex app is a cheeky reaction to the fetishisation of performance artists’ bodies on internet platforms. In “Getting a Rise out of *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*” Ploeger explains how he sought to play with how his body is consumed by spectators and where this kind of work can be advertised. In doing so, he blurs the lines between art and pornography, or perhaps even erases it. In an age where more and more aspects of life have become mediated by our cell phones, this contribution certainly gives new meaning to ‘swipe right.’

Lastly, Sarah Mullan’s contribution ‘Bread and Circuses: the Politics of Claiming Identity in *Puffball*,’ considers how Mark Storer’s production of *Puffball* (2014) at the Roundhouse, London

was marketed using the cast's various LGBTQ identities. Mullan argues that despite this, the production rendered these sexualities and identities as invisible, allowing for a 'universal experience'. It is worth noting that Mullan's article was originally given as a paper at TaPRA's 2014 conference at Royal Holloway, an event which acted as a nexus for this issue's original call for papers.

We would like to thank Royal Holloway, University of London, where this journal is based, and its staff for their continued advice and invaluable support of *Platform*. Developing, reviewing, writing for, and publishing a print journal is an important method of learning for postgraduates and early career researchers, the funding of which demonstrates Royal Holloway's commitment to providing opportunities for new research and the development of research skills. We would also like to thank the peer and academic reviewers for their time and thoughtful feedback. Their support has provided assistance to the research of all who have submitted to this issue. We would also like to thank Bloomsbury Methuen Drama and Performance Research Books for book review copies. Finally, we give special thanks to the authors of the articles and book reviews of 'Sexuality and Sensuality.' Their hard work speaks for itself.

Will Shüler and James Rowson, Editors

Works Cited

Letts, Quentin. "A modern *Lear* with just a hint of Uncle Albert!" Rev. of *King Lear*, by William Shakespeare, dir. Sam Mendes. National Theatre, London. *The Daily Mail*. 24 Jan. 2014.

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