

Preface

Bodies of Difference

By Karen Vedel, Jeuno JE Kim, Storm Møller Madsen, Nina Cramer

Over the past 10 – 15 years, the performing arts scene and context in Denmark has become a platform for the examination of normative constructions of gender, sexuality, functionality, and racialisation. In concurrence with this development, the need for a critical examination of individual artistic works, as well as artistic strategies and concepts with which to discuss and analyse these developments, has become increasingly urgent and relevant. The aim of *Bodies of Difference / Kropp i forskellighed* is to highlight some of the ethical, political as well as method-related questions relevant to the aesthetic practices and theories that place the body at the centre of an investigation into performative constructions of identity. How, for instance, is it possible to challenge and disturb the embedded normativities of the body in terms of binary gender constructions so that the performing arts will open up to a wider range of difference? How are performative strategies and approaches in the performing arts being challenged as a predominantly white space? And can it be assumed that an increased representation of marginalised bodies/voices in the performing arts (whether or not these are actually on the stage) is indicative of a more inclusive political space? The importance of the theme for the readers of *Peripeti – tidsskrift for dramaturgiske studier* should be evident since identity constructions constitute a key aspect in the discipline of dramaturgy, theatre and performance studies. The theme, however, is also inscribed in a much larger, interdisciplinary field from gender, queer and performance studies, as well as crip theory, to de- and postcolonial studies, which has brought new and important perspectives to the wider discipline of arts and cultural studies. The insistence of queer and crip theory to critique normative and static identity categories has opened up the entire field towards the consideration of performative strategies for the negotiation of gender identities as well as subject positions in relation to bodies that are constituted as different to normalised bodies and the privileges attached to these. The emergence of a debate on transnational adoption and the recent critique of what constitutes “Danish national identity” as unaffected by colonial history have, moreover, pointed to racialization as an important perspective that – in addition to relations of difference in terms of power and the unequal distribution of privileges – highlights the explicit as well as implicit attributions of otherness. During the editorial work on the volume at hand, these very topics were investigated and challenged under intense media interest in connection with the monument *I Am Queen Mary* and the theatre performance *Black Madonna*.

Lastly, the topicality of the theme is motivated in the need for a heightened attention to the increasing use and misuse of performative strategies in the political arena, especially in the right wing where they often enter into a dangerous synergy with an us versus them thinking that marginalizes and stigmatizes minorities defined as such on the basis of corporeal identity markers. Thus within today’s political and social climate, it is of specific relevance to explore a specific strain within the Danish performing arts scene that has been able to provide and operate as a platform to investigate intersectional criteria that label and control our bodies of difference. In addition to opening up the wider discipline of performing arts to contemporary and historical tendencies and artistic strategies, this theme issue aims to shed light on some of the attempts and actors that have been active in resisting and questioning the dominant paradigm.

The thematic focus on corporeality – here understood as the material body and its historical

function as carrier of identity markers – illustrates a historical shift of the body from a medical to an aesthetic and political space (see, e.g., Tang Kristensen, Vadim). Here the construction of difference becomes inscribed in an epistemological and cross-aesthetic tension (see, e.g., Gullach), where the performing arts have a privileged position. Not only does it require the corporeal presence of the performers (see, e.g., Flyvbjerg), the stage also holds a unique potential as a heterotopic, democratic space (see, e.g., Vitting-Seerup), in which the constitutive gaze on the body may be challenged, subject positions negotiated and inherent normativities of the body questioned. Thus, in this issue, a number of the bodily givens that have been challenged in the theatre over the past couple of years will be discussed. As we have seen, the body is no longer unambiguous or univocal, rather it is negotiated and disturbed through artistic mediations as well as digital technologies (see, e.g., Hasse Jørgensen and Cramer). Thus, the focus is increasingly on a corporeality that is in a continuous process of becoming through performative actions (see, e.g., Møller Madsen).

The editors' intention with the issue is to address – and elevate – the debate on the role of identity politics in relation to performing arts in Denmark. Through the selected contributions, we wish to render a proposal for the role of the performing arts in widening the perspective, not least in terms of its theoretical and critical relevance in the interplay with identity politics (understood as a discursive particularization of corporeal positions/experiences) (e.g., Myong and Danbolt). In this sense it has also been a key concern to include both a historical (Tang Kristensen, Vadim), a contemporary Danish (Wandahl, Schultz, Rex), and an international perspective (Adebayo, Qureshi, Løvholm). In relation to the development of a theoretical terminology in a Danish context, the issue contributes with a range of new concepts, translations and/or neologisms such as *kompulsiv kropskapabilitet*, *korporealitet*, *epistemisk ignorance*, *racialiseret kredibilitetsøkonomi* and *erfaringsappropriation*.

As already suggested, we consider the theorization as closely interconnected with practices in the artistic field and their critical reflection. This interconnection is reflected in the contents of the thematic issue, which – in addition to articles, essays and reviews – contains artistic contributions in the shape of edited excerpts of existing works (Langvad, Larsson) and an integrated visual and text work reconfigured for publication in this issue (Qureshi). The artistic contributions have been invited and edited with the idea that they should stand as artworks in their own right, without requiring explanatory texts that mediate how the contributions can be read. Based in a thinking of texts as bodies, however, placing artistic contributions next to the academic raises the question of how the artistic contributions can reside as a different body-of-text in the format of the journal that dictates a certain reading pattern and comes with its readership. These questions led to a consideration about how texts perform as well as the different approaches each of the artists has to their medium and form, and how each of their contributions sheds light on the issue of performativity and the performing textual body. A shared characteristic of the artists behind the artistic contributions is some form of displacement, whether self-imposed or otherwise, whereby the geo-political location of being a certain body from a certain place has been relocated so that where they are from may not necessarily coincide with where they are based.

In acknowledgment of the complexity of the contents and the implied difficulties with dividing the contributions into neat sub-sections, we have chosen to assemble articles, essays, artistic contributions and reviews in a sequence that aims for a 'flow' in the reading. The broader contextual and thematic framework for the contributions ranges from those that, in and of themselves, have an investigative focus or are discussions of such works, to text-bodies that reflect upon specific artistic strategies found in performance-based works. The result, we hope, is a sequence of thematic displacements in which the different voices (of the authors of articles, essays, and reviews, and the

contributors of artistic works) engage in conversation. As a further help in navigating the contents, we encourage the readers to consult the abstracts provided in the back of the journal.

All contributors have had the choice between writing in Danish or in English. The result is equally divided when it comes to articles and essays, whereas all text in the artistic contributions is in English. It is a shared trait for the contributions – whether they have been submitted by artists or academics whose investigative work contributes to epistemological developments, or they provide a more analytical gaze on artistic works and the theoretical framework within which they may be elaborated – that their authors are conscious of the situated position from which they write. This is also the case for the editorial board, which consists of artist Jeuno JE Kim and art historian Nina Cramer; performance theorist and part-time lecturer Storm Møller Madsen, associate professors Karen Vedel and Laura Schultz, all three of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Copenhagen, as well as part-time lecturer at the same department, Mette Tranholm, who is also a dramaturg and PhD with a dissertation on performance artist, film maker, and drag performer Jack Smith in a queer theoretical and new materialist perspective.

The interdisciplinary perspectives have made thinking about and discussing the underlying ideas as well as the individual contributions a very fruitful process. We are grateful for the important work provided by the artists and the authors, as well as for the thorough peer reviews, which made us wiser. We are pleased to present the results and hope that the journal will be well received.