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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Vanessa Marie Passini entitled *UNSEX ME
HERE...: THE BODY AND GENDER IN NUDE PERFORMANCE* has been approved
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UNSEX ME HERE...: THE BODY AND GENDER IN NUDE PERFORMANCE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

UNSEX ME HERE...: THE BODY AND GENDER IN NUDE PERFORMANCE

By Vanessa Passini, BM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Major Director: Dr. Aaron D. Anderson
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Unsex Me Here... is an examination of our bodies, what they mean in terms of gender and power, and why they mean what they do. Plucked from Lady Macbeth's infamous soliloquy, the title suggests the stripping away of something essential that transforms. Sex is not the right word, but gender is. Often, these two are mistaken and interchanged. Myths that support our social structure exist at the intersection of sex and gender. In this production, I collaborated with Pete Guither of the Living Canvas to challenge notions of gender in different textual mediums (via the written text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the text of the body itself) ultimately moving towards a space in which greater body understanding and acceptance exists. Our goal was a theatrical event

that was both artistically beautiful and transformational not only for the artists involved in the process of making the piece but the audience as well.



Plate 1
“Unsex me here...”

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

A woman stands onstage, wearing a simple black dress. She is sparsely lit from behind. Light cascades over her collarbone and forms a halo around her thick red hair. The theatre is filled with the sound of breathing. She speaks, “Come, you spirits / that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here” (*Macbeth* I, v, 41-42). Suddenly, another set of hands emerge from the darkness as she removes her clothing. She stands naked before the audience.

In the summer of 2008, I worked with photographer Pete Guither, and his project The Living Canvas, on a performance piece entitled *Unsex Me Here...*, a retelling of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* examining gender roles both in the text of the play and the bodies that performed it. The cast of five actors were completely nude (except for the brief use of the previously mentioned black dress). Guither’s live performance aesthetic is born from his work with light and shadow and projected textures is his photography. Clothed only in light, the actors confronted the audience’s preconceived notion of the human form.

My concern is with the body’s performance of text. This text can be something as concrete as Shakespeare or as abstract as gender. In the movement classroom, I see students wrestling with how their body speaks for them. The aspects of their physical persona which Yi-Fu Tuan in the essay “Space and Context” attributes to a “[fall] from innocence into culture” were revealed—the tall guy trying not to take up too much space,

the woman who is embarrassed by her chest, the gay man who plays the dumb blonde to get what he wants, etc. For many students, their performances are “unconscious acts,” but not all (Tuan 157). I am fascinated by how we perform different roles both unconsciously and consciously in our everyday lives.

Without words as a communication crutch, actors consequently are forced to rely on their bodies as objects with inherent meaning. Not only do race, gender, and sexual identity mark the students’ bodies, but their developmental experiences relative to their peers scar their bodies.

While a scar is a permanent mark, it fades. Marks of identity manifest themselves in habituated movement and can also fade. Movement patterns can be re-learned. For example, once the effeminate male student comes to recognize his behavior as a performance, he can perform develop a psycho-physical connection to ultra-masculine behavior for the purposes of the stage.

Jacques Lecoq believed that “In order to really know someone you have to be able to see the face behind the face” (Lecoq 106). This is the basis for the idea of mask/counter mask, and the two masks are hard to separate. The performance of ourselves can become so real that we become estranged from what is underneath. Clothing is a part of this performance. It is a mask, and it is a special occasion when we appear in front of another person without it. Underneath it all it the one thing we all have in common. Much of Lecoq’s implies in an essential humanity. If there is something essentially human, then it is inextricably linked to the body.

We all have a body. We all are a body. But what is the reality of that body? As a director and choreographer, I understand that bodies have complex meanings and how to manipulate this text. Carving shape in space with bodies creates an atmosphere imbued with messages of power. Social scientist Albert Mehrabian found that over half of communication happens via body language and explores this concept fully in his book, *Nonverbal Communication*. Body language is just that—a language. On stage and in life, bodies have different meanings because of their proximity to other bodies.

The words we communicate make up part of the message, albeit a considerably smaller percentage. However, the denotative and connotative meanings of words cannot be dismissed as unimportant. Often, canonical texts hold important clues to cultural attitudes. This makes them fertile grounds for post-modern playwrights.

The deconstruction of language engenders a greater understanding of corporeality and can help unlock the body's capacity for communication. This process reveals the constructed nature of naturalized behavior and social structures. Relationships between bodies and texts are, therefore, to be examined not just head on but from multiple views.

This project brings together several ideas that run throughout my work as an educator, director/choreographer, and scholar. I ripped apart a canonical text, exposed bodies, and questioned the binary social order. My approach to *Unsex Me Here...* was to question not only the audience's beliefs concerning the body and gender, but also the ensemble of performers, and myself. What is hiding beneath our clothes? Can the nude body be seen as something other than a sexualized object? Can nude performance transform the actor allowing him/her to thus transcend their daily performance of self?

How exactly does gender exist within the body? Can two differently sexed bodies be the same gender? How pervasive is gender in the subtext of culture?

Ultimately, through the process of conceiving this project, bringing it to fruition, and now reflecting upon it, I have clarified and refined my beliefs about the gender/body relationship. Drawing upon a considerable amount of feminist theory, actor training manifestos, and other cultural critiques, I have sifted through an abundance of information and come to the conclusion that gender is plastic. Rather than the strict binary, it is a continuum that flows and the containers that hold it, the sexed male and female body, dictate how it flows.

The public display of the naked form is the Living Canvas' main tactic to change people's views about their own bodies. As part of the body acceptance movement, the Living Canvas does not display explicit bodies. In my work with them, I was hyper-aware of the sexual implications of naked bodies in close contact with one another. These bodies were not meant to be erotic. The audience's preconceived notions about nudity were very real, but the naturalization of nudity attempted to address these attitudes and perhaps change them.

My views on gender and the body are not necessarily those of Pete Guither, his project the Living Canvas, or those involved in the production. They are exactly that—views. These views, however, are rooted in experience. Those that I worked with on this project participated in a theatrical experiment.

Because I was able to literally strip the bodies down to the bare essentials, the body in and of itself, I was able to intimately examine the volatile stage on which identity

politics are played. Gender seems to exist as a continuum in both male and female bodies, and it is perpetually in flux.

Performances of *Unsex Me Here...* were held at the National Pastime Theatre in Chicago, IL from July 11-August 16 at 11:00 pm. Running time for the show was approximately one hour. Original cast included:

Mac.....Glenn W. Proud, III
Beth.....Melinda Ryba
Spark.....Michael Schmueck
Droplet.....Diana Christopher
Twig.....Michael Glazer

During the run of the show, I served as understudy stepping in for both Michael Schmueck and Michael Glazer.



Plate 2
Robot Battle

CHAPTER 2 Something Old, New, and Definitely Borrowed

Fog settles over a glen. Trees loom in the distance seeming to stare watchfully from a distance. The damp Scottish air is filled with an anxiety that surrounds on all sides. The trees begin to move. The witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* prophesy that:

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.

(IV, I, 92-94)

This image of the woods encroaching upon Inverness was the impetus for a collaboration with photographer Pete Guither that would become *Unsex Me Here...* I imagined how his sumptuous use of textured projection could illuminate the imagery laden language of the Scottish play. Shakespeare masterfully manipulates the text, and “In many parts of *Macbeth* there is in the language a peculiar compression, pregnancy, energy, even violence” (Bradley 290).

Exploring the imagery of the play required combing through the text in an attempt to understand the entire story. On the surface, *Macbeth* is about murder, ambition, and treachery. Shakespeare found inspiration in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Written for James I, the play has political overtones referencing the King's uniting of Scotland and England under one crown; “however, the main concern of *Macbeth* is not political, but rather the

human flaws of the protagonist. Most engrossing is his transformation from noble war hero into a tyrannical murderer” (Dunton-Downer 359).

The idea of a flawed humanity implicates the existence of something flawless. What exactly does that mean? Who/what is unflawed? What causes this mark?

Macbeth faithfully serves the king before he commits regicide and is different than most tragic characters for “Usually in tragedy a good person is made to suffer through a flaw in his goodness. In *Macbeth* this pattern is reversed: it is the streak of goodness that leads to pathos and suffering” (Auden 212). If Macbeth has no goodness in him, he should feel no remorse for the murder of Duncan. His act isolates him from society and sends him swiftly into a bloody downward spiral in order to keep his throne.

We like to think in binaries. There is good and there is evil. There is man and there is woman. In the interest of imposing order and making sense of the world, these binaries which create false dilemmas become superimposed on one another. Man becomes good and woman evil. Man is strong and woman is weak. It creates a sense of how things should be which pays itself out in language.

Helene Cixous finds that “Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposite action: activity/passivity” (Cixous 68). The Macbeths relationship is interesting in that, ultimately, Macbeth is the one carrying out the murder of Duncan. However, his wife is not a complicit partner; rather, she is the one who encourages her husband to do the bloody deed. She is the one to clean up the mess after it is done, and she is also the one trying to keep him from being consumed by his guilty conscience in order to keep their power. So, what happens when the traditional power

structure is subverted and man and woman become equal partners? This is the story that *Unsex Me Here...* attempts to tell.

Lady Macbeth is a fascination of mine. It is a role I have always wanted to play. She is one of Shakespeare's strong female roles that does not take part in the trope of cross-dressing. Some see her as the driving force behind her husband's treasonous actions. Lady Macbeth is a rare example of a woman being able to embrace a masculine role without having to change her clothes to do so, but "For all the power and prominence of Lady Macbeth, the drama remains essentially the story of the lord who commits regicide and thereby enmeshes himself in a complex web of consequences" (Rosenblum 193).

As we began rehearsals on the piece, I knew I wanted to look at the relationship between these two characters. So, I ripped all of the pages out of my copy of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that contained lines spoken by the characters of Macbeth and his wife.

During the first rehearsal of *Unsex Me Here...*, I asked the actor playing Mac, Glenn W. Proud III, to prepare Lady Macbeth's Act I, Scene V monologue. The juxtaposition of the text and the body speaking it became a delightful interplay between playwright and actor. Initially, Proud did not acknowledge the dissonance between his body and the lines. I quickly pointed out that he had no "woman's breasts." Once he made this adjustment, I knew what this piece was going to be about. We had the lynchpin. It was this monologue.

In *Macbeth*, there is "that struggle in the hero's soul which sometimes accompanies the outward struggle is of the highest importance for the total effect of the tragedy" (Bradley 37). The struggle in Macbeth's soul is wrapped up in a much larger issue. His

action against the figure head of existing power structure has thrown his life into flux. He has effectively turned the world he lives in upside down.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is largely denouement. The murder happens in the second act, leaving the remaining three for Macbeth to unravel. Since time is not linear in *Unsex Me Here...*, the moment of the murder is unclear. Thus, with no definitive moment to serve as the inciting incident of his demise, Mac is unstable to begin with, whereas murder drives Macbeth to this place. This instability is played out in the audience's first encounters with the character as he first performs his ultra-masculinity as a warrior moving directly into the delivery of the Lady Macbeth soliloquy. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are "torn by an inward struggle; and it is frequently at such points that Shakespeare shows his most extraordinary power" (Bradley 12). What is this struggle? If it is "inward," then one ought to look to the body for answers.

In examining a canonical text like *Macbeth* the story and the language with which it is told render important clues for larger themes concerning how society is structured. According to Elin Diamond, "no feminist can ignore the fact that the language of the battlefield is a system based on difference whose traces contain our most powerful desires" (Diamond 80).

Conflict is the essence of drama. Understanding these opposing forces, helps define the tragic action. In Shakespeare's play, "Treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm: here is the outward conflict. But these powers or principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth himself: here is the inner. And neither by itself could make the tragedy" (Bradley 13).

By deconstructing *Macbeth*, a piece of theatrical literature that is part of high culture, I am contributing to a feminist tradition that exposes language's inherent sexism. The literal text of the play is projected onto the ceiling as the audience takes its seats. *Macbeth* is a play about power, ambition, and desire. Women are symbols of desire. They are a commodity to be traded in Shakespeare's world. Possession of them means possession of power, but Lady Macbeth is an interesting figure in Shakespeare's harem. She is both man and woman.

Marriage, today, has come to signify, particularly in religious ceremony, two people becoming one. While in the past, as was the case of the Macbeths, it was more of an exchange of goods. Transactions of women for political, monetary, and social gain led feminists to see marriage as the root of female bondage.

Regardless of her own lust for power, Lady Macbeth cannot enjoy it, save through the advancement of her husband. He can attain power. He can be king. Although, one could definitely argue that he lacked the ability to act on his ambition without her help. They are both essential to the plot of *Macbeth*. For this reason, what happens to them post-regicide is just as interesting as the murder itself. Lady Macbeth's "ambition for her husband and herself (there was no distinction in her mind) proved fatal to him far more than the prophecies of the witches" (Bradley 322).

I have always been bothered by the fact that Lady Macbeth plays such an integral role in the story of the play but is rarely seen. Cixous notes, "if we consult literary history, it is the same story. It all comes back to man—to *his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin" (Cixous 68). *Unsex Me Here...* pays closer attention to Lady Macbeth's story.

Macbeth is not the story of one man usurping the throne of Scotland, but rather of two people's thirst for power.

MACBETH : If we should fail?
LADY MACBETH : We fail?
 But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
 And we'll not fail.

(I, vii, 59)

The fall of one means the fall of both. Their fates are linked, so that when she loses control it signifies that: 1. the female body is incapable of possessing the masculinity she asks for in her Act I Scene V soliloquy and 2. Macbeth's virility is waning. The reassignment of lines in *Unsex Me Here...* turns this interpretation of gender on its side. Mac and Beth possess both masculine and feminine behaviors at the same time. They are on a continual gender rollercoaster.

Lady Macbeth's demise is interesting to examine from a feminist perspective. As one of Shakespeare's strongest women, she lacks the body to hold the power she seeks. That is where he husband comes into the plan. As Luce Irigaray finds, "Women do not in fact suffer much from delusions. If they could, it would protect them. They suffer in their bodies" (Irigaray 45).

In *The Sex which is not One*, Irigaray defines "virgin, mother, and prostitute" as the roles patriarchy forces women into. Lady Macbeth is an interesting in that she is not depicted as any of the three. She is more man-like in her ambition. There is an allusion to the fact that she has born children, but we do not see her in this role. In fact, she tells her husband:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

(I, vii, 54-59)

Rhetoric like this, colloquially speaking, classifies her as bitch. How dare she not care for her child the way we expect mothers to care? The image of infanticide, on top of the fact that she and her husband are planning regicide, vilifies her. In the soliloquy that drives *Unsex Me Here...*, she is asking to subdue those things that make her woman in order to be capable of carrying out her plans. Here, it is clear that she has made that transformation.

Cixous said, “Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought” (Cixous 68). Her ambition, her capacity to desire, is behind these gruesome words. For this very reason, Lady Macbeth stands out among Shakespeare’s leading ladies. She is not passive. She plays the part in public, but she is an equal with her husband. Because she shares the guilt in this venture, she must pay the same price for her greed.

In the making of this piece, I was indulging in my own questions about Shakespeare’s text. I offered it to an audience as my interpretation of the story. At play are the rules and regulations steeped in centuries of tradition. In reading a piece of literature, or seeing a play, we must recognize that the intended message is not the only one that comes across. This is true the text of our bodies in everyday interactions. In *The Politics of Experience* R.D. Laing states “your experience of me is invisible to me and my experience of you is invisible to you” (qtd. in Iser 180).

We cannot know each other. Does that mean we should not attempt to try? No. It does, however, require an acceptance of difference of this gap in our understanding of one another. Wolfgang Iser in “Interaction Between Text and Reader” argues that a “dyadic and dynamic interaction comes about only because we are unable to experience how we experience one another, which in turn proves to be a propellant to interaction” (Iser 180). In a power structure based on an “us v. them” mentality, interaction with another, not necessarily the Other, brings about personal discovery in the dissonance between interpretation and intention.

Iser’s concept of blanks in the text/reader relationship creates a space where “The shifting blank is responsible for a succession of colliding images, which condition each other in the time flow of reading. The discarded image imprints itself on its successor, even though the latter is meant to resolve the deficiencies of the former. In this respect the images hang together in a sequence, and it is by this sequence that meaning of the text comes alive in the reader’s imagination” (Iser 184).

This is at play in *Unsex Me Here...* The original context of the words, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, is ghosted on the new theatrical event. The audience with previous contact with the text will experience a double consciousness that they must navigate while watching the show. How they navigate the dissonance between their previous experience and expectations surrounding *Macbeth* and the story unfolding before them in *Unsex Me Here...* reveals truths about themselves as individuals and collectively as an audience.

Desire, as opposed to reason, is something to overcome. The morality implied here drives the action of *Macbeth*. The action of the play is the consequence of giving in to

desire. Despite the titular character wrestling with his ambition, we, the audience, approach this canonical play from a point of reason. It engages our intellect. What happens, then, when we engage this text with an element of desire?

If reason is related to the mind, then desire is most certainly related to the body. What is the effect of staging such a play using nude actors? Engaging the text in such a way creates a tension in the spectator. Foucault notes, “What is particular to modern societies, in face, is not that they consign sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*” (Foucault 51). The bodies in *Unsex Me Here...*, beautiful or grotesque, carry with them a sexual presence. The audience’s first association with a nude body is usually in a sexual context: either the actual act of sex or via pornography or strip clubs.

What they were presented with are not explicit bodies, but rather naked people performing actions as if they were clothed. The lack of sexual context crates a space in which the spectator can view the body as something other than sexual object.

Irigaray’s work supports the idea of clothing as a veil. A veil “hides, masks, displays, renders impossible or prohibits any relation between two bodies, except – sometimes - breaking and entering” (Irigaray 93). Unveiled bodies are open to one another. They can interact.

For our first rehearsal, I chose to work on Lady Macbeth’s infamous soliloquy.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

(I, v, 41-54)

Her invitation to the witches is an interesting one. She asks to be unsexed in order to have the strength to carry out the plan. We disrobe in order to examine the text.

This piece is a collage of *Macbeth*. As such, I rehearsed the scenes in one sequence and put them back together in another. The result is a memory or perhaps a nightmare. Text is reassigned, interrupted, and sometimes altogether replaced by movement. The atmosphere created through Guither's projection, the stylization of movement, and the source text is the glue that holds the piece together.

Unsex Me Here... takes the shape as the nightmare that is shared by these two tragic figures as their greed, paranoia, and remorse consume them. As it is a dream, it does not follow chronological order. The scenes make a sort of collage violently cutting from one moment in Shakespeare's play to the next using music, light, and movement to tell the tale of the Thane of Cawdor with some original dialog added in to serve our own selfish purposes. As in the works of many feminist playwrights, characters take on lines that do not belong to them. But this time, no one is wearing any clothing.

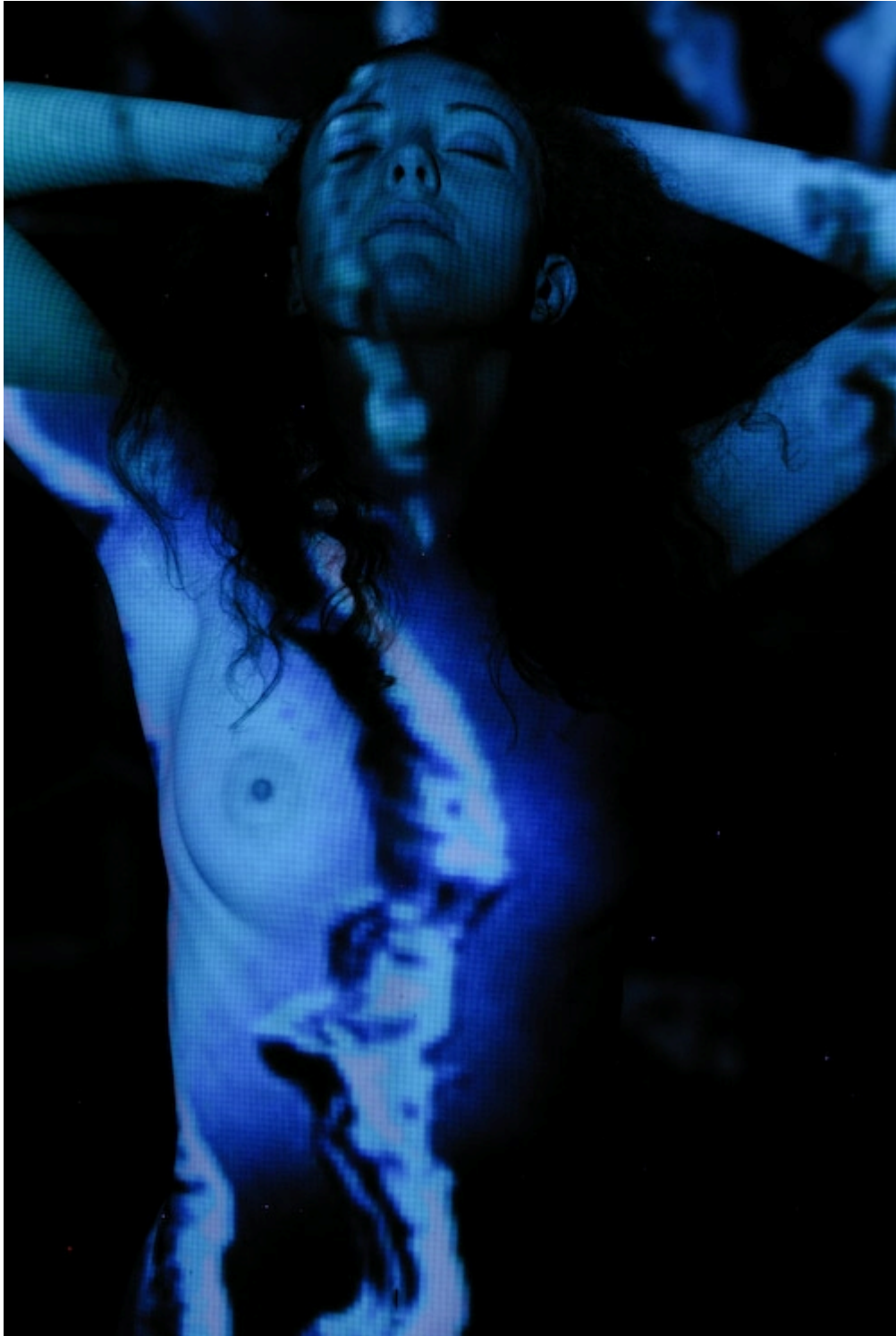


Plate 3
Beth Death

CHAPTER 3 Body of Work

Beautiful People

Many people ask about the bodies cast in *Unsex Me Here*... In talkbacks and other conversations about the show, someone always asks about how the casting process works for a show such as this. Quickly, audiences point out the fact that there are “alternative male types” but the females all seem to fit the “classic” definition of female beauty.

Personally, I find these descriptions to be vague and humorous, but I get the point of the question. They want to know if I only cast pretty girls. When casting for *The Living Canvas*, we were not looking for any specific body types. We cast everyone. Basically, if you want to get naked in front of a room full of strangers two nights a week for six weeks, we aren't going to stop you.

Finding a cast was not easy. As it turns out, those one might expect to have more reservations about performing nude, those with non-traditional body types, were more open to the idea. Those who are more traditionally defined as objects like actress playing Beth, Melinda Ryba, had some strong concerns about the project. Yet, it was something she desperately wanted to do. In Ryba's own words:

When the opportunity to be in "Unsex Me Here" arose, I was hesitant. Could I actually be naked on stage? How would I tell my parents that this show their daughter was in was a naked show, and how to explain to them that it is, in fact, art. Shocking things are put on stage in the guise of 'art' for many reasons, most of the time it's to be shocking for shock's sake. I respected that *The Living Canvas*

always had a message behind it - body acceptance. As a woman, I had to come to terms with my own body, feeling comfortable in my own skin. Media and society pressure to look a certain way melded with the pressure I put on myself. We're all made differently, and I thought that as long as the message of Living Canvas was still portrayed and emphasized, then a Shakespearean show (at it's core) on top of that would be interesting, especially with the material of MacBeth [sic].

(Ryba 01April2009)

Her hesitation comes from outside pressures and prerogatives that might not understand her motives or what is there to be seen. At the same time, there is a desire to break the strangle hold of main-stream beauty standards, which she is aware of internalizing.

Ryba's dilemma concerning her participation in Living Canvas is a microcosm of a larger issue that is played out by women and men on a daily basis. Everyone has issues with their bodies. We wish our breasts were bigger or our thighs were smaller. We catch ourselves saying, "If only my nose was slimmer, I would be happier." Catherine Clement notes in *Seduction and Guilt*, "keeping oneself in a state of permanent guilt is to constitute oneself as subject" (Clement 56). Shame associated with the body is the result of a means of control. As fashion reinvents itself every season, so do we. This vicious cycle ensures a docile body.

Underneath our clothes exists a canvas. We obscure it, and like the painter's canvas, it is changed; however, unlike that painter's canvas, the body is pliable. The clothes can be removed. The body is still marked by socialization, but that is not necessarily a permanent scar.

Presence is at play in nude performance. The line between character and actor is blurred because of the lack of costuming. The audience sees the naked actor on stage. When asked about his greatest fear in performing nude cast member Michael Glazer said,

“I’m not gonna [sic] lie - shrinkage. I’m not saying I have the largest [or] smallest kibbles and bits, but I just want it to look its best since it is clearly going to be the first thing everyone looks at. And I know this goes against the whole body acceptance thing - but that theatre was freakin [sic] freezing” (Glazer 02March2009).

Glazer’s self-consciousness about the size of his genitals reveals an underlying fear of being judged by the audience as not masculine. Like Ryba, Glazer has a classically beautiful body type. Whereas she is the pinnacle of female beauty, his tall, chiseled frame is a perfect replica of a Greek statue in a museum. Despite fact that the messages the rest of his body marks him male, he places (and expects the audience to as well) equal importance on the size of his sexual organs. The idea that the sexing of the body is linked to the gendering of the body is something that I will return to later, but it is important to note that although he is not explicitly stating this idea in these terms, he is well aware of the social implications because he lives the consequences of it every day.

Like all of the cast members, Glazer found the act of performing nude to naturalize the act of appearing nude in public. By banishing the clothed spectators to a shadow existence (they sit in the darkened gallery) the only visible bodies are the ones contributing to the action of the story. The audience is bombarded by nudity. The lack of clothed bodies creates an aesthetically altered world for the audience where nudity is normal. Glazer continues, “But like I said, once its [sic] out there for all to see, you kind of stop caring and don't think about it. So basically being clothed gives you more worries than being naked” (Glazer 02March2009).

The audience sees the naked character in addition to the naked actor. The actor and the audience experience a double consciousness. In an intimate space, they are both seeing and being seen. The actors are aware that they are both portraying a character in a play for the audience to enjoy, and they exist as potential objects of desire for that audience.

Even though everyone gets naked in the show, sexual politics come into play in audience/actor interaction. The potential for objectification and valuing of bodies is present during a Living Canvas performance for both the male and female bodies involved, and is articulated in feminist critique via the concept of the male gaze. Laura Mulvey talks about the gaze in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” saying, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been a split between active/male and passive/female. Determining the male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 188). Thanks to what Philip Auslander calls the “mediatization” of our culture, our experiences with the female form have a distinctly male frame around them (Auslander 4).

Culturally speaking, we have a very limited frame of reference relating to nudity. Exposure reveals the sex of the body and implies gender. Hetero-normative structures dictate that male goes with masculine and female means feminine. Confusing gender and sex has engendered inequity via a strict binary that renders women as objects for men to desire.

What happens when the naked female form is on display next to the male? Is this jarring enough to undermine the gaze? Or does it simply turn the male body into another object of desire? Mulvey argues that “According to the ruling ideology and psychological

structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (Mulvey 189).

This assumes that a female audience will look upon the performers with a male gaze finding eroticism in looking at the female performers. It renders women incapable of the same sort of desire as men, and it completely neglects the male gaze from a homosexual perspective. Regardless of these alternative gazes, Mulvey’s perspective does not allow for the using male nudity as a *verfremdungseffekt*.

The visibility of male genitalia calls attention to itself can disrupt the male gaze. Taboo regions, such as the penis, when glimpsed on film are often jarring. Frontal male nudity is rare in the theatre and on film. Fantasy of the unknown is ripped asunder when we are face to face with each other’s “naughty bits.” In this sense, the nudity in the Living Canvas is a transgressive act. It aims to normalize nudity in order to de-eroticize it.

Confrontation of the naked body is more than simply looking at naked people. It is an examination of the body as a concept while confronting its corporeality. Michel Foucault said, “the body is conceived not as a property but as a strategy, dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in a network or relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than privilege that one might possess” (Foucault 128).

The body has become a means for control. We adorn ourselves with symbols of our identity through fashion. Underneath it all still lurks the unknown, the misunderstood, the most dangerous thing of all: the actual body itself. Elizabeth Wilson notes in *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, “A part of this strangeness of dress that links the

biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a cultural artifact even, and its own boundaries are unclear” (Wilson 147). Clothing is a mask. It acts as an identification badge for those we meet on the street. Literally, we wear our personalities on our sleeves. Rarely are we seen without it. Public nudity brings the private body into the open for public consumption and discourse.

Part of the uneasiness, as far as the body is concerned, lies in our inability to control it. Wilson reminds us, that “the naked body underneath the clothes and paint is somehow unfinished, vulnerable, and leaky at the margins” (Wilson 149). Work, like that of the Living Canvas, denies this premise of social interaction. Instead, favoring the body as a site for individual security, a home, the Living Canvas promotes an agenda of body awareness and acceptance. It is what it is.

Once a person can accept their corporeal reality, the necessity to hide it diminishes. Now, not everyone who works with Canvas runs off and joins a nudist colony. That is not the point of the work. For many, their relationships with their bodies fundamentally changes, as does their interaction with the world around them.

Melinda Ryba found that “All said and done, I am very glad I went through with it. I feel more comfortable with myself as a person and as an actor. Would I do it again? I can't say for sure, but I've done a naked show, I can do anything!” (Ryba 01April2009).

In speaking with the cast members, they all agree that the fact that they were not alone in the endeavor made it easier to do. Creating an atmosphere of trust in the rehearsal process is of the utmost importance. This is why everyone, technical crew included, took

off their clothes at “first undress.” Everyone was placed on equal footing. There was no one who got a free look. Everyone was encouraged to move at their own pace. Ryba remembers this rehearsal where:

Lights were turned off, projectors were on and everyone in the theatre got naked. I was slow to undress. I had to work at my own pace, removing piece by piece and moving modestly as I saw fit. Having Living Canvas veterans [sic] there, like Diana and Mike, *really* helped. It made me more comfortable with the situation, knowing that others were in it as well, and I am okay with saying I was a follower.

(Ryba 01April2009)

Just as we learn how to perform our gender roles and what our relationships should be from those around us, we can also, like Ryba, break those habits by being in a community where normalized patterns are destabilized. During first undress, each individual was responsible for his/her own process.

Whether or not Shakespeare is universal, the body, as an actual physical thing, is. That is not to say that there is necessarily an essential nature that is connected to our bodies. Simply, we all are a body, though most of us don't quite know what to do with said body. Despite this, some see fit to legislate over the bodies of others dictating their social roles. We perform these roles and the roles become more and more real with each performance.

The body is one of the great unknowns. Throughout history, science has tried to understand how the body functions, but even science is guided by the agenda of the dominant class.

Unsex Me Here... looks at the fragmented body of modernism and does not see it in terms of a simple male/female binary. Gender exists as a continuum contained within a

body, therefore, we are all feminine. In this sense, the bodies both male and female involved in the Living Canvas align with “feminist postmodern as openly wrestling *within* the conundrum of reading the infinite recessive dreamscapes of capitalist culture as they coagulate across the infinitely resplendent and splintering of the feminized other” (Schneider 128).

The dream-like telling of a familiar narrative holds the text accountable for its role in using language to propagate patriarchic prerogatives. Anything is possible. Just as in dreams, the subconscious takes over. Mac and Beth are stuck struggling not only with regicide and its consequences but also the roles they play in their grab for power.

Power determines how the body is read. In *Unsex Me Here...* power and gender are a balancing act. Femininity does not cease to exist in Beth, nor does masculinity leave Mac. There is no effort to redefine the terms, either. Both remain as traditionally characterized. What is different is the absoluteness of masculine and feminine. Instead of a binary, it is a sliding scale from one extreme to another. It can exist in both male and female bodies, and when it does it is reads differently.

For example, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the titular character becomes hysterical during the infamous banquet scene. Here, he can be read as feminine and his wife as masculine. Why don’t we think of Macbeth as a feminized character?

This is one question I am asking with *Unsex Me Here...* along with countless others. In the 60s and 70s, female performance artists were working with their own bodies in an effort to connect with the lost matriarchy. Feminist performance art evolved into a grittier and more angst ridden idiom in the 80s. My work with the Living Canvas uses not only my

own female body but also other male and female bodies. It seeks the beauty of the individual body.

By showing *man* as something that can exist as feminine, via the assignment of a woman's words to a man's body or the reassignment of movement in a similar manner, *Unsex Me Here*...does not deny the existence of femininity. It acknowledges its existence in multiple bodies.

According to Judith Butler:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that, if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner acts and gestures from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject.

(*Gender* 185)

Our bodies are pliable. Shakespeare famously wrote in *As You Like It* that "All the world's a stage" (*As You Like It* II, vii, 139). While this might be true, the men and women involved are not "merely players," but stages themselves wherein narratives of power and identity are played out.

The painter Wassily Kandinsky said,

This I learned to battle the canvas, to come to know it as a being resisting my wish (dream), and to bend it forcibly to this wish. At first it stands there like a chaste virgin . . . and then comes the willful brush with first here, then there, gradually conquers it with all the energy peculiar to it, like a European colonist.

(qtd. in Schneider 134)

The body is my canvas, but it has also been the canvas of capitalist patriarchal society. I was not alone as an artist in my endeavor. The five actors that went on this

journey also wrestled with their canvases. We must remember what that blank canvas was one like in order to paint a new picture.

Going the peep show at the art museum

Despite intention, objectification rears its ugly head. And to be quite honest, we were trying to attract this audience member. When marketing the show, Guither and I played up the fact that everyone was naked. Since Canvas is a project about body acceptance, it is not only focused on engendering more positive feelings about one's own body, but also letting the live performance be a place where the audience's pre-conceived notions of the naked body are altered.

When advertising the show, we were mindful to include the fact that the entire cast is entirely nude. This was partly due to the fact that, in the past, Guither had received a rather scathing review from a critic who was not aware that she would be seeing a nude show, and consequently her own discomfort with the naked body came out in the review.

In July of 2001, Kelly Kleiman of *The Chicago Reader* wrote:

what do we project onto nudity? . . . Coeducational nakedness is not Edenic innocence to those of us living after the Fall. Naked people don't go around touching each other chastely, because genitals are displayed to signal availability for sex, thereby assuring the propagation of the species. Nakedness can be asexual, but it rarely is in people with such flawless figures. And who challenges conventional constructions of the body by making sure every woman in the group sports a neatly barbered pubis?

The company gambols through a portentous narrative that combines old-hat nonconformism ("I refuse to be ashamed") with New Age invocations.

Even people with what Kleiman seems to term “flawed” figures are socially sexualized when nude. Lack of desire still carries with it significance. These figures lack value, but are still part of the desire/power hetero-normative exchange of bodies. Her preoccupation with pubic hair reveals her perception that nudity is a sexual act. Her derogatory tone implies her own relationship to her body and sex. Typically, these are the people that stay away from Guither’s performances, which is not to say that she was not welcome.

Political art can either be a rallying cry or a moment of transformation. The fact that the Living Canvas has been performing live for nearly ten years means it has quite a following in Chicago. However, in order for Pete to spread his message of body acceptance, he needs to reach outside that demographic. In order to do so, he sells the nakedness.

By emphasizing the fact that the cast is naked, Guither is able to attract those people who are titillated by the idea of getting to see naked chicks disguised as art. During *Living Canvas: Odyssey*, Guither remember talking to a young man after the show whose sister was part of the cast. Guither recalls, “Her teenage brother, at first, wasn't going to come see the show and then ended up doing so. After the show, he confessed that, for the first five minutes or so, he was checking out the girls on stage to see who had the best rack. Then he realized it was his sister, so he immediately stopped doing that and just enjoyed the show” (Guither 01April2009).

This particular audience member came face to face with the incest taboo. Coming to see a Living Canvas production is on some level about coming to check out naked

people. The body is used as an object to sell tickets. They come to peep in the safety of a dark theatre with other people there for the same reason. By overwhelming the audience with flesh, nudity is normalized. Everyone in the world of the play is naked, and that is simply how they interact with one another. Eventually, the actors interact with the audience drawing attention to the fact that they are hiding behind their clothes.

The bodies in *The Living Canvas* are not explicit bodies. The goal is not to shock, but what effect does pornography have on the work? Nude performance is ghosted not only by pornography but also the explicit performance artist that made the body into a battlefield for sexual politics. This is what keeps people from performing in the show, packs the house, and turns people away. Nudity is a polarizing issue because it forces people to come to terms with their body which is often confused with *the body*.

While feminist performance artists of the late twentieth century relied on using their own bodies in an explicit manner, showing what some might deem “too much” of the body, my work with the *Living Canvas* shows just enough. The aim of pieces like Annie Sprinkle’s piece *Public Cervix Announcement* is to transcend the coding of the female body as a sexual commodity via overexposure. Audiences could, and were invited to, see inside her body. In *Public Cervix Announcement*, the body is space. The juxtaposition of public, Sprinkle’s outer corporeality, with private, her exposed cervix, mirrored a larger female struggle for power.

Does this tactic work? The display of sexual pleasure onstage combined with the clinical and titillating examination of her body produce a statement is about the politics of the body inextricably linked Sprinkle’s past as a prostitute. The message is not only

obscured, but presented in such an extreme fashion that it makes it easier to discount it. According to Rebecca Schneider in *The Explicit Body in Performance*, “Sprinkle’s ‘too much’ exposes sexuality as invisible from social issues of vulnerability and power” (Schneider 76).

If seeing “too much” highlighted the implicit link of sexuality and society, then seeing “just enough” could spark conversation about how gender is coded onto our tactile bodies. Naked bodies sneak into our everyday lives at a safe distance: a nude model selling perfume in a magazine ad, actors playing a love scene in a movie, or a woman selling soap on television. All of these depictions of nudity are safe. The viewer can control them. There is no way they are going to jump off the screen and hold him/her accountable for looking.

Live nudes are a different situation. Our contact with actual nude bodies is, typically speaking, either in the shower or during a sexual act. Therefore, nudes on stage present an interesting problem: they aren’t doing either one. So, the sexual situation is imposed on them. The first ten minutes of the show become a peep show. After all, this is part of the reason why they came—breasts and penises. Who has the perkier? Who has the biggest? Who would I want to take home?

Who would I want to take home? This is where the Living Canvas seems to fall into the same trap as the feminist performance artists like Sprinkle. Since the bodies are not *doing* anything overtly sexual they cease to be read that way.

Schneider talks of a “second look” that is employed by artists such as Sprinkle. After the initial interpretation of the performance, it is examined further. The explicit body

is in performance is about sexuality, but also the separation of identity from the tactile body. Nude performance is first read as explicit, but upon a “second look” it transcends those connotations. The body can be viewed as something sexed but not necessarily sexual.

The body becomes a popular site for the performance artist because it is not just one thing. It exists both as something real (the tactile) and fantasy (the constructed body). The fantasy is treated as real, and as a result, becomes more real than the base it is built upon. The tactile body becomes a space on which the performance of identity is played. Because identity consists of ideas, it is always changing, and despite strong appearances, it is incredibly fragile.



Plate 4

“Is this a dagger which I see before me?”

CHAPTER 4 A Whole Bunch of Sound and Fury Signifying ...?

History links femininity with secrecy. Many people still equate sex with gender. The primary indicator of both is the tactile body. In order to propagate this prerogative, it is necessary to hide the thing that indicates both. We wear clothes not simply to protect our bodies from the elements, but to indicate who we are. These are the icons of gender. Men and women must wear clothes as an affirmation of gender being linked to tactile bodily realities, and therefore, behaviors. Stripping away the safety net of constructed identity leaves the performer vulnerable. Who are they if they are not the sum of all that stuff?

Uncovering the body is only one strategy employed in *Unsex Me Here...* Words and images from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are projected onto the bodies in combination with images of nature and industry. In performance, the body literally has images put upon it. It is a canvas for the artist to paint with light and movement.

In Shakespeare's comedies women change their clothes and can pass as men. His comedic heroines alter their daily webs of signification (class, gender, etc.) when they put on caps and breeches. Penny Gay notes in *Shakespeare's Unruly Women*, "Shakespeare's comedies, more than any other group of plays, offer the actress the potential to put forth this extraordinary transgressive energy, to assume power . . . these plays are fascinated by the possibilities of sexual transgression, which is euphemized as temporary transgression

of gender codes” (Gay 45). In *As You Like It*, Rosalind wields this power *en travesti* but Lady Macbeth operates in a very masculine way without a spare change of clothes.

Lady Macbeth stands out among Shakespeare’s characters because she is strong-willed, ambitious, and female. She does ask to be “unsexed” like Rosalind, but her transformation is not cosmetic. She shifts gender within her body. Because of this, she is still read as female but it is completely different than her comedic sister. Lady Macbeth’s change does not result in playful mistaken identity and homoerotic sexual tensions. She becomes an equal partner with her husband.

Macbeth is an interesting play to examine gender roles. Unlike the comedies, everything is not restored at the end, and Lady Macbeth is not playing “man.” Using her soliloquy that invokes the “spirits that tend on mortal thoughts” as a launching point, *Unsex Me Here...* not only questions representations of women but of men as well (*Macbeth* I, v, 41-42). Instead of changing into men’s clothing, Beth strips off her dress to begin this play. As she asks to be less like a woman, she removes the cultural garment that indicates her gender, but underneath is a body that is unmistakable female.

The starkness of the lighting against the bare skin accentuates the landscape of the body forcing the audience to acknowledge that she is, in fact still woman. As she is lifted into the air, her body seems to rest on an altar as if a virgin waiting to be sacrificed. All of the signs point in the direction of reinforcing conservative established notions of gender and the body, but what is invisible at this moment is the fact that already within this body, clearly marked female, exists masculinity.

What follows is a nightmare where time and bodies are out of joint. Nothing is as it seems. How appropriate considering a history of Shakespeare in performance where men played women and women played men. Marjorie Garber notes in “Dress Codes or the Theatricality of Difference” that “It has been variously argued by critics over the years that virtually all of Shakespeare’s great characters, from Richard III to Cleopatra, are ‘suspended between male and female’” (Garber 180). The Macbeths are included in this cadre of characters. For all of them, gender is negotiable.

After the audience meets Beth, the stage goes dark. Three blue orbs begin to dance in the space. It is the witches concocting their magical brew. Because the audience first encounters the witches as disembodied voices represented by blue balls of light, they are placed in the position of gendering them according to the timbre of their voices. In this brief encounter, the audience gets to build in their mind’s eye who these individuals are, or at least who they hope them to be, based on the sound of their voice.

When they are revealed to the audience, it is not as human beings, but as trees. They are the personification of Birnam Wood. Three bodies intertwine to form a gnarled tree. They move and heave together. Their forms are clearly human, but what they represent is not. As they split apart, the image is incomplete. They become fragments of an image. Eventually, the witches find themselves back together and the image is re-formed.

Fragmentation is a theme that runs throughout *Unsex Me Here...* The story is told in a fragmented style. The character names of Mac and Beth suggest a fragmented identity. Text is spliced to create new meaning. After “Birnam,” Beth comes back to deliver a patchwork monologue.

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold
Yet I do fear thy nature
Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles and trammel up the consequence.
Out damned spot! God forgive us all!
We still have judgment here.
We but teach bloody instructions, full of sound and fury.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight?
It is the bloody business.

(Unsex Me Here... Scene 4)

The schizophrenic nature of this patch-worked monologue not only serves to further establish the dreamscape of the play, but it echoes the shifting nature of identity.

In “The Robot Battle,” masculinity is constructed. It is mechanized. The music is more staccato than legato and has an industrial feel. The movements of this piece represent Macbeth’s climb to power culminating in the battle that immediately precedes Shakespeare’s point of attack. Man is a well-oiled machine. However, the piece recognizes that the performance of “proper masculinity” is also balanced by “improper” behavior. As the music shifts from the fast paced 5/4 meter into what the cast referred to in the rehearsal process as “happy slo-mo,” the depiction of masculinity also shifts. The celebration of victory unleashes lewd masculinity.

The witches serve as Mac’s minions in “The Robot Battle.” There is a mix of male and female bodies doing the same masculine movements. They are not feminized on a female body. The witches are playing the role of soldier. Soldier as a construct is masculine. Scholars have found that women in the military take on the gender of their profession. Women in such roles “seem to distance themselves from traditional femininity by adopting the masculine perspective and the masculine norm” (Rimalt 1098). Movement

is coded as a specific gender. In this real life scenario, playing the role of soldier has caused them to be read as masculine. The female bodies in “The Robot Battle” are mimicking this on stage.

The first time the audience hears Mac speak, he is saying the words of Lady Macbeth. When Mac says, “Come to my woman’s breasts,” it is not an indication that he should not be saying that line, rather, that the idea of gender being housed in a specific body and reinforced by language is ridiculous (*Unsex Me Here... Scene 6*). Women are read in relation to men. So, give a man a woman’s lines and what do you get?

Something that seems strange. It draws attention itself for the purposes of asking whether the rest of the text could stand. With out the line “come to my woman’s breasts and take my milk for gall,” would someone unfamiliar with the source text know that something was amiss? Consider the following soliloquy:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! . . .
 . . . Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

(Macbeth I, v, 41-55)

While a “the access and passage to remorse” could be read as vagina, that is only one interpretation. Assuming an alternative reading, the speech makes sense without the omitted. The breast line is the only one that *specifically* indicates the female anatomy.

Tongue firmly planted in cheek, the witches take over in the “Unsexy Improv.” Jumping about the stage, as if on a jungle gym, the three witches repeat variations of the phrase “unsex me here” ad infinitum. It begins as a mocking of Mac for saying a woman’s words, but soon the phrase is broken and re-mixed. It becomes almost gibberish. The meaning slippage in meaning that comes from the play of language reveals both the strong associations we have with words like “sex” (which even when used to denote classification of body by reproductive organs still connotes sexual desire) and the arbitrary nature of language.

In the “Hope Drunk Ballet,” femininity is out of kilter. As she deteriorates, Lady Macbeth is found sleepwalking around the halls of Dunsinane. She is slipping mentally. The line between consciousness and unconsciousness is blurred. It is an altered state, almost trance-like. The moment is grotesquely ethereal. George Balanchine declared that, “Ballet is woman.” So, the movement is ballet, sort of. The music is Chopin, sort of. The piece starts with the monologue that contains the same line. They are Lady Macbeth’s words, but in *Unsex Me Here...* it is delivered by Mac as he watches his wife dance. The music has been altered as if someone were making mistakes while practicing the piece on the piano. As the music is disrupted, so is Beth’s dance. She stumbles and falls as she desperately tries to perform the codified movements of ballet. All the while, the witches are watching, judging, and laughing with each misstep in the performance. The piece

builds with each mistake, her reaction to her inability to perform the movements getting stronger and stronger until she throws herself onto the ground to deliver the famous “Out damned spot!” monologue (*Macbeth* V, I, 38-43).

The “spot,” originally signifying her complicit guilt in the murder of Duncan, takes on a second meaning. In *Unsex Me Here...* Beth’s spot can also be interpreted as masculinity. She is incapable of performing the delicate, graceful, feminine movements in the “Hope Drunk Ballet” without losing her balance. The ballet and the femininity it represents are an unsustainable ideal.

The play of masculine/feminine within Beth also comes out in her moments of seduction. Both in “Sexy Dance” and “Milk of Human Kindness,” Beth is a strong woman using her body to get what she wants from Mac. She uses her body as a tool to manipulate her husband. Her ability to seduce comes from a place of strength, and though that is traditionally attributed to the masculine mode of behavior, these were very feminine movements. Strong curves and undulations of the torso marked both pieces and she beckoned for her husband to come hither and always remaining just out of reach. She taunts and teases Mac in these moments. Here, she is both object and an empowered agent in an interaction of power. Though the product she is selling (her ability to be penetrated by him) is not of use to her, the exchange of it is. Tit for tat.

During Beth’s death sequence, she is surrounded by water imagery. She is washing herself clean of all of the ideas that have been thrust upon her body. She hums a simple tune to herself. It is a lullaby. This is the only piece of live song in the entire piece. This is

the moment where Beth is as close to her tactile body as she can possibly be. Clean and simple. Once she has achieved this, she can rest.

However, this is not the end of *Unsex Me Here...* in the next moment she springs back to life to pressure her husband into killing the king. Since time as we know it is disrupted, nothing seems real. Nothing is final. Time echoes the body's agility in changing identity. It is different from one moment to the next. Things are not "done when it tis done" for "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day" (*Macbeth* I, vii, 1 and V, v, 19-20).

The idea of projection extended beyond the idea of literal projection of images onto a body. The "Do It Quickly!" sequence plays with the notion that this might be all in Mac's head. The compression of moments via editing of text and placing the Mac in the space with Beth makes him the subject and her words, then, become fragments of his imagination (not to mention the fact that their names are two halves of Shakespeare's whole). She bears the weight of his ambition. Since it is established that the world of *Unsex Me Here...* is not necessarily one of realism, the circumstances of the original context of the dialog is null and void.

She encircles Mac and he contemplates his treasonous intent reminding him of his recent accolades and the ultimate prize—king. The "If it were done" soliloquy gains urgency because she is there egging him on (*Macbeth* I, vii, 1-28). But is she really there? Is this all a figment of his imagination? His inaction and caution traditionally is read as being controlled by reason. However, she forcefully pushes him to take action to the point of commanding him to "screw your courage to the sticking place" as she drives him

backwards into a wall, thus, putting herself in a position of power (*Macbeth* I, vii, 60). She is strong and he is weak because he cannot act. There is a strange play of masculine/feminine in this scene. Both characters exist as both genders. Beth still needs her husband to be the agent of action. Mac reads as masculine and Beth feminine. At the same time, Mac needs Beth to drive him to do it. Here she reads as the masculine one.

The “Knock Knock” sequence might seem a blatant disregard for the text, but in reality, it is filled with word play. The sequences of improvisation around small pieces of *Macbeth* manipulate the language to reveal the silliness of language. Turning Shakespeare’s Porter scene into a series of knock knock jokes, pokes fun at the seriousness with which his plays are treated. The Porter is one of Shakespeare’s great clowns. The witches in *Unsex Me Here...* are tricksters. They are not the passive prophets of *Macbeth*. Every action of Mac and Beth is monitored by these “weird sisters.” Being magical, the witches, like their shaman and trickster counter-parts, are capable of being multi-gendered.

The “Dagger Dance” is fraught with Freudian overtones. The dagger in the dance is played by Droplet, the only witch to be played by a female for the entire run. She is a material representation of castration anxiety. The dagger is something that penetrates, piercing the skin. It will be the instrument of Duncan’s death, but it also poses a threat to Mac. He is mesmerized by the vision. The edge of the dagger traces a line from the top of her head, down her breast, and ending at her pubic bone. Mac cannot look away demonstrating that “The castration complex gives rise to the persistent voyeuristic mania to look at the female organ” (Koch quoted in Schneider 79). Throughout the dance, she evades his grasp. She redirects and misleads him. Though she appears before him, she is

unattainable. He questions his sight. In *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Rebecca Schneider links castration anxiety with loss of sight, and “We can interpret the link between the fear of the loss of one’s penis and the fear of the loss of one’s eyes as a signifying loss of the masculine-marked prerogatives of perspectival vision” (Schneider 82). The sex of the actress cannot be ignored, nor can the dance be forgotten in his following encounters with female bodies in *Unsex Me Here...*

Scenes like the “Mac/Beth Duet,” allow for the characters to play traditional gender roles as they dance, sensuously signifying their relationship in marriage. He leads. She follows. The relationship is established through iconic movements. His masculinity is emphasized in moves that showcase his strength in supporting, while her femininity come across thorough her need for support. Each role is the necessary opposite. In the end, she runs off stage and Mac is left alone to contemplate the actions of his ambition.

The witches return as if emerging from the earth an entangled mass of flesh. Writhing bodies lose their well defined boundaries as they meld together and with their environment. The witches’ bodies are the cauldron in which they concoct their strange brew. Together their identities fuse with limbs linked. The heaving mass of flesh has its own identity. Like “Birnam” they are recognizably different as a group than as individuals, however, this time, it is easier to make sense of their bodies, and thus identities, when they separate and speak to Mac showing him visions of his future.

Mac’s contemplation of these prophetic images is interrupted by the “Battle.” Compressing time cuts to the chase. The movement pattern established in the “Mac/Beth Duet” is echoed twice in the “Battle.” In the midst of Mac’s last stand, the music breaks

and the lights shift and Beth appears. They dance the same sensuous dance, only this time Mac exerts his power over Beth, violently throwing her to the ground. The choreography is this same, but now it signifies something different. He is no longer the supportive partner. As the song shifts back to the battle theme, she disappears. When next we see her, it is the same choreography but the roles are switched. She is now playing the masculine role of leading and doing so culminating in her slitting Mac's throat. In this moment, she becomes more than Lady Macbeth. She is MacDuff.

The male/female gender binary is out of sync. It is not lining up with the bodies it is imposed upon. Beth searches for Mac, traversing the landscape of the stage as she returns to her first speech "Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts..." (*Macbeth* I, v, 41-42). As she continues to speak, Mac joins in, but he is two beats behind. The speech serves as counterpoint to itself. Both are searching, blindly in the dark for the other. They nearly miss. The tension and release in those moments create a growing frustration and they continue their search. Finally, words and movement is in sync. They are together.

This is but a momentary respite, for the witches return to pull the two apart. In "Monkeys," the witches mockingly torment both Mac and Beth. They bound across the scaffolding, swinging violently, and laughing playfully. They examine, tug, pull, and mistreat the bodies of Mac and Beth. Still, like mannequins, Mac and Beth accept the abuses.

After the chaos of the two previous scenes, Mac is sits atop the highest point on the scaffolding. He is lit simply from above. His face is dark as purple light spills from the top of his head down onto his chest and shoulders. "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-

morrow,” he begins (*Macbeth* V, v, 19). The words fall out of his mouth that we cannot see. There is no face to this man. His body, perched on high, can see those watching him, but they can only see parts of him. He is both there and not there. He’s held something back for himself, but it is his face and not his body. As he comes to his stark conclusion that life “is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” his face comes into the light. We can see all of him (*Macbeth* V, v, 26-28).

Mac’s moment of clarity is but short lived. Seduced by an ultra-feminine dance of Beth’s, Mac descends, abandoning whatever perspective he has gained. She rolls and gyrates her hips moving in a way to accentuate the curves of her female body. She’s directing focus to herself, purposefully turning herself into an object to desire in order to get her husband to do her bidding. Doubly conscious, she is able to be in power at the moment by exploiting his proven weakness for her flesh.

In order to break the eroticism of the previous moment, the witches return to lead the audience in a pep rally. Spark serves as the emcee commanding, “When I say double, you say double!” (*Unsex Me Here...* Scene 22). He takes the audience from one place of excitement (the visual arousal of Beth’s seductive dance) to another (the frenzy of a chanting mob). It is the perfect precursor for what comes next—the marching of Birnam wood. Spark has fired up the unsuspecting audience creating an atmosphere in which he can ask them to disrobe and join him in overthrowing Macbeth. Filled with energy and enthusiasm they are one. The chanting has brought them together. This must happen before they can be propositioned to join the actors on stage.

Up to this point, the audience has been looking at the actors, as they sit anonymously in the darkened gallery. Those who choose to participate cross the line from spectator to performer. Those who watch passively accept their role as voyeur, only now they are not simply looking at actors but also one of their own. This is not what they came to see. The bodies on stage were sitting next to them. “Real” people, who for all intents and purposes are just like them, are naked on stage. By association, they are naked too. The audience members who join the cast on stage are seen, literally and figuratively, in a different light. They become more exciting, more dangerous than the rehearsed actors, because this moment has never happened before. When they return to their seats, will they put the clothing back on? The individual response to the anxiety of the moment is extremely telling.

After the audience has had their fun, the witches have an opportunity to show off their physical prowess. In the section, “KTF” (a reference to a Chicago dance company with ties to Living Canvas), the witches play a game of one-upsmanship. It is the final flourish of flesh as the show moves towards a resolution. They compete for the crowd’s affection. Completion of a task is not as important as entertaining the audience. Muscles are flexed by one witch in a position that resembles an iron cross in men’s gymnastics as another hangs horizontally from the set in a feat of superhuman strength, another might fall into the splits, or spin around in a circles really, really fast without falling down. For the actors, it is a moment physically to push them to the limit, but it is also a moment of pride. It enables them to say, “This is what I can do and no one else can.” These three that seem to merge as one at times are distinctly different bodies in this moment.

Flowing from feats of physical prowess, Beth returns one last time. Using the her own physician's lines she offers a strange apology for her sins.

Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all!

(*Macbeth* V, I, 75-79)

To wind the piece down with this bit of text changes its original meaning significantly. The “unnatural deeds” are ideas we impose on the body. Gender, applied in a strict hetero-normative sense, does breed “unnatural thoughts.” Breaking with naturalized gender turns people to gender prisoners in their own bodies.

To end at the beginning ensures that this is not a linear trajectory. This will happen again. It is debatable how much control the witches have over Macbeth in Shakespeare's play. In *Unsex Me Here...*, they are the puppet masters. They are the agents that toy with gender being of questionable identity in the first place. By not finishing the last line, the subject is suspended in mid-air for the audience to continue on the conversation.



Plate 5
“It is the bloody business.”

CHAPTER 5 I Enjoy Being a Girl...Wait Boy?

There is something very egalitarian about nudity. In a “natural” state, the disguises of culture are thrown aside. The fashion industry is founded on a strict gender binary. Not only does it dictate what indicates acceptable tropes of masculinity/femininity in any given season, but it also creates a culture which restricts and commodifies women, through high heeled shoes and the idealization of unrealistic body types, while at the same time reinforcing their role of consumer which is vital to the continuation of the hetero-normative flow of power. If clothing is a mask, then the body must support it. Without clothing, what is the body supporting?

Clearly, it is not simple being a woman. I remember going to my aunt’s house as a child and watching her prepare for the day. She was one of the most beautiful women I knew. There was a table covered in tiny jars and oddly shaped bottles where she would “put on her face.” First, were the curlers in the hair. Then, she slathered on multiple perfumed creams which turned her over-tanned skin into a slick, pungent garden. Her face was painted on in layers: foundation, power, color. When all was said and done, nearly an hour and a half later, she was beautiful.

Years later, when I was in high school, I remember thinking it strange that my mother would not leave the house without at least a little mascara. She was never one to

primp like my aunt, but she had a definite ritual that had to take place before she left the house. These two women in my life taught me that there is a disguise that is woman.

In “Womanliness as Masquerade” Joan Riviere finds that “Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (Riviere 113). Were these women, my aunt and mother, hiding masculinity? Or were they hiding something else? If so, what?

Fashion is a perpetual exercise in conformity. The continual attention to cosmetic changes is an attempt to distance the self from the body. If as Elizabeth Wilson posits “Dress is always ‘unspeakably meaningful,’” then how do we interpret meaning in an undressed body? (Wilson 148).

Ultimately, the fact that my mother and aunt feel the necessity of this ritual points to the fact that femininity is not natural state of being. They are both women, but that statement in and of itself is not enough for them to be able to live up to cultural expectations without creating a façade. All identity is a performance the trick it to not be caught acting.

Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* defines what is at stake in body politics. For her, “If gender consists of social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties, but, rather, *is replaced by* social meanings it takes on” (*Bodies* 5). There are discursive limitations when talking about sex. There is no access to the concept except by means of its construction, and sex is absorbed into gender which is, in Butler’s opinion, fiction.

Sex does not necessarily determine gender, but it gets confused as such. At the center of all of the confusion is the body. According to Luce Irigaray, “woman is to be nude, since she cannot be located, cannot remain in her place” (169). The post-feminist view of the body makes it a site for potential. Irigaray in particular uses the naked body as a metaphor for the reclaimed body—a body untouched by man and by extension language. Women’s and men’s bodies are not the same, but that does not mean that the gender assigned to them is “natural” nor does it mean that it is inseparable from the tactile body.

In working with both male and female bodies, it would be easy to vilify one and praise the other. Because women are defined in relation to men, it is also important to examine the construction of identity with regards to a male body. Acknowledging the layering of symbols in order to construct “feminine” implies that “masculine” is a product of the same process. Therefore, what is left after all of the layers have been stripped away? Is that even possible? Gender is not only an outward manifestation of identity, but also behavioral. When for a transgendered person to pass, s/he must learn the movement and behavioral patterns associated with the gender they are trying to outwardly portray.

This suggests that there is an intellectual manifestation of gender as well as a physical, and the two do not always go together. Habitual movement is a marker of societal conditioning not of an essential nature. As such, there are tropes of gender. Susan Brownmiller dissected femininity in her best-selling book of the same name. When talking about femininity, I accept that it is a real thing. It is not housed in a particular body, nor is masculinity.

It is important to note, that I am not searching for some universal woman or man. Rather, it is a comfort and understanding of one's own corporeality that I am trying to find, a place that is flexible and comfortable. I truly believe that the lived experience of an individual, in their own skin, is separate from how they are read by others. By turning the focus inward, the body is allowed to speak for itself.

Confrontation of the naked reality of the body is essential to finding this comfort. When something can be hidden, when it does not have to be looked at for any prolonged amount of time, when few others will ever see it, it can be ignored. We must become comfortable with looking at our bodies. You don't have to love your body, just come to terms with it. This comfort is empowering because it can diffuse the gaze of others.

Trinh T. Minh-ha points out in her essay "Write Your Body" that "we do not *have* bodies, we *are* bodies" (Minh-ha 258). So often we think of our bodies as things we possess, separate from our intellect (and for some of us our soul). To possess a body, assumes that the Platonic mind/body split is truth. If you are a body, then mind and body are inseparable. There is no space for identity that does not exist outside of the body.

As stated previously, in choosing to rip apart *Macbeth*, I've chosen a play from an era where cross-dressing was accepted on stage, in both the sense that gender and class were transgressed. Sumptuary laws were in place, and despite the make-believe nature of theatre, it could not be ignored that "The controversy about cross-dressed acting [. . .] also tapped into larger cultural anxieties. Did clothes, in fact, make the man – or woman? [. . .] these were deep-seated anxieties about the possibilities that identity was not fixed, that there was no underlying 'self' at all" (Garber 177).

In her theorizing about drag performance Butler notes, “Imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (Butler 75). The performance of femininity by Mac in *Unsex Me Here...* is not a drag performance. He has no clothes on. None the less, the performance of gender in, particularly in the performance of femininity, makes it seem more “real” or everyday than a drag performance. As a result, it is jarring for those familiar to the play and invested in the gender hierarchy, and at the same time, more natural for those exposed to the material for the first time.

Which witch is which?

What exactly is the gender of Shakespeare’s witches? Does it matter? During the rehearsal process, I encouraged my three witches to bring as much of themselves to the characters as possible. The conversation of gender never came up, because it didn’t matter. That is not to say that the witches are without a gender—far from it. Rather, in performance, they became whatever gender the actor playing them happened to be.

For this very reason, I imagined it would be very easy for me to step into both the roles of Spark and Twig as an understudy. This situation was a way for me to put some of my ideas about gender and its performance to the test. If I could seamlessly pull it off, then gender is a state of mind and not a body. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was forced to perform half of the run in two different roles both written for and choreographed on male bodies. The audience had no idea except for an announcement at the beginning of the show that I would be performing either the role of Spark or Twig.

In performance, I did not feel that I was “being a man.” Conversely, I didn’t feel like I was “being a woman.” I didn’t even approach the roles thinking about gender. I practiced the movement patters that the actors followed while on stage, and then found how my body best performed them.

In my acting career, I have been asked to play men. Often, this involved many hours of observation to see how men move, interact with other men, and interact with women all to figure out what is at the heart of “manliness.” I must confess, I still have no clue. What is even more entertaining is that, after cast, the production team typically realized all too late that I very clearly have the body of a woman. So, I have spent much of my time on stage in sports bras, ace bandages, and hats. There have been a lot of hats. Apparently, if you wear a hat, it hides the fact that you have boobs. Go figure.

So, how exactly do you understudy a man in a naked show? You don’t. When I assumed the role of Spark during the second week of the run, I stepped into the character. Bodies are imaginary. They are ideas. There was nothing about Spark that required a penis. There was also nothing about Spark that a vagina was going to take away.

Spark was played by Michael Schmueck. My body is very different from Mike’s. First off, he’s a man. Beyond that, he is an ectomorph with short, tight muscles. His center of gravity is higher than mine. At rest, he has a slightly collapsed chest. When he moves, there is a self-conscious stiffness to it; however, he has wonderful upper-body strength which we took advantage of in the choreography. I, on the other hand, am a woman. My body is more mesomorphic. My hour-glass figure is flexible. I carry myself very erect due to my years of gymnastic training. When I move, there is a sensuality associated with it.

We are two very opposite bodies. Yet, we both played the same character. If we were both female, this would not be a huge stretch of the imagination. Many great actresses have played Lady Macbeth. Sarah Siddons, Sarah Bernhardt, and Dame Judi Dench are just a few of the noteworthy women who have embodied this role. Each one brought something different to it finding something within the character to which they felt a deep connection. Let's just remember that in the long list of actresses that have played Lady M, at the very top of that list is a man.

So, stepping in for a man is not that big of a deal. After an hour rehearsal, I was part of the show. The performance was seamless. There was nothing jarring or artificial about my portrayal of Spark, because I was not trying to be something that I am not. What is more, the relative ease with which I was able to substitute myself into the role of Spark confirms that the ideas about gender that we assign to specific bodies based on genitalia are not fixed.

Gender is fluid. It exists more as a continuum than a binary. An individual slides around constantly negotiating gender in their daily interactions, and it has nothing to do with hiding one's hair or smashing down breasts in order to "look male." Gender is behavior. Because we do not exist as stereotypes, we do not fall into neat categories of gender.

Not so fast...

Later in the run, I had to replace Michael Glazer, the actor playing Twig. Again, two very different body types. Beyond, being differently sexed, he is the epitome of the classical male form—a living, breathing copy of Michelangelo's David.

I approached this role in much the same way. This time, however, I found that there were some dissonances between myself and the character. When conceiving the witches of *Unsex Me Here...*, I approached the characters like clowns finding dominant features of the actors' personalities and blowing them out of proportion. Whereas Michael Schmuck and I were compatible personalities as far as Spark was concerned, Twig was a different matter.

The name was a clear reference to his genitalia. I clearly do not have the same equipment. No penis. No penis joke. When placed on my body, the name Twig, became about my weight. But clearly, my body is not that of a twig. Despite our best efforts to make the joke work, it was never completely successful. Another discrepancy was in the line "finger of blaspheming Jew" that occurs in the second scene, "Blue Balls." It is one of the ingredients from the witches brew in *Macbeth*. Ultimately this line was changed when I performed the role, since it did not carry the same significance for me.

By stepping into the role of Twig, I learned some things about the essence of Michael Glazer, how he sees himself and how he would like to be seen. His identity depends on his body identifying him as masculine; however, there is a self-deprecating element to it. His insistence on the Jew line, of course, reveals the fact that his faith is a major factor in defining his identity.

Inconclusively speaking

We see by contrast. That is what makes binaries so attractive. Difference is clear and never messy in a binary. There is a difference between a man and a woman. That

difference does not dictate gender. Clearly, there is a difference between a male body and a female body as far as anatomy is concerned. There is also a difference between two males. It is not as drastic, but none the less there is a difference.

Judith Bulter notes that “If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on” (*Bodies* 132). Gender and sex come into play both in the reassignment of lines of text but also in the cast substitutions in *Unsex Me Here...* during the weeks in which I was substituted for male witches.

Why was it easier to become one man than another? There are many intertwining factors that lead to the creation of one’s identity. Michael Glazer wants you to see him as a man. He has taken steps to physically portray that role. Since playing the role of “man,” is such an important role in his life, it was an important role for his character.

Glazer presents an interesting problem for me. His naked body still serves as a mask in the same way that clothes do for others. His body has been disciplined and crafted consciously to look a specific way. He has conditioned his body past the point of fitness. Consciously, he has crafted a masculine body that resists interpretation as feminine. When female frames sport muscle mass on that scale, such as we see in professional female body-builders, it represents something unnatural. By clinging that steadfastly to the masculine end of the gender spectrum, Glazer made it very difficult for me to step into his role. It would seem that, in this case, gender is proved intrinsically linked to the physical body.

Schmueck’s witch was not based in a conscious portrayal of self. He constructed his character’s identity based on his impulses. In performance, the audience saw

personality type that was gender-specific but not body specific. By gender specific, I do not mean masculine/feminine specific, rather existing in some middle ground that was comfortable and natural for both Michael Schmueck and me. Does that make the two of us the same gender?

Gender is a complicated idea. My best guess is no and yes. From my experiences stepping into roles that were clearly made for male actors in addition to other activities in my life (such as fight directing, ballroom dancing, and yes, even shopping), I exist on a sliding scale of gender. I drift from one side of the scale to another based on who I am with and what I am doing. I do have a default setting. It is at odds with my body. My tendency to be slightly masculine when read against my female body results in being labeled “bitch.”

In *The Body* Tiffany Atkinson states, “The modern body is thus doubly ‘occupied’ by the subject, being both the fleshy house of self *and* an unruly terrain whose mapping and control becomes, for the self-disciplining individual, a matter of almost military exactitude” (Atkinson 8). Thus, the body is both a site of the intimately familiar and the ultimately unknown.

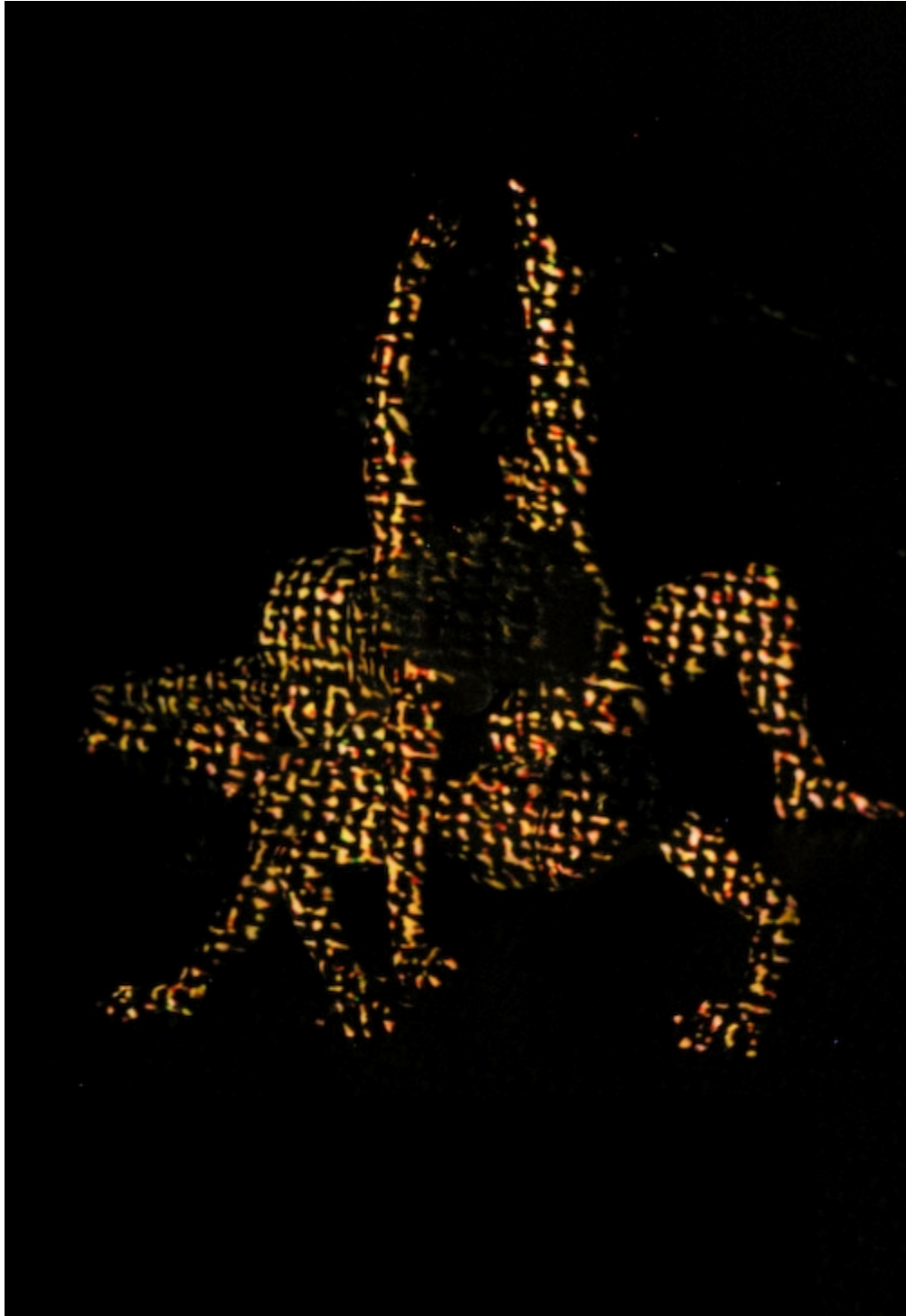


Plate 6
“Double, double toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble”

CHAPTER 6 Stripped Down Ritual

Each new wave of artists has a different means for uncovering the truth as aesthetics violently shift. As Richard Schechner posits in *Performance Theory*, “theatre history can be given an overall braided structure continuously interrelating efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theatre)” (132). This structure makes it possible for multiple models of theatricality to exist at once, albeit for very different reasons.

Theatre with a ritualistic element aims to change something about those who participate in the event. The theatre of the 1960s, including Schechner’s work with The Performance Group (TPG), was at a place of intersection. Ritual came into contact with theatre blurring the line between spiritual experience and entertainment. Traditional audience/performer relationships were challenged forcing the theatergoer to exist in a heightened state, and “Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which include not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus the conditions for art production and reception changed in a crucial aspect” (Fischer-Lichte 22).

An artistic atmosphere is created which fosters activity on the part of the observer. The call to action rips them out of their passive role immediately elevating the level of interaction between the rehearsed performers and the spectator performers. It engenders anxiety because it holds the audience member accountable for being part of what

transpires. It is a crisis of liminality which invites (forcibly) the audience to change their behavioral patterns. The blurring of the line between spectator and performer is a sign of the changing relationship between aesthetic producer and consumer.

Unsex Me Here... is a production that follows in this tradition. Theatrically speaking, allowing the audience to be and active part of the performance, to the point of disrobing and joining the cast onstage to play, shifts the performance from the realm of entertainment to something more ritualistic. Audience members experience a moment of crisis where they are asked actively address the reasons why they hide their bodies. Their offering of their corporeal selves for examination contains elements of ritual. They are separated from their fellow spectators, join the rehearsed cast on stage as both audience and actor, and return to their seats having experienced something that has changed them as individuals. At the same time, the seated audience is left to deal with a volatile theatrical moment concerning unpredictable bodies in close proximity.

Schechener played with audience/performer relationships in pieces like *Dionysus in 69*. Tactile interaction was at play. The tension behind physical contact, the touch, makes such a public act volatile because “theatre represents a public medium while physical contact represents the private sphere of intimacy” (Fischer-Lichte 60). In this example, seeing led to touching which actually mimics the process of objectification leading to possession.

It is difficult for those who did not attend a performance of *Unsex Me Here...* to grasp how the audience participation worked. Unlike the experimental theatres of the 1960s, specifically TPG, the interaction with the audience is not about the tactile or the

sensual intimacy of the mingling of flesh. Rather, since the entire project focuses on liberating the body from, among many things, sexual objectification, the interaction is purely voluntary and is more about the audience participants seeing their own bodies in a different light. While the actors contact one another in the scripted portions of the show, this improvisatory time is an opportunity for audience members to shed their social masks and celebrate what is underneath.

Scar Tissue

The Living Canvas spreads the message of body acceptance in every performance. Inviting the audience to transgress socially constructed rules concerning the propriety of the body crates a literal moment of stripping down. More importantly, it uncovers the very system that puts those practices in place. This extends beyond coming to terms with one's own corporeality, but also the systems of control that encompass sources of identity. Coupled with the text that is constantly playing with ideas of gender and making it strange, *Unsex Me Here...* is moving beyond the Living Canvas' typical message.

As Elin Diamond notes, "When gender is 'alienated' or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system *as* a sign system . . . as a system of beliefs and behavior mapped across the bodies of females and males, which reinforces the status quo" (79). From an outside perspective, the Living Canvas appears to be exposure for the sake of exposure and it is; however, exposure of what?

The Living Canvas, and particularly with the production *Unsex Me Here...*, exposes more than just the naked human form. It wrestles with the questions, fears, and

doubts we have about our bodies in relation to others. The naked body is a canvas which is colored and covered by ideas leaving it marked. Even undressed we bear the markings of our histories. Our encounters with hetero-normative power structures scar our bodies, so that even naked we are marked. What, then, is the point of nude performance if we cannot escape the markings of our past?

The human body is amazingly resilient. It is pliable. Our scars will fade, but projects such as the Living Canvas are important. Confrontation is the key. I find Jerzy Grotowski's rhetoric of transformation applicable to the Living Canvas. Grotowski put the actor through a series of "shocks" in order to provoke a change in the artist. In the preface to *Towards a Poor Theatre* Peter Brook defines them as:

The shock of confronting himself in the face of simple irrefutable challenges.
The shock of catching sight of his own evasions, tricks, and clichés.
The shock of sensing something of his own vast and untapped resources.
The shock of being forced to ask why he is an actor at all.
The shock of being forced to recognize that such questions do exist . . . the time
comes
when they must be faced . . .
The shock of seeing that somewhere in the world acting is an art of absolute
dedication, monastic and total.

(*Poor Theatre* 13)

The imagery of the shock invokes an awakening. Grotowski wanted his actors to live in a heightened state of awareness.

Unsex Me Here... invites the actors to experience a similar series of shocks questioning their relationships with their bodies. What are the "evasions, tricks, and clichés" of gender? What are my own vast and untapped resources? The systems of identification must be questioned in order for the performer to create art. Transcending the

mundane is vital to the artistic process. For the Living Canvas, removing clothing is the first step in this journey.

The naked body is scarred. The process of confronting a constructed identity is complicated and complex, but what is the end result? Like peeling back the layers of an onion, does it eventually leave us with nothing? This metaphor is inadequate. For this process of examination is both an exposure of our marked bodies and marking them in completely different ways. It is both a subtractive *and* additive process. New marks are made of the body as others fade but do not disappear. This production takes that necessary first step—undressing—in order to address who we are.

Art as a Vehicle

The Living Canvas provides an opportunity for actors to explore their bodies via the intimacy of performing nude. At the same time, “clothing” them in light makes the bodies appear something other than naked for the audience, the result of which is overwhelming. First time Canvas performers often have never appeared nude on stage, and enter into the project with a good deal of hesitation. By the end of the process, they have greater psycho/physical connection not only to their work on stage, but also in their daily lives.

In *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski says, “The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form” (*Poor Theatre* 21). He speaks metaphorically about nudity, but my work with The Living Canvas

has been a case study in literal application of nudity to the actor's work. Stripping the actors of their customary accoutrements reveals not only their literal backbones and all the flesh that surrounds it, but allows them to be more fully present with nothing to hide behind.

Grotowski's work was a process of stripping away the actor's clutter, in the form of insecurities which lead to masking of identity, making the "via negativa—not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks" (*Poor Theatre* 17). Nudity in the work of an actor works to eradicate one of the most fundamental blocks of the actor—bodily shame.

Art can be a vehicle for change both in performer and spectator. For Grotowski, "The actor is a man who works in public with his body, offering it publicly" (*Poor Theatre* 33). In this production, I used the work of the Living Canvas to uncover the hidden truths of the actor's body and how the human form, laid bare, is a site for transformation for both performer and spectator.

Literally speaking...

Grotowski believed in a theatrical experience that permanently altered the individual. As such, he was interested in theatre that moved towards ritual attacking the structures of culture. His theatre "provides the shock which rips off the mask, enabling us to give ourselves nakedly to something which is impossible to define but which contains Eros and Caritas" (*Poor Theatre* 22). While he is speaking metaphorically about nudity enabling the performer to discover deeper universal meaning, a literal interpretation bears the same fruits. Grotowski made extreme physical and emotional demands of his actors. In

their work, “everything is concentrated on the ‘ripening’ of the actor which is expressed in a tension towards the extreme, by a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one’s own intimacy . . . the actor makes a total gift of himself” (*Poor Theatre* 16).

Those who have worked with The Living Canvas before, express that working nude demands full psycho-physical commitment. According to Diana Christopher who played Droplet, “After a min [sic] or so being on stage, I almost forgot that I was performing naked” (Christopher 01March2009). It is this moment, where the actor almost forgets that s/he is naked in front of strangers in which I am most interested for it is this moment where the actor is present.

In the words of Michael Schmueck who played Spark, “The feeling in front of the audience changes over time. That first time it was exhilarating and nerve racking. What if they hate it? What if they laugh at me? What if I screw up? The nervous energy was humongous. However, like most things in life...it actually became routine. By the second week of our run, I could completely lose awareness of the audience through most of the show...instead focusing on what I was doing. Getting naked at that point was like getting into any other costume. It transformed me into performance time” (Schmueck 02March2009).

It is important to remember that, while nude, these actors are, in a sense, clothed. Artistic Director Pete Guither jokes that, “There were 127 costume changes in [*Unsex Me Here...*]” (Guither). Guither uses his projections to provide another source of imagery for the actor. The actor becomes an emotional chameleon. For Grotowski, “the costume which

fails to reflect the changing mood of the actor and which the latter cannot transform, pertains to the plastic arts and not the theatre” (Grotowski 115).

The effects of working with The Living Canvas are long lasting. According to Christopher, “. . . there’s a huge vulnerability aspect that goes into Canvas work. And I think if you can perform nude, you can do most anything you set your mind to” (Christopher 01March2009). This sentiment is echoed by many who participate in the project. Performing nude, forces the actor to cross a line of personal comfort that forces them to come face to face with their own corporeality. The lack of tangible costuming, makes hiding impossible and forces the actor to use his/her instrument to create character.

Liminally titillating

Grotowski’s ideas about shock and transformation reached beyond the performers to include the audience in the act “The intensity, the honesty and precision of his work can only leave one thing behind. A challenge. But not for a fortnight, not for once in a lifetime. Daily” (*Poor Theatre* 14). For the actors, this manifests itself in both the practice of his/her craft and in daily living. For the audience, the starting point is going to the theatre. They must enter into a liminal space where they experience the shock.

Unsex Me Here...approaches the audience on multiple fronts. It places them in a traditional voyeuristic audience/performer relationship, engages with the characters via dialog, it asks for physical participation, and culminates in a dialog between actors and audience in the form of a talkback.

The audience at a Living Canvas performance is an active part of the transformational act. The titillating notion of attractive naked people draws many to the show; however, once the lights go down, they are placed in a liminal state of being both spectator and actor. *Unsex Me Here...* broke the fourth wall in the “Porter/Knock Knock” scene. Building upon the rapport built in the previous dialog with the audience, the actors then lead a rousing chant with the audience of dueling “Double double toil and troubles” akin to a pep rally working the audience into a playful state before asking for volunteers to drop-trow and join them in becoming Birnam Wood. The fourth wall, in this moment, is obliterated. The spectator/actor line blurs as the naked spectator crosses the threshold of the stage.

These brave souls willing to expose themselves are Grotowski’s ideal audience members. He was:

awaiting a spectator who would really like to see himself, see the true aspect of his hidden nature. A spectator willing to be shocked into casting off the mask of life, a spectator ready to accept the attack, the transgression of common norms and representations, and who—thus denuded, thus disarmed, and moved by a sincerity bordering on the excessive—consents to contemplate his own personality.

(Grotowski 116).

Grotowski wanted to extend the experience of transformation to include the audience as well as the performers.

Not only are their attitudes about the bodies they are faced with altered during the performance but they are asked to, and often do—there was not a single performance of *Unsex Me Here...* where members of the audience did not join the cast on stage, transgress their own restrictions they place on themselves.

During a post-show talkback, one audience member, who chose to be a part of the audience participation, related his experience. This was not a preplanned moment, but rather, caught up in what was happening before him, he found himself compelled to join the performers. For this particular audience member, the simple act of disrobing became a moment of transformation. The performance left the spectator forever changed. What is the line between art and life? In the moment that the witches invite the audience on stage, is this art? Life? Both?

The talkback sessions are an integral part of the Living Canvas experience. It transitions the conversation of the performance piece into a form that, hopefully, will continue. The actors put their clothes back on and the lights come back up. It is a chance for people to talk to one another not only about what they have just witnessed, but what they experience living in their skin everyday.



Plate 7
The Witches torment Mac

Final Thoughts

The naked body is a work of art. It can be powerful, graceful, weak, beautiful, and even grotesque. For the actor, it is his/her instrument. It is a text. The physical prowess of wo/man is magnificent, and there lies a great capacity to convey what mere words cannot express. Theatre should be rich with movement and possess a gestic language. When we see someone feeling something intense, we feel it too. The plays that really move audiences are the ones where actors discover the emotion in their bodies. It rips it out of the audience.

Theatre has a great power to move people in a way that other performance idioms do not. Live people telling stories to a live audience is something very special and sacred. It must be preserved, but cannot exist within antiquity. So, let it reach for the unattainable. Let it lay bare the artist's imagination for public consumption. Imbue it with the alchemical power that it is capable of possessing.

Physical truth is emotional truth. To be present on stage, the actor must come to terms with how they are and how they are seen. We are bombarded by images of unrealistic bodies every day, and every day we wear our disguises. We play roles in life that become so real that it is difficult to divorce ourselves from them. Character, and in a greater sense theatre as an artistic idiom, is about transformation of the corporeal self not

the illusion of it, for “the actor who struts across the stage with padded chest, false nose and delicately applied make-up has no bearing on the essence of theatre” (Grotowski 114).

In the acting classroom, how can we apply the lessons of *The Living Canvas*? Certainly, we cannot have students running around naked without the administration taking note, nor is every student in a place where they can participate in this sort of work. However, implementing a strict dress code of leotards and tights, clothing that provides maximum coverage while not hiding the form beneath, is a close approximation. The Polish Laboratory Theatre used “nakedness” in a similar way. But why bother with this in the first place? Rarely, are actors called upon to play a scene, let alone an entire production nude. Simply, you must be comfortable with who you are in order to be present. Underneath a corset and yards of crinoline, I must be at home in my body for it, not the costume, is my instrument. After all, as Grotowski once said, “Self-research is simply the right of our profession, our first duty” (Grotowski/Schechner 248).

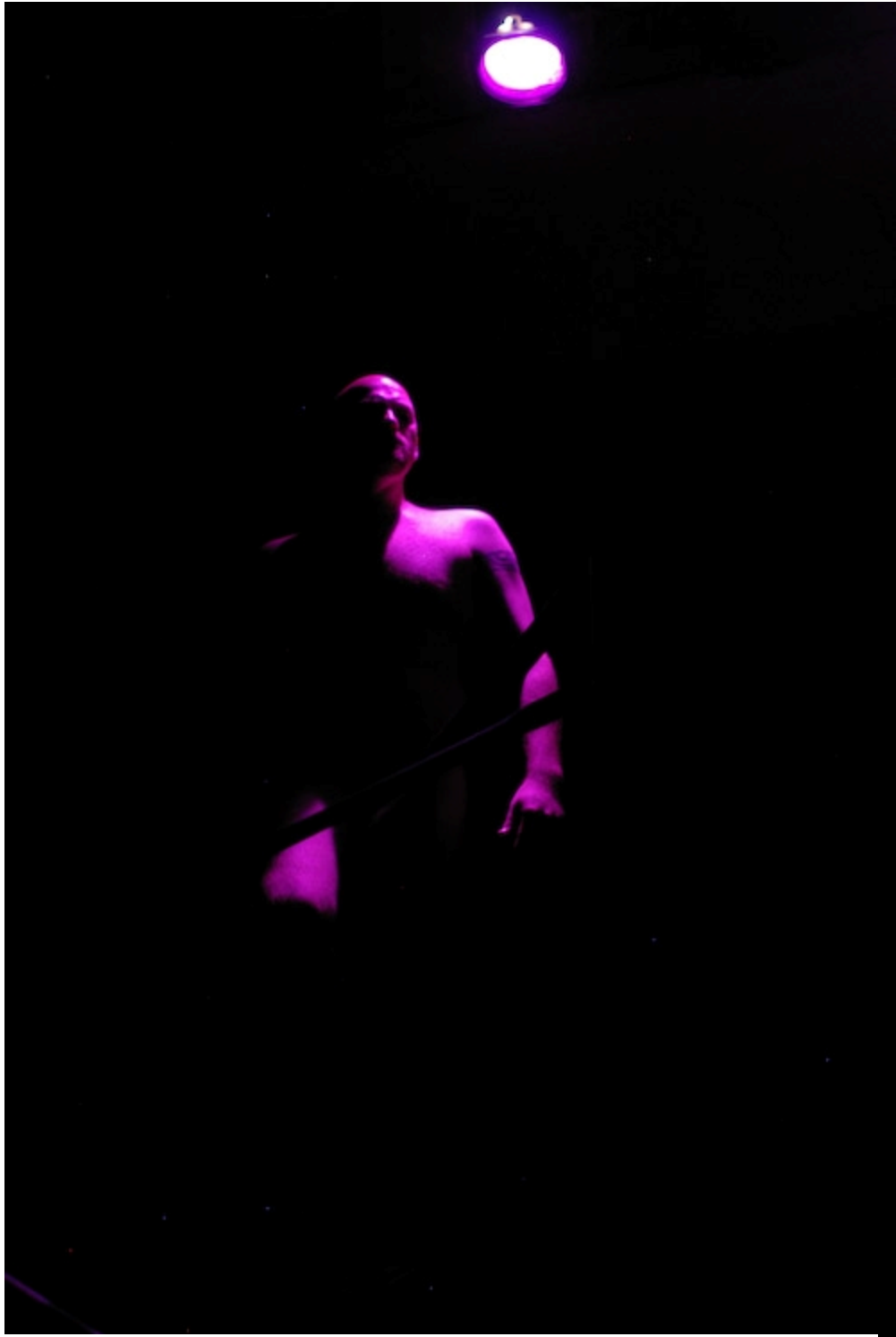


Plate 8

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow”

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APPENDIX A

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Every action is a performance. What we do and how we do it is a text that gives voice to the culture in which we live. Within the solidarity of culture, however, there is still the individual who incorporates personal experience in the reading of a text. It is for this very reason that I have often thought playwrights take themselves a little too seriously. In the case of Shakespeare, I think we, the audience, revere the text so highly that we try to close it to interpretation. The act of going to see a Shakespearean play is often a display of cultural capital, for often neither the audience nor the actors quite understand the words which they imbue with so much power. So, I took out some of the words in order to examine what is left.

There is a love story in *Macbeth* that gets lost in all of the carnage, for the action of the play could not be sustained without it. The construction of gender and the fluidity of it are at play in *Unsex Me Here*. The marriage of these two ambitious souls fuses them culturally into one being, thus leading both of them down the same tragic path. Contrary to what Banquo says in II,iii, “And when we have our naked frailties hid, / That suffer in exposure, let us meet, / And question this most bloody piece of work, / To know it further,” we’ve also taken away all of the costumes so that we cannot hide.

Though we all take our clothes off at some point in time during the day, the naked body is dangerous. Without the garments that signify power and position, we are left with the one thing we all have in common: the place in which we live—our naked bodies.

APPENDIX B

Unsex Me Here...



Plate 9
Beth stands alone on stage



Plate 10
“Come to my woman’s breasts”

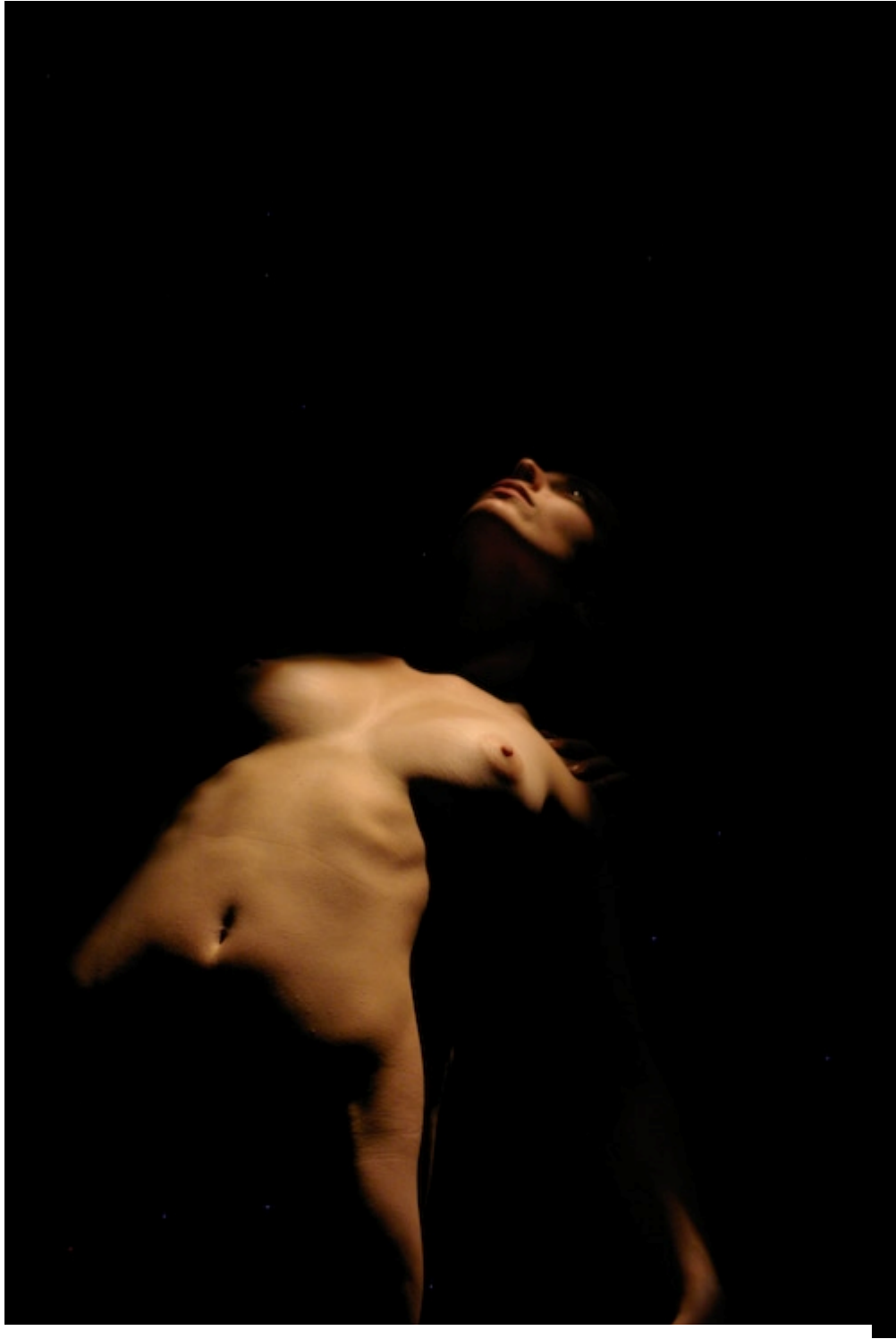


Plate 11
“Hold, hold!”

1. Beth Unsexy

Beth is alone on stage in a simple black wrap dress. During the following monologue, the sound of breathing is heard as Witch Three enters from US and engages in a grotesque strip tease with Beth. In the end, she removes the dress herself.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

2. Blue Balls

Lights go out. Three lighted balls roll across the stage signifying the presence of the Witches. They dance.

TWIG

Toad,

SPARK

that under cold stone

DROPLET

Days and nights has thirty-one

Swelter'd . . . red . . .

SPARK

. . .red . . . venom

sleeping got,

DROPLET

Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.

ALL

Round about the cauldron go;

In the poison'd entrails throw.

TWIG

days and nights, days and nights

. . . red . . .

3. Birnam

The Witches become Birnam Wood. They dance.

4. Schizophrenic

BETH

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold
Yet I do fear thy nature
Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles and trammel up the consequence.
Out damned spot! God forgive us all!
We still have judgment here.
We but teach bloody instructions, full of sound and fury.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight?
It is the bloody business.

5. Robot Battle

The witches and Mac engage in a battle. They are both friend and foe. The movements are mechanical and angular.

6. Mac Unsexy

Mac is on the platform.

MAC

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

7. Unsexy Improv

The three Witches improvise on the theme of "Unsex me here."



Plate 12
Blue Balls

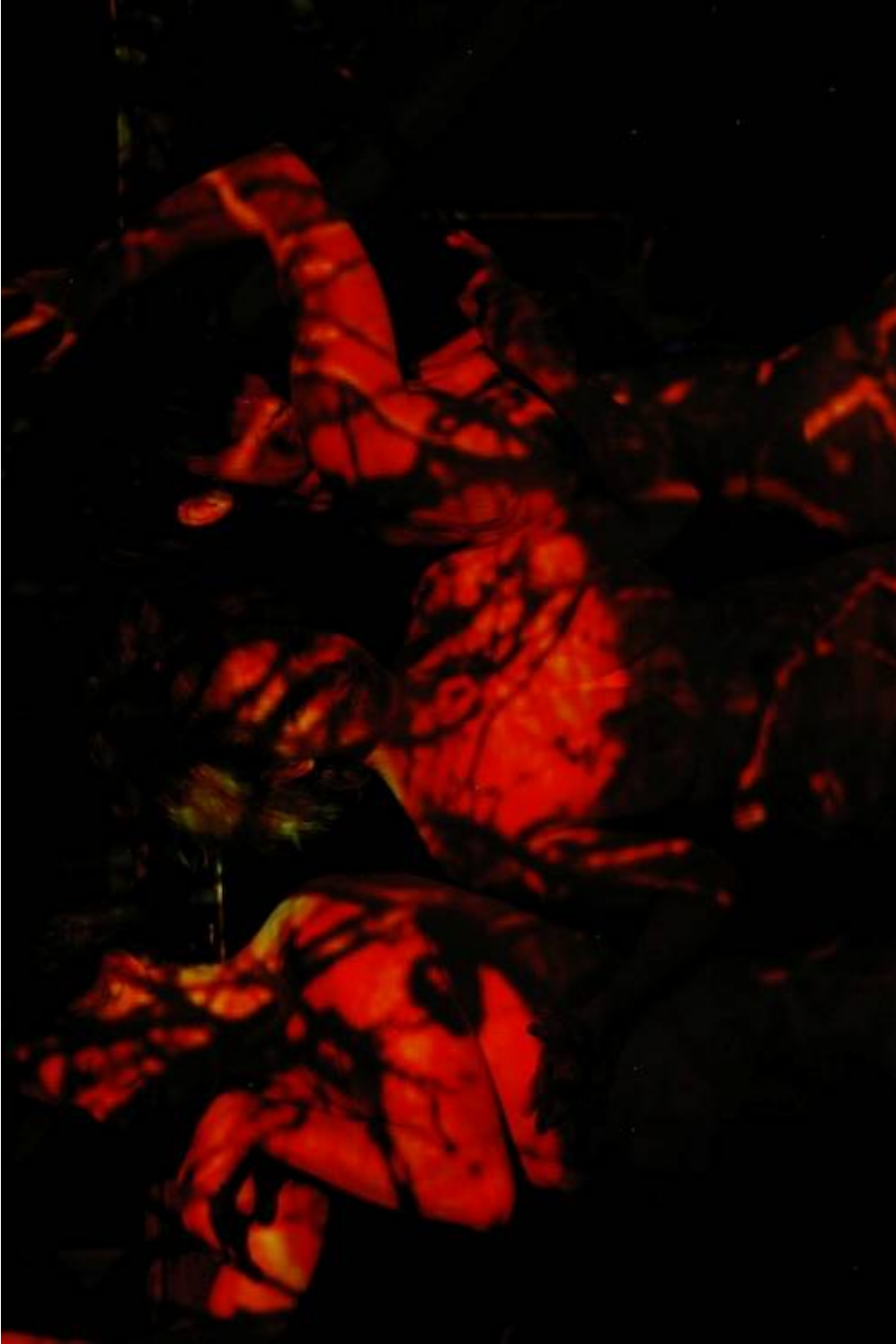


Plate 13
Birnam



Plate 14
Mac leads his war machine in battle.

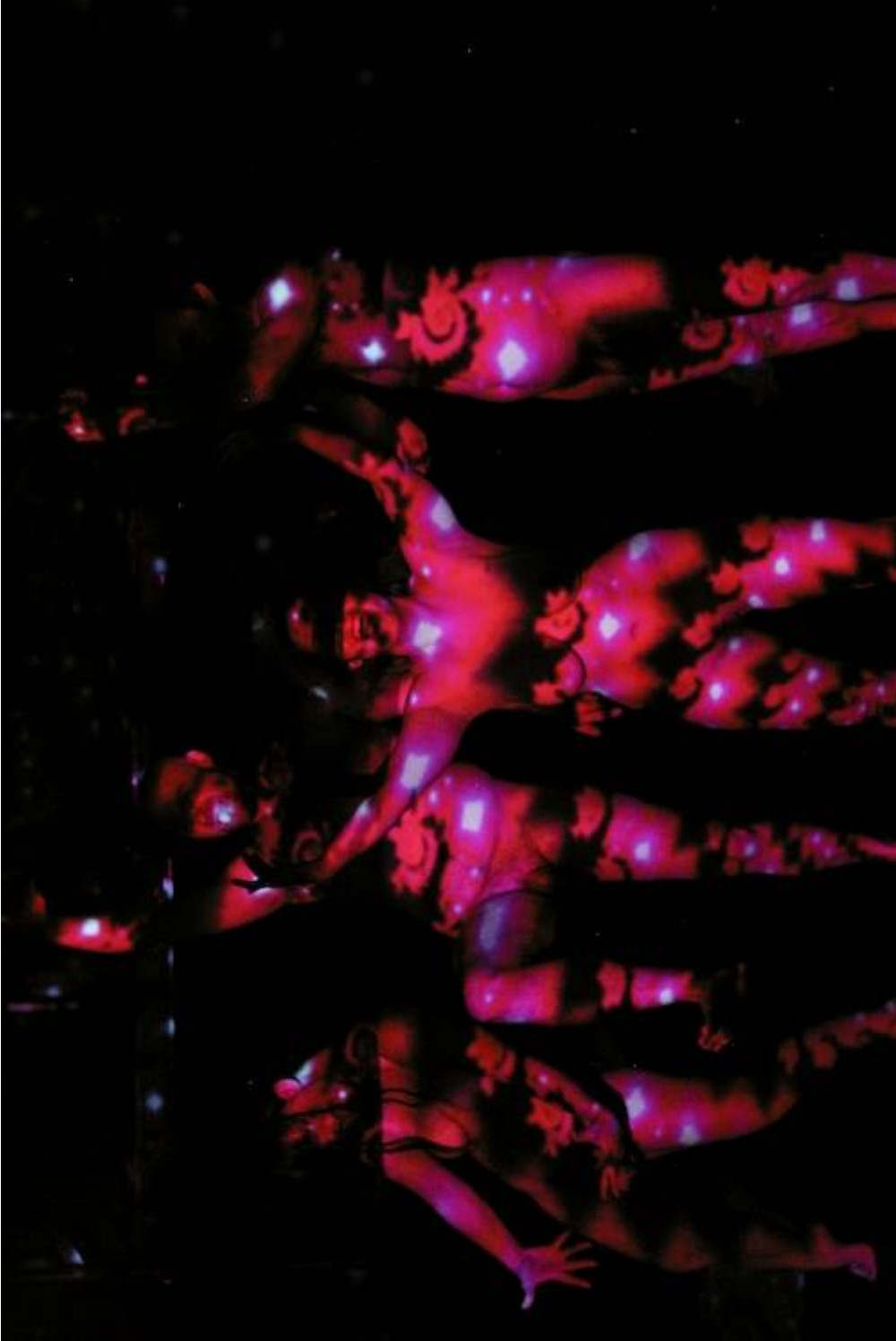


Plate 15
Victory in slo-mo

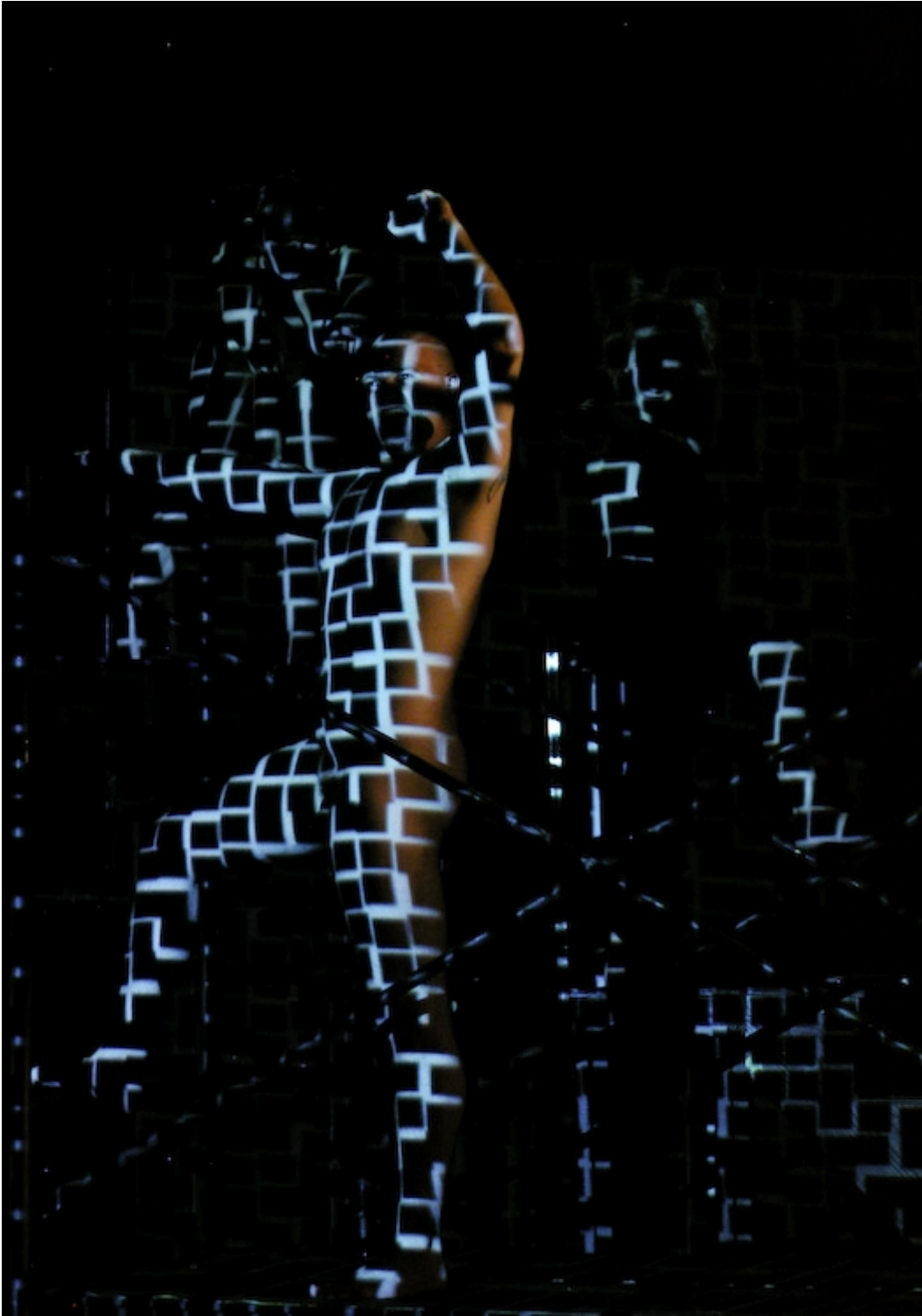


Plate 16
“Come to my . . . woman’s breasts?”

8. Hope Drunk Ballet

Beth enters and dances an off balance ballet. While she dances Mac speaks.

MAC

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

She finishes the dance.

LADY MACBETH

Yet here's a spot.
Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why,
then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my
lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we
fear who knows it, when none can call our power to
account?--Yet who would have thought the old man
to have had so much blood in him.

9. Beth Death

Lady M does dance-essence of showering/bathing while the witches take turns manipulating her.

10. Do It Quickly!

Mac stands over Beth's dead body. He turns away. As he speaks, she wakes and presses him towards the wall.

MAC

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well

It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,

BETH

... do it quickly!

... Glamis ...

... Cawdor ...

... King!

We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.

Just do it.
Come on Mac.
Do it quickly!

screw your courage to the sticking-
Place.

She exits.

11. Knock! Knock!

TWIG: Knock, knock!

DROPLET: Who's there,

TWIG: Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty

DROPLET: [tries to get it in...] Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty Who?

TWIG: [puzzled, continues] Knock, knock!

DROPLET: Who's there?

TWIG: Faith, here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose.

DROPLET: Faith, here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose.... WHO????

SPARK: Wait. This is all wrong!

TWIG: What do you mean? This is the Porter scene – that's the way Shakespeare wrote it.

DROPLET: But they're not proper knock-knock jokes.

SPARK: Shakespeare may have invented the form, but he sure didn't perfect it.

TWIG: OK, smart-ass, how should it go?

SPARK: Knock-knock

GALE: Who's there?

SPARK: Toby.

GALE: Toby who?

SPARK: Toby or not toby, that is the question

GALE: Wrong play!

SPARK (to audience): Knock, knock

(AUDIENCE: Who's there?)

SPARK: Norma lee – normally you don't have a naked person in front of you doing knock-knock jokes, do you?

TWIG: (to DROPLET) Knock, knock

DROPLET: Who's there?

TWIG: Interrupting cow.

DROPLET: Interrupting cow...

TWIG: (overlapping) MOOOOOOO!!!!

DROPLET: (to TWIG): Knock, knock

TWIG: Who's there?

DROPLET: Pecan – pecan someone your own size

SPARK (to audience): Knock, knock

(AUDIENCE: Who's there?)

SPARK: Repeat

(AUDIENCE: Repeat who?)

ALL: Who, who, who, who, who...

DROPLET (to audience): You go first

(AUDIENCE: Knock, knock)

DROPLET: Who's there?

(AUDIENCE: ...)

TWIG (to SPARK): Knock, knock

SPARK: Who's there?

TWIG: Candice – can this be the last knock knock?

SPARK (see if audience has favorites, then continue)

Now that's how you do knock-knock jokes. Not: "Faith, here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose"

DROPLET: Yeah, too much talky-talky

SPARK: Shakespeare was mortal and limited. We, however, are not bound by anything – we can change reality just like that [snaps fingers for projection change]

DROPLET: And he was all hung up on chronological order.

TWIG: No imagination, either. Think about it. Witch one, Witch two and witch three? Are you kidding me? I have a name... thank you very much. It's Twig.

SPARK: (to audience member) I'm Spark, pleased to meet you. (pretends to get a static spark from attempting to shake hands).

DROPLET: (with dramatic pose) And I'm Gale.

TWIG: You're droplet.

DROPLET: No, I'm Gale (starts explaining about the power of Gales)

TWIG AND SPARK: Droplet, droplet, droplet.

(General insults)

SPARK (interrupting) Hey, shouldn't we tell these folks why we interrupted our little show?

TWIG: Oh, right.

DROPLET: So we could make fun of their Athenian weeds?

TWIG: Droplet...

DROPLET: It's GALE!

SPARK: (to audience) Anyway...As witches, we have a lot of power. We can bend time and space, foreshadow, deconstruct, and manipulate young Beth and Mac at will. But...

TWIG: There are only three of us.

SPARK: How many of you noticed the marching of Birnam wood in an earlier scene?

TWIG: Not much of a forest with just three of us, is it?

DROPLET: Doesn't pose any real threat to Dunsinane

SPARK: We need more trees. So we're going to do it again later in the show – and any would-be witches or... trees in the audience are welcome to shed your strange garments and become part of the forest.

DROPLET: We'll let you know. For now, just screw your courage to the sticking place.

But before we leave you, how many of you know the story of *Macbeth*?

Witches engage the audience in piecing together a synopsis of Macbeth.

Do you have any favorite lines?

Witches take lines from audience members. They are looking for the line "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" If the audience does not offer the line, SPARK should "read" the line on DROPLET'S body. There is a huddle. DROPLET is elected to play the next scene. SPARK and TWIG exit.

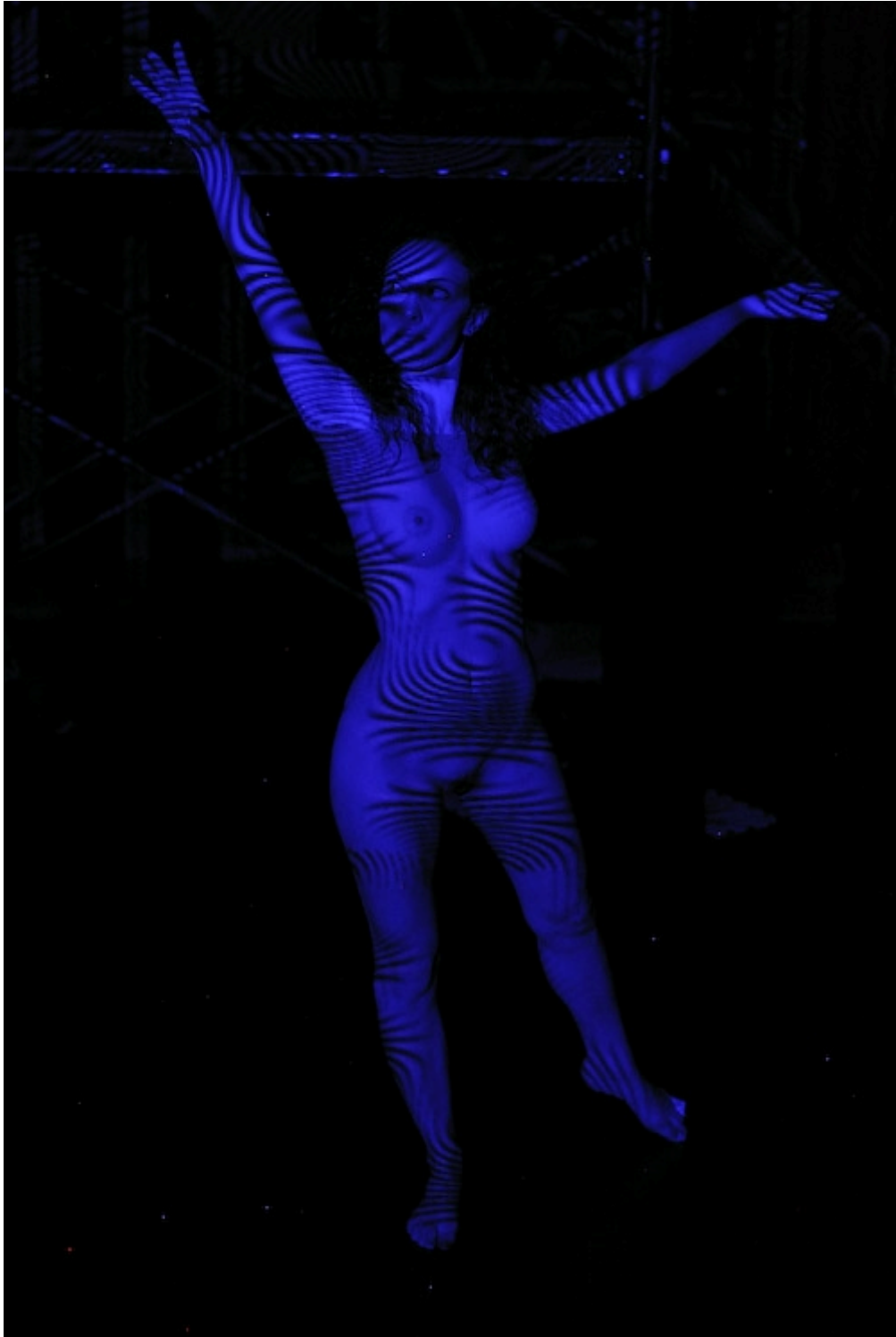


Plate 17
Hope Drunk Ballet

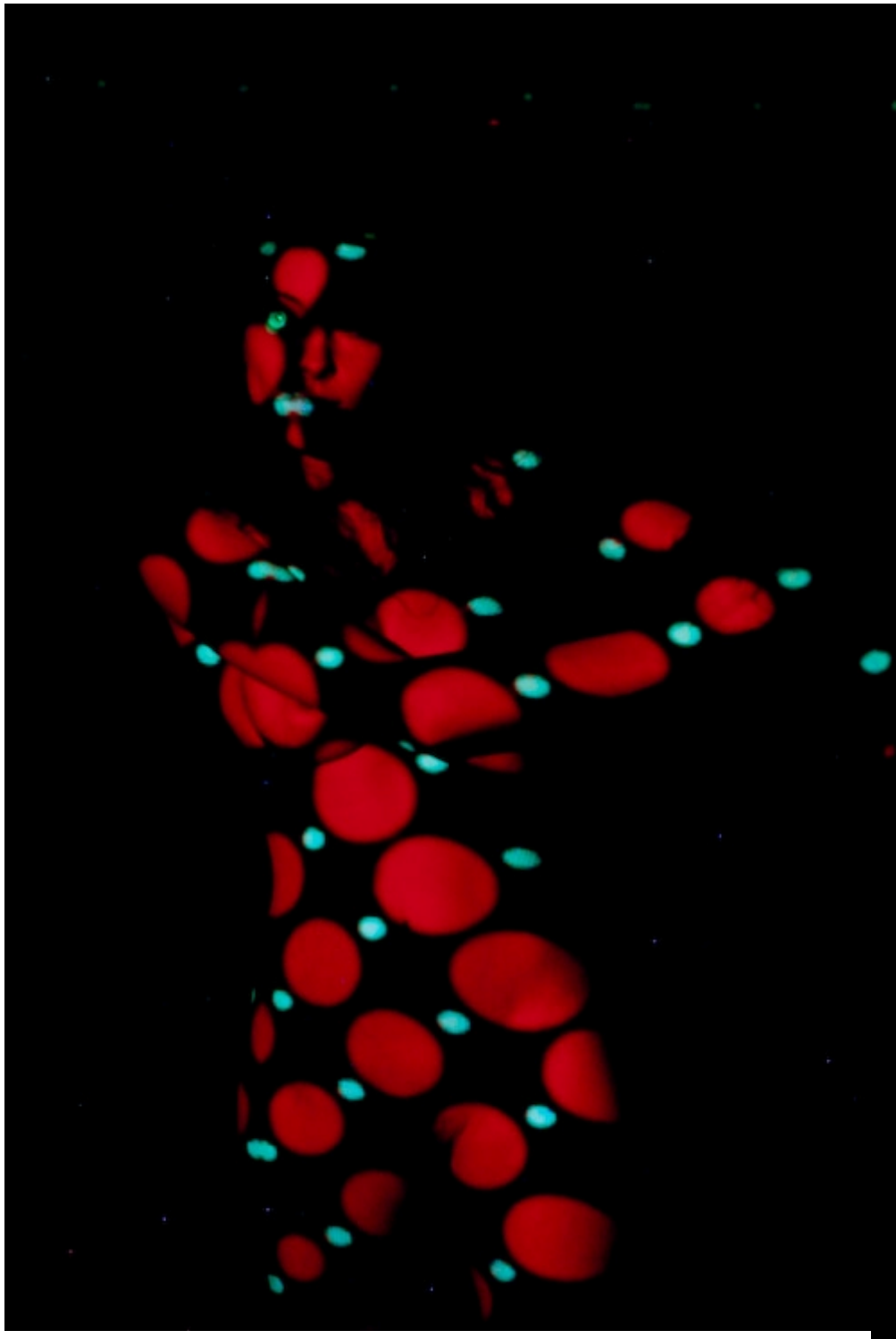


Plate 18
“Yet here’s a spot!”



Plate 19
Twig manipulates Beth

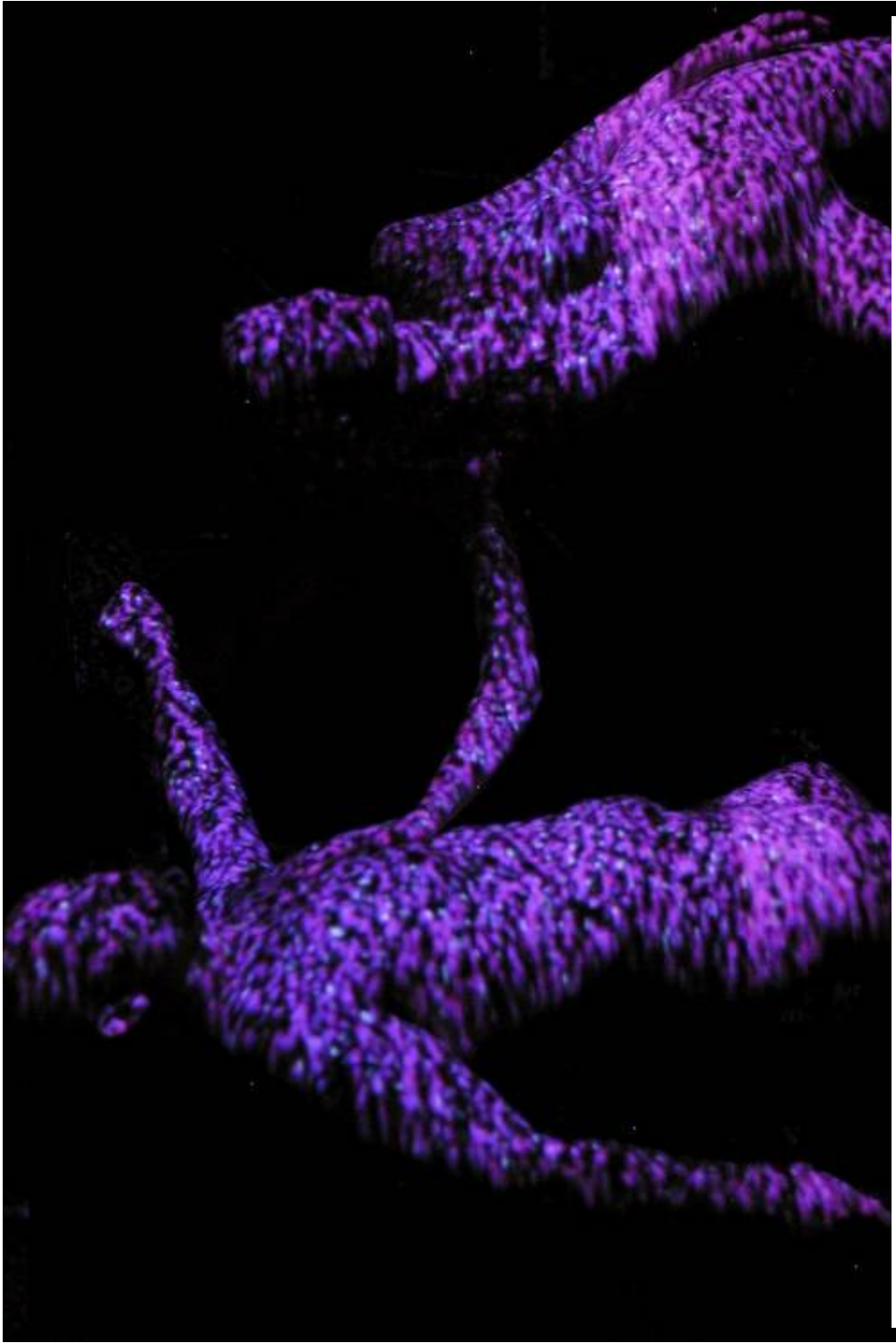


Plate 20
“Do it quickly!”

12. Dagger Dance

Witch Two performs a modern dance sequence DS. She is the dagger. Enter Mac. They dance. During his speech the Witches whisper "Sleep no more. Macbeth doth murder sleep."

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep

13. Milk of Human Kindness

Mac sits on the scaffolding deck with his arms draped across the bracing. Beth encircles him as she climbs the scaffolding.

Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,
That which cries 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.' Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,

Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

14. Mac/Beth Duet

Mac and Beth are on the floor at the bottom of the scaffolding and perform a dance.

15. Toys

MAC

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There 's nothing serious in mortality:
All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.

16. Hell

All three Witches are intertwined in a pile DS. They begin to breathe and heave as a unit each trying to stand while pulling the others down. The text is broken and becomes complete as a drum beats. First slowly, then fast.

WITCHES

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

The Witches are standing.

WITCHES

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.
Open, locks,
Whoever knocks!

They scramble up the scaffolding to show Mac the three apparitions.

MAC

What is't you do?

DROPLET

A deed without a name.

SPARK

Speak.

TWIG

Demand.

DROPLET

We'll answer.

TWIG

Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,
Or from our masters?

MAC

Call 'em; let me see 'em.

Witches form the first apparition. Mac looks out towards audience.

SPARK

Mac-----beth!

TWIG

Macbeth! Macbeth!

DROPLET

Macbeth, beware Macduff;

Witches form second apparition. Mac shrinks back in horror.

TWIG

Be bloody, bold, and resolute;

SPARK

Laugh to scorn the power of man,

DROPLET

For none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

Witches form third apparition. Mac rises. The form shifts and they are archers. Arrows fly. Mac ducks.

DROPLET

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.

SPARK

Macbeth
Birnam wood
Dunsinane

TWIG

Macbeth
Birnam wood

Mac attempts to climb the scaffolding. He is stopped by the Second Witch.

DROPLET

Seek to know no more.

Mac hangs from the scaffolding by one arm.

MACBETH

Time, thou anticipatest my dread exploits:
The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
Unless the deed go with it; from this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:

Mac drops to the ground level.

The castle of Macduff I will surprise;
Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line.

17. Battle

Mac fights all the witches and Beth. As he is about to slay his foe, time shifts. Mac and his victim are still and the battle rotates around them. In the final face off, Mac and Beth are in the center. Beth slays Mac. All fall. She is alone with a dead Mac in her arms.

BETH

And when we have our naked frailties hid,
That suffer in exposure, let us meet,
And question this most bloody piece of work,
To know it further.

18. Mac/Beth Unsexy

Mac and Beth start on opposite sides of the scaffolding and out of phase. While they are trying to reach each other on the scaffolding, they are also trying to synch their words.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,

Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

19. Monkeys

The three witches climb about the scaffolding with Mac and Beth still in the middle.

20. To-morrow

Mac is perched on the top of the scaffolding.

MAC

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

21. Sexy Dance

Beth does a seductive dance on the scaffolding platform. She finishes cradled in the upper cross bracing of the scaffolding.

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't.

22. Pep Rally

SPARK: When I say "double," you say "double." Double...[Double] Double.. [Double]
When I say "toil," you say "trouble." Toil... [Trouble]. Toil... [Trouble]

Come on, you can do better than that...

When I say "double," you say "double." Double...[Double] Double.. [Double]
When I say "toil," you say "trouble." Toil... [Trouble]. Toil... [Trouble]

Double [Double], toil and [Trouble]
Fire burn and cauldron bubble

[Twig and Gale get them clapping]
Double [Double], toil and [Trouble]
Fire burn and cauldron bubble

Double [Double], toil and [Trouble]
Fire burn and cauldron bubble

OK, now this side do Double, double, toil and trouble
And this side do “Fire burn and cauldron bubble”

Side one: Double, double, toil and trouble
Side two: Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Side one: Double, double, toil and trouble
Side two: Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

GALE: OK, now everyone take off your clothes and become trees. Let’s go!

23. Birnam’s Back

The audience is invited to join the cast on stage—nude. After they’ve had a chance to play in the projections, Droplet leads them in a game of “Red Light/Green Light.” Then cast and audience participants form the tree from “Birnam” to march towards Mac’s demise.

24. KTF

GALE: (to twig) You know, I was noticing back there...for a witch with the name Twig, you don’t make a very good tree

TWIG: Hey, it wasn’t a contest or anything.

GALE: Just sayin’

TWIG: But if you WANT a contest, I’m happy to show you up.

GALE: Oh, yeah?

TWIG: See if you can top this:

The witches have a contest over who has the most impressive bag of tricks.



Plate 21
“Your face, my thane, is as a book”

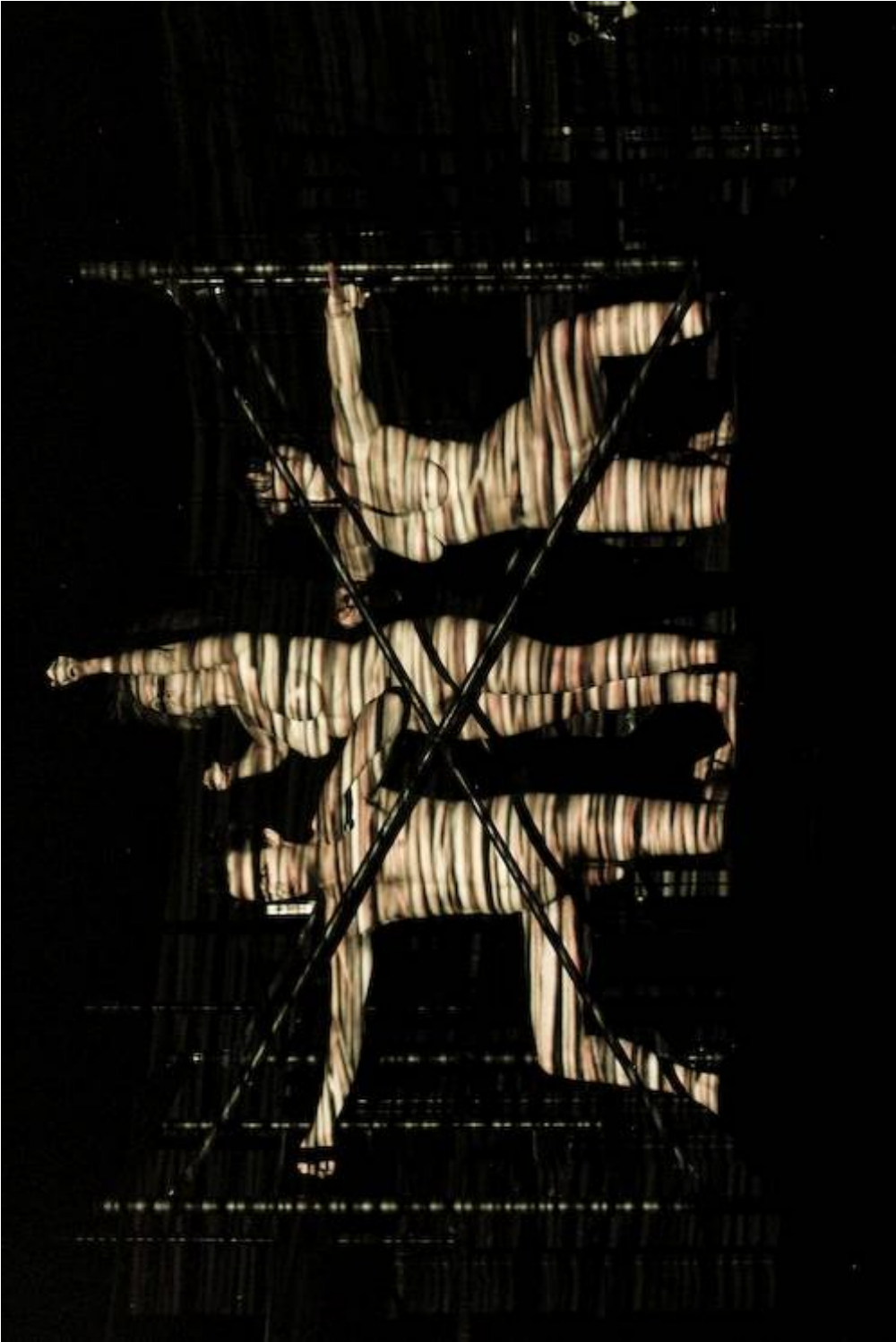


Plate 22
The witches cryptic prophesy



Plate 23
Mac's last stand

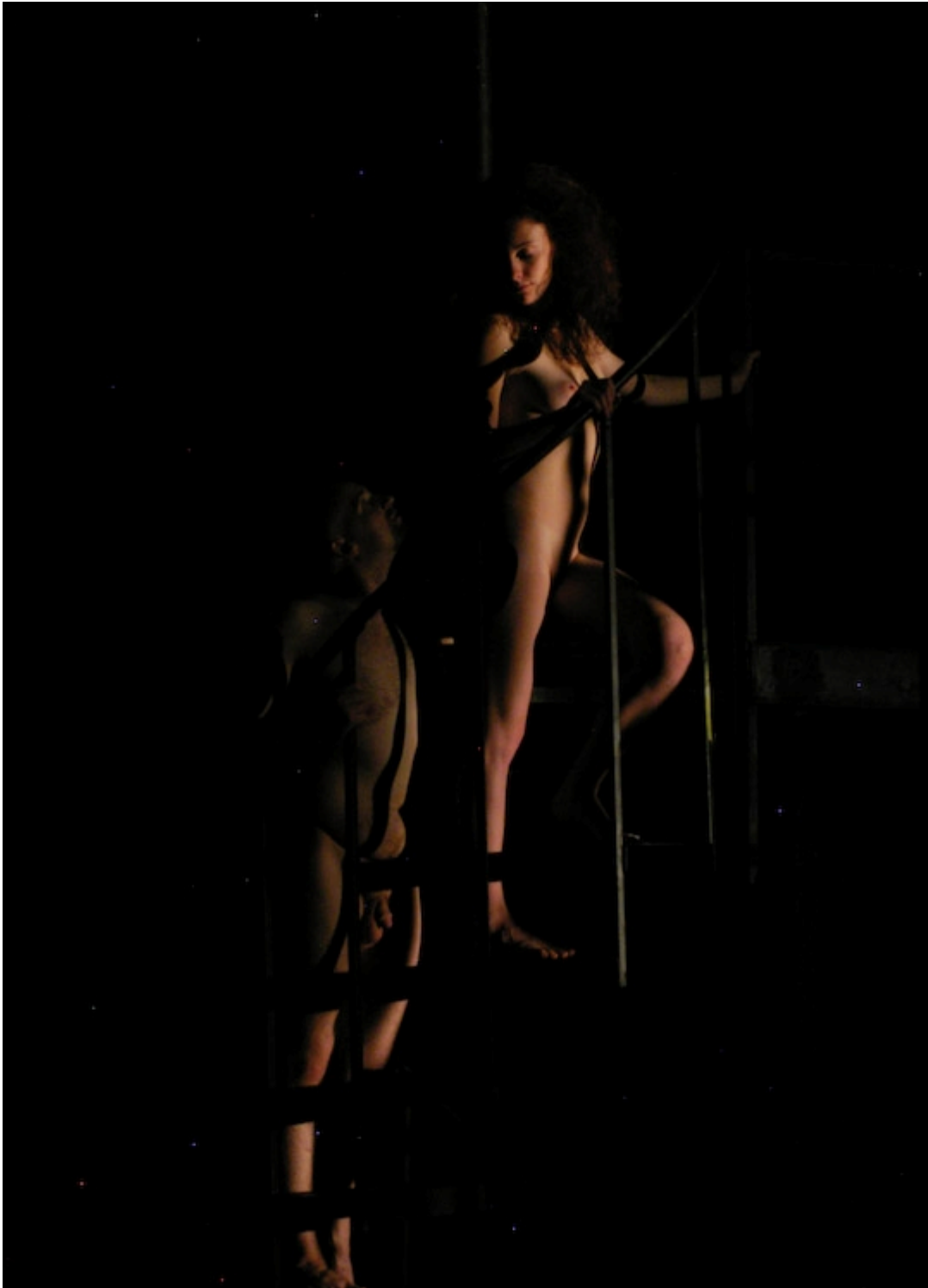


Plate 24
Mac is distracted by thoughts of Beth during the “Battle.”



Plate 25
Mac grapples with one of the witches in the "Battle."

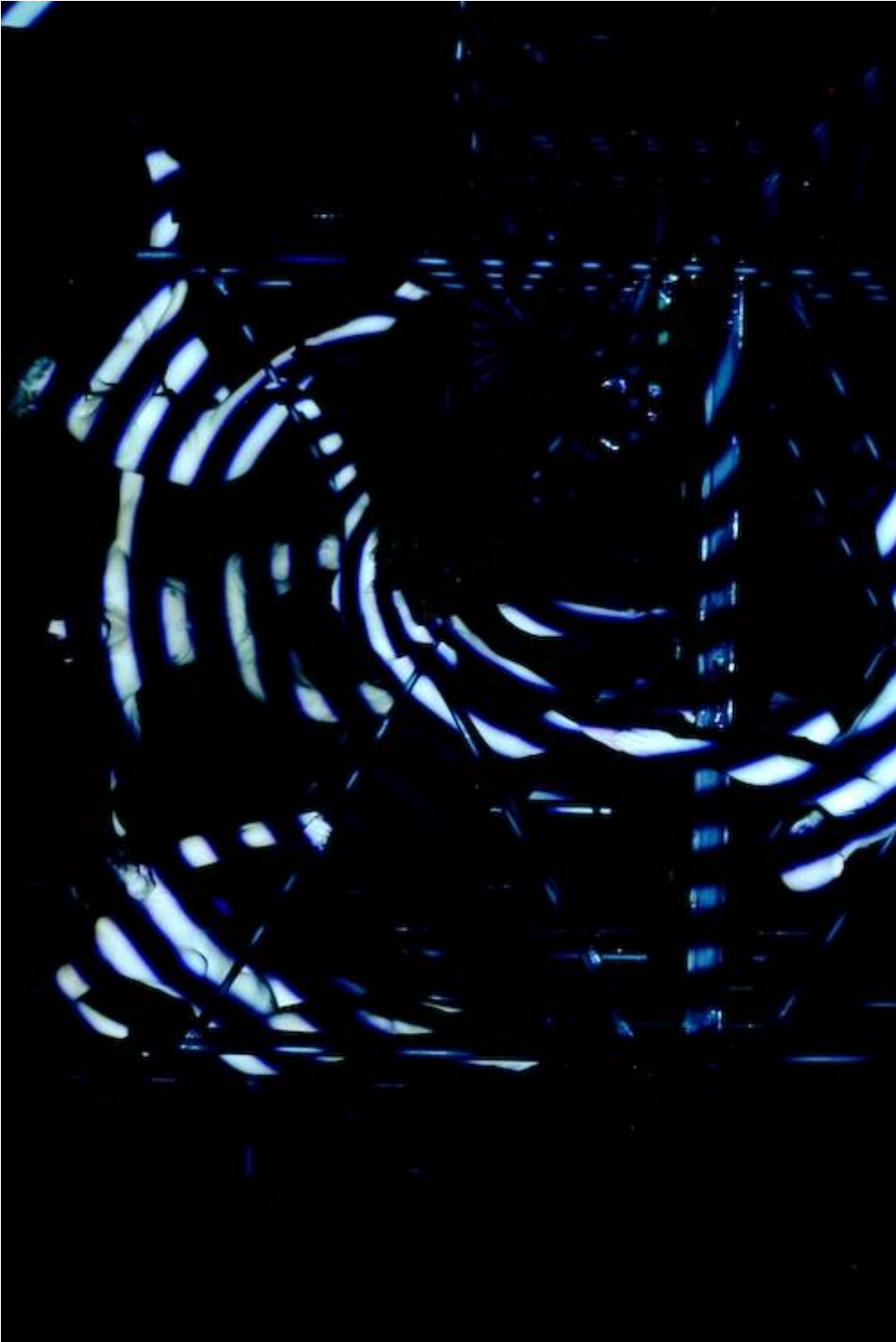


Plate 26
Monkeys



Plate 27
Beth seduces Mac



Plate 28
“When I say double, you say double!”

24. Unnatural Deeds

BETH

Unnatural deeds

Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all!

25. End at the Beginning

Music: Mysterious Guitar. First Witch is crouched on scaffolding. Begins to dance. Second Witch enters from the back of scaffolding. They intertwine as they beckon the Third Witch who has entered from the DS corner. They struggle working with and against one another. During their dance, the First Witch is thrown to the ground by the other two who rush to the ground in pursuit.

SPARK

When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

DROPLET

When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

TWIG

That will be ere the set of sun.

ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and—

Lights out.

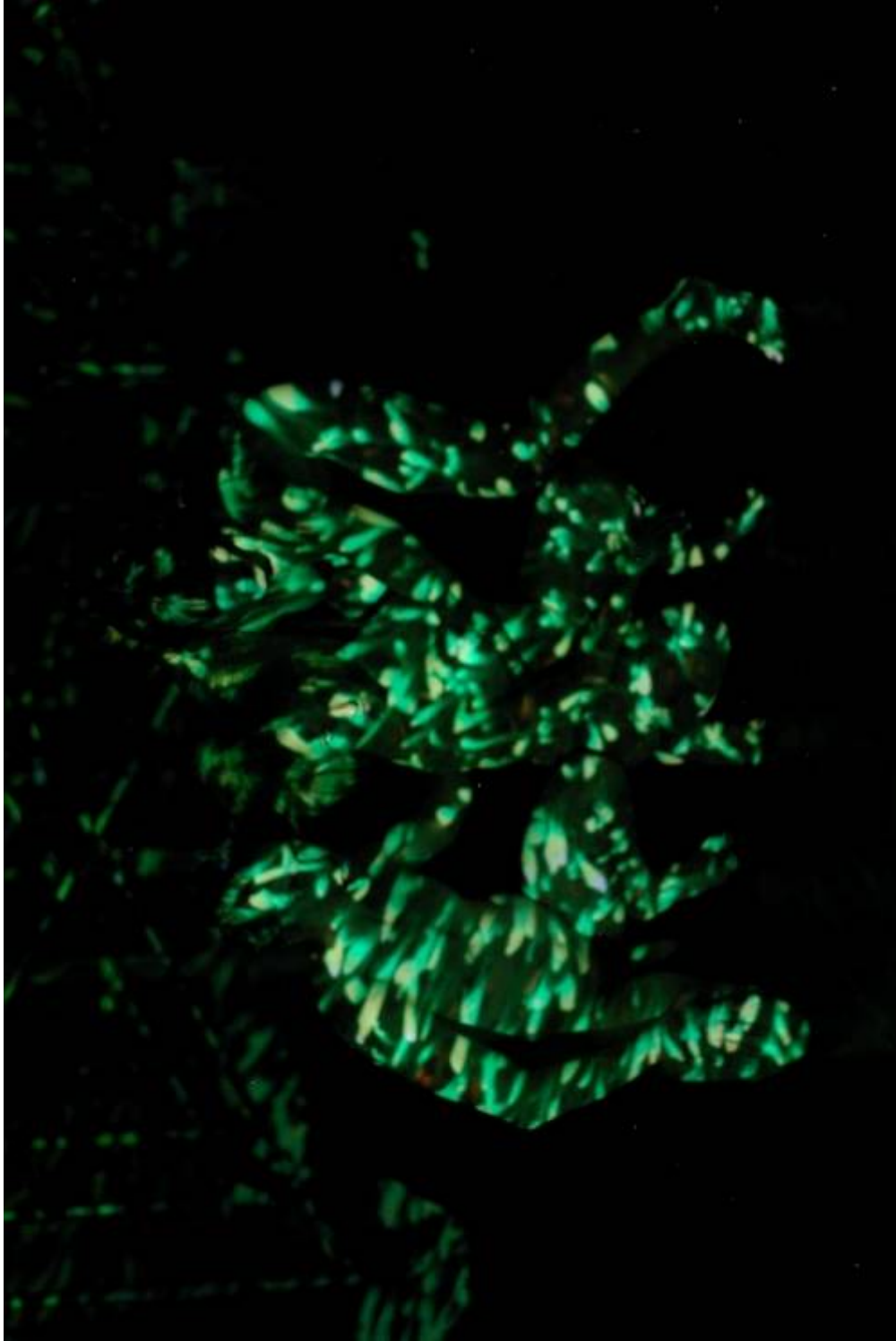


Plate 29
“When shall we three meet again?”

APPENDIX C
Soundtrack

APPENDIX D

Program

APPENDIX E

PUBLICITY POSTCARD

VITA

Vanessa Passini was born in Moline, IL on April 11, 1981. She received her Bachelor of Music from Illinois State University in 2003 where she also studies theatre and her Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting Pedagogy with a Specialization in Movement from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2009.

She participated in the “No Place Choreographies” panel at the 2008 American Society of Theatre Research Conference with her paper “What’s Under The Veil? Belly Dance and Invisible Others.” Vanessa also presented two papers at the 2009 Mid America Theatre Conference: “Stripped Down Performance: The Living Canvas and the Use of Nudity on Stage” and “A Bunch of Little Savages: Using Grotowski to Teach Middle School Boys” (John Robert Moss co-author).

While at VCU, Vanessa has taught and assisted movement and choreography, dramatic literature, and speech communication classes. She is a director, choreographer, and movement coach who has worked on numerous Theatre VCU productions as well as collaborating with the school’s film department.