



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

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## PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY 7(2): IMAGINING THE OPEN

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I believe that we are in an imagination battle, and almost everything about how we orient toward our bodies is shaped by fearful imaginations. [...] Our radical imagination is a tool for decolonization, for reclaiming our right to shape our lived reality.

adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism* (2019, 10)

We have discovered the performance by making it.

Goat Island Performance Group

We—Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, Will Daddario, Diana Damian Martin, and Theron Schmidt—are delighted to introduce this latest issue of the *Performance Philosophy* journal. As feels entirely fitting to us, this is an issue that has taken on a life of its own—disrupting the form, structures, and temporal conventions of the journal through the way in which it has manifested itself.

With this open edition of the journal, we find ourselves back again face to face with the premise of the “open,” which is an exciting and paradoxical concept. The mission statement for this journal proposes, “Performance Philosophy is an emerging interdisciplinary field of thought, creative practice and scholarship. As an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal, *Performance Philosophy* publishes work that interrogates what this field might be and what might be possible within it.” If something—say, a territory, a field, a possibility—is truly open, then do we ever leave it? Pure openness seems to suggest the absence of a boundary that would transform open to closed. As such, we never really “return” to the open. We’re always in it, always-already *of it*—whether we imagine ourselves within “the open” or not. Does, then, the premise of an “open edition” bring us to the plane of immanence, and, if so, are we faced with certain ethical challenges? The most obvious of these challenges is the act of exclusion that comes with the role of “editing.” In a truly open edition, we wouldn’t exclude any of the proposed submissions because, again, what isn’t included in the open? So, ah ha!, our edition isn’t really open. The “open” here refers to something else. It is, for the most part, a word that identifies a lack of a governing theme to this edition, and the issuing of an “open call.” And yet, while perhaps not “open” in the philosophical sense, the edition is shaped by a desire for the open. Performance Philosophy is not a field with clearly defined boundaries. *Performance Philosophy* seeks to help figure out the shape of Performance Philosophy through, amongst other things, the very doing of scholarship.

Philosophical considerations of openness play out in the (seemingly) practical task of editing a journal (this journal). For this edition, 7(2), we invited contributions on *whatever* topic. (Here we might recall Giorgio Agamben’s [1993] distinction between whatever as indifference—the shrug of “I don’t care, whatever”—and whatever as singularity, as that which arrives before us “*such as it is*.”) We received numerous responses and chose ones that, we felt, gave a good sense of the diversity of flora and fauna in the always-emergent field of Performance Philosophy. But a problem presented itself (Yay!). We seemed to have more pieces for the [Margins] section than for the “central” section that is usually populated with “essays” or “articles” of some kind. The Margins, in other words, overtook the Center. How lovely. But what, then, do we make of the distinction between margin and non-margin? Is it totally arbitrary? Must we parcel out the field? Does this porosity offer us scope to consider performance philosophy as seeking to untangle distinctions between center and margins? [Margins] then contracts and expands across different parts of this journal’s iteration. Whilst [Margins] concerns itself with creative, non-standard approaches to the manifold relations arising at the conjunction between performance and philosophy, in this issue this formal provocation spills out, or rather, as the section spills out, so does the question of how we think and do performance philosophy. Across a meditation on flicker (Blum), an auto-fictional reflection on practicing *khayal* (Shankar), an interactive project on eavesdropping (Jones and Wilkins), an experimental sonic work that attempts to sound out “incompossibility” (Tromans and Schmidt), or a video-essay on whiteness and embodiment (Spatz and collaborators), “open” emerges as a speculative and porous question. [Margins] insists on, perhaps playfully offers, a refusal to uphold distinctions between form and content, or between critical and speculative, and in doing so, *performs* the many ecologies of thinking and doing performance philosophy. In this way, our open issue echoes other openings, too.

We have called some works “articles” as a description of their form, characterised by sustained argument or analysis and supported by scholarly cross-referencing. But here, too, are “imagination battles” (brown 2019), carving out space to think, feel, to remember the past differently and to imagine new futures. These take the form of an essay that draws on Benjamin’s conception of the caesura to imagine UK-based Phoenix Dance Theatre’s performance *Black Waters* (2020), itself a re-habitation of colonial violence, as a possible decolonial encounter with white spectators (Kittlaus); along with a close reading on the impact of John Cage’s thinking and practice—themselves inseparable from each other—and the way they reveal the ethnocentric disciplining of our acts of listening (Lomnitz). They take the form of two essays that explore the origins and futures of performance and philosophy: a meticulous survey of the evolving significances that Sophocles’ *Antigone* has had for various philosophical disciplines and movements, marking the changing role of tragedy at the juncture between theatre and philosophy (Romanska); and a tracing of the interrelation between “drama” and “desire,” following lines of thought from the Theatre of Dionysus to Lacan’s later work on Borromean knots (Katafiasz). And they take the form of a critical self-reflection on practice-as-research that explores performance strategies related to violence on the performer’s body as a way to re-think (and re-embody) “life-as-surface”: “a life experienced in its full intensity and *in pure joy*” (Zacharopoulou).

### Special sections: SOUTH BOOM BOOM and Performance Philosophy Problems

Moreover, a temporal openness has shaped the issue—stretching out across a postponed conference and its prologue, a section spilling out, and an emergent project finding a home.

While we were contemplating this, another problem arose (Yay!). In order to showcase the work of the Key Groups who will be co-constructing the Performance Philosophy Conference in Helsinki (happening this June), we decided it would be a good idea to publish some process-oriented thoughts shared by a few of those groups. The theme of that conference is, precisely, “problems” and the nature of “collaboration,” so wouldn’t it make sense to include them in this open edition, given that the edition seems to be growing from the problem of the open? But how should this be presented? As a roundtable? As an open discussion? Should we include an editorial introduction to each? Or should we leave it to the contributors themselves to frame the terms of engagement?

And then again! Originating from a project at DAS Graduate School, Amsterdam, there is a group of writings—performative texts written by artists, gathered under the title SOUTH BOOM BOOM, that would be quite at home in this journal. But where do they go? They arrive already classified as belonging to their own group, and so they seem to deserve their own section. And, oh, because of the timing of a real-world gathering, they are seeking to be published ahead of the other articles in 7(2). Is this ok? Can we do this? Where does their section go?, we asked ourselves as editors. Is it part of [Margins]? Would it occupy a margin within [Margins]? If [Margins] has already overtaken the center, then does that mean SOUTH BOOM BOOM takes over the take-over? Should we comment on this in the editorial?

In the end we have published these two mini-collections as “special sections,” including each contribution as its own discrete “article” (with an official registered DOI), so that they reflect their origins in a particular spatiotemporal relation to their neighbours, but also recognising that they might circulate, be cited, and enter into new relationships on their own in other conversations that we have yet to imagine.

The idea of the “key group” is a core element of the 5th Biennial Performance Philosophy conference, hosted as a hybrid online/face-to-face event in June 2022 by the University of the Arts Helsinki. As part of the ongoing interest of the wider Performance Philosophy network in developing non-hierarchical and intentional forms of collective organisation, the “key group” replaces the traditional form of the “keynote,” supplanting individual expertise with group experimentation. For this event, Key Groups are supported over what was initially a year—and then became two years as COVID postponed the conference initially scheduled for 2021—in the formulation and exploration of a self-nominated “performance philosophy problem”: a dilemma or issue, both conceptual and practical, that calls for creative thinking and action or, specifically, “for dialogue and collaboration between philosophy and the performing arts.” And indeed, in addition to an externally designated theme, one of the implicit “problems” such an approach invites engagement with is the challenge of collaboration itself: what exactly *is* a key group? What does it mean to work toward a conference presentation? And what different forms might that “presentation” take? In discussing these questions as a research network, we realised a key insight was that the conference had actually already begun. That is, the conversations about the form of the conference *are* the work of the conference. In this issue, we include short provocations from three of the six Performance Philosophy Key Groups—lagunaries, Co-labouring, and AGITSATSIA—as they wrestle explicitly or implicitly with these questions. Short statements from all six groups can be found on the [conference website](#), and, if you are reading this before 15 June 2022, you are welcome to join into the gathering from wherever you are; for listings of which events are available online, see <https://www.uniarts.fi/en/events/performance-philosophy-2021/>.

SOUTH BOOM BOOM is a multi-lingual collection of performative texts originating from a project at DAS Graduate School in Amsterdam, combining contributions from artists participating in the Theatre and Choreography programs, alumni and invited guests. Edited by Mario Lopes, Flavia Pinheiro and Tom Oliver with Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, this special section is part of the larger, multi-year project SOUTH BOOM BOOM which “invites artists to discuss the importance of dissenting invisibility in art and education to contribute to knowledge on how institutions can articulate and enact an anti-racist and anti-colonial agenda.” Among the connecting threads of the texts is the affirmation of collectivity and “collective doing” (Lopes) over individualism in artistic research, resonating with the multivocal articulations of the Key Groups (not Keynotes) of Performance Philosophy’s Helsinki conference.

But there is also a specificity here wherein the “problems” at stake are ones that speak to what is both the shared and individual experience of “non-European artists” living and working in European contexts of art, education and research. The texts speak from and to these contexts differently; but one point of departure is the articulation of the “dilemma” or double-bind by

theatre maker and educator, Rodrigo Batista, who writes: "The work of non-European immigrants who propose to answer the political questions of their contexts of origin depends fundamentally on the misery they are criticizing [...] And this is where a market bubble is created: condemning immigrant artists to think in supposed solutions (or denunciations) of problems created by the continent in which we are presenting our works." Or again, as Ana Lira puts it in her preface to the section, the texts demonstrate different layers of refusal to the "visible and symbolic violence, which gains new contours in each cycle, continues to (de)mark creative lives even in territories that claim to be revising their colonial pasts, structures and methodologies." Performance philosophy problems? Perhaps. But also problems for dreaming and speculation, and for Mario Lopes, "sharing technologies, fermenting strategies, re-appropriating ownership of one's own existence, counter-academicism and an Afrotransopic community."

### Imagine

Editing an issue on a designated theme comes with all kinds of questions, as one generally thinks of such a special issue as an opportunity to explore and explode the received understanding of that theme. But editing an "open" issue poses questions not only about "openness," but also the act of editing itself. Questions of inclusion, classification, standardization, and authority, questions all linked in some way to the central invitation of openness, pose themselves loudly. For example, why change punctuation to create a cohesive "style" across all of the contributions? Why modify or "correct" the language of non-native English speakers? What even is this task of copyediting? If the ideas gathered here in this journal have been prepared in the name of an open edition, then why not let them come as they are? Why alter their appearance in the name of professionalized standards, especially when one of the stated aims of Performance Philosophy is to question the validity and reliability of those standards? Each of these questions is one we approach in relation to each article and its specific needs, and in dialogue with its (sometimes multiple) authors. The task of the editor, we are finding, is a role we discover by doing it. And we have imagined an opening, we might hope, by making it.

### Works Cited

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## Biographies

Prof. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca is Lector and Head of DAS Graduate School at Academy of Theatre and Dance, Amsterdam University of the Arts in the Netherlands. Her forthcoming publications include *Interspecies Performance* (2023) co-edited with Flo Fitzgerald-Allsopp; and *On Love and Not Knowing* (2022)—on the work of Fevered Sleep—co-edited with Luke Pell, David Harradine and Sam Butler for Performance Research books.

Will Daddario is a grief worker, performance philosopher, and theatre historiographer. With Matthew Goulish, he is the author of the forthcoming *Pitch and Revelations: reconfigurations of philosophy, poetry, and reading through the work of Jay Wright*. With his wife, Joanne Zerdy, he runs Inviting Abundance ([invitingabundance.net](http://invitingabundance.net)), which is dedicated to helping people develop creative approaches to grief.

Diana Damian Martin is an artist and researcher. She is currently Senior Lecturer in Performance Arts at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, where she leads the BA (Hons) Experimental Arts and Performance course. Her work has been published in *Global Performance Studies*, *Performance Research*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *Research in Drama Education*. She is editor of the [Margins] section of the *Performance Philosophy* Journal.

Theron Schmidt is an artist, teacher, and writer, currently working at Utrecht University. He is a founding co-convenor of the international Performance Philosophy network and co-editor of this journal, and he is also an Editor of *Global Performance Studies* and Associate Editor of *Performance Research*. In addition to his academic research, he has written widely about contemporary performance and live art for a variety of publications, including magazines and artist books, and also as part of innovative critical writing projects that foster interaction between audiences, artists, and critics. He makes performance as a solo and collaborative artist.

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