

Editorial

In this issue's call for papers, we asked for submissions that that engaged with gender and performance on a number of levels: how performances affect our perception of gender identity, what the relationship was between theory and performance, whether or not considering the gender of practitioners and playwrights is still important, and to what extent is work by women in the theatre informed by gender and feminism? The articles that we received in response, and which make up this issue of *Platform*, both deal with these questions explicitly and, in some cases, raise new questions. It is not surprising, given the vast discourse with which they engage, that the pieces should in many ways speak to each other, while at the same time offering different, even contradictory, viewpoints.

Kerstin Buesgches's article details her 'dialectical' approach to feminist performance. Beginning with an account of a short piece of her own work which arose from Bobby Baker's *Box Story* workshop, Buesgches proceeds to describe a performance practice that seeks to confound audience expectations of the feminine while accounting for the specificities of class, sexuality, and age. Situating her work in both performative and theoretical contexts, she argues for an approach that engages with both post-Lacanian feminism and materialist philosophy. Alissa Clarke, also dealing with approaches to performance, argues against what she sees as the patriarchal domination of the psychophysical approach to performance training. Her article challenges the dominant discourses of the discipline, which articulate performer training in terms of a 'genealogy of sons and fathers' and follow a fundamentally male-biased model of transmission. As an alternative to this, Clarke identifies the growth of a new paradigm for performer training in the work of The Magdalena Project, and advocates a more supportive approach which, while still making use of the discourse of family, allows for varied forms of relationships between students and teachers.

Shonagh Hill, Courtney Elkin Mohler, and Siobhán O'Gorman have chosen to focus on theatrical works in their engagement with gender, and done so in markedly different ways. Hill's piece, 'Articulating the Object' provides an alternative reading of Marina Carr's *The Mai* through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's work on myth. By considering The Mai's suicide as a transformative act, Hill argues that the play presents a positive view of creative female agency in a male dominated society. O'Gorman's piece also deals with Carr's work (in this case *Portia Coughlan*), comparing it with Suzan Lori-Parks's *In the Blood*. O'Gorman engages with these playwrights on the level of genre, tracking the trajectory of their work from absurdism and symbolism into more overtly mainstream forms, and poses the question of what (if any) potential realist theatre holds for the feminist movement. Between these two pieces comes Courtney Elkin Mohler's essay, 'Little (White) Women,' which compares Louisa May Alcott's famous *Little Women* to Split Britches' *Little Women, the Tragedy*. Locating both of these works in their historic context and moment, Mohler uses Split Britches' revisioning of Alcott's novel as a lens through which to examine some of the fissures that have existed within the feminist movement, and to highlight the assumption of – and even reliance on – whiteness as a signifier in many feminist works.

Finally, Matt Saltzberg's piece, 'Staging Humanity,' looks at gender from a different perspective, relating the complex process of constructing and performing a piece of theatre in which he assumes the role of the iconic Joan Crawford. This essay details the process of a male actor attempting a sensitive and serious portrayal

of an actor who is often portrayed in a satirical light. Like the articles by Buesgches and Clarke, Saltzman's piece represents a struggle to find an appropriate approach to gendered performance.

Many of this issue's articles engage with Butler's concept of gender *as* performance, which clearly remains a key tool in examining gender *in* performance. However, the variety of critical perspectives and theoretical standpoints from which these articles approach that work, and the ways in which it is blended with that of other scholars, makes clear the breadth of scholarship that exists on this topic, and demonstrates the continued vitality of gender scholarship in the performing arts.

In the previous issue of *Platform*, we started a 'Performance Response' section, which is envisaged as a space for critical, analytical reflection on and around a particular performance. In this issue, Kate Leader's piece, 'Tell her to be careful' approaches Caryl Churchill's recent, controversial *Seven Jewish Children*, considering the complex ways in which content, context and performance combine, and unpacking some of the problematics of this short, divisive production.

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(Issue Editors)