

# SPLIT INTIMACIES: CORPOREALITY IN CONTEMPORARY THEATER AND DANCE<sup>1</sup>

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*Before I begin, I want to thank Katia Savrami and the members of the Department of Theatre Studies for welcoming me to the University of Patras and for facilitating my presence here today. This is my fifth trip to Greece over the past six years. Over the course of these fourteen weeks on Greek soil, I have lectured, taught dance workshops, and organized an international Dance Studies conference. Each time I return, I feel more and more as if this country has begun to weave and wind its way into my connective tissue, and I take this fleshy communion with the Greek world seriously. Today, I am hoping that my talk will continue this exchange and that we can enjoy a lively conversation afterwards.*

Two years ago I had what many would call a classic moment of catharsis at the theater. I had been to see a local production of *The Laramie Project*, and while I was describing the show to a friend afterwards, I broke down crying. I was profoundly affected by the production – something that does not happen very often when I go to see a play. My position as a resistant (read feminist, queer) spectator who is highly suspicious of traditional theater (particularly the convention of the fourth wall) usually disrupts many of the pleasures inherent in realist drama. This time, however, I was completely caught up in the events unfolding onstage. What I found compelling about the performance was not so much the dramatic relationships between characters or the language of the script per se, but rather the layering of dynamic and bodily exchanges that led me to reflect on the very slippery way in which bodies carry meaning in contemporary performance. Attending to this admittedly ambiguous corporeality allows us to chart the split intimacies of embodiment and representation across forms of theater and dance that are not anchored in the usual codes of realistic mimesis or expressive movement.

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1 Lecture given on 12 October 2017 at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Patras, Greece. The text is excerpted from a longer essay with the same title from the *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, ed. N. George-Graves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

One classic explanation of my experience in the theater that evening would be to attribute my response to the production itself, claiming it was the kind of magical effect that a successful combination of visionary directing and highly competent acting would inspire in anyone. On the other hand, I could connect my reaction to the fact that I attended the performance during a time when there had been a recent spate of vicious gay bashing in France in reaction to the country's marriage equality vote, and even more egregious homophobic violence in Russia and the Republic of Georgia that may have been abetted by Russian Orthodox priests no less. In addition, since I had just taught a course in which we read a review of the sequel to *The Laramie Project* based on a series of interviews done ten years later, I was deeply familiar with the whole context of the production. Clearly the personal stakes were high for me as I entered the theater that night. Nonetheless, I was surprised by my reaction – I was truly moved.

This talk hinges on the reverberations of that last word, *moved* – the meaning of which splits across the psychic and physical to encompass both an emotional and a visceral responsiveness to the world. Being moved by a performance represents an intertwining of somatic feeling and political urgency that characterizes much of the contemporary performance work that I have attended over the past two decades. There is, I believe, something very vital in these works that leads the audience from passive spectators into the role of active witnesses, raising the stakes of our viewing experience. As I have argued in the introduction of my first book *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (which, incidentally, has recently been translated into Greek), to witness a performance suggests a response/ability, which includes both an ability to respond to the events onstage and a sense of being implicated in their outcome.<sup>2</sup> This particular sensibility, however, departs significantly from two classic theories of audience reception: the Aristotelian notion of catharsis in the theater, and the modernist concept of kinesthesia in dance, most fully articulated in the work of the mid-twentieth century dance critic John Martin. In the discussion that follows, I explore the possibilities of an affective somatic relationship with the audience that engages neither a direct psychological identification with the protagonist(s) onstage, nor a conventional notion of physical empathy, but rather prioritizes other kinds of exchanges, bringing attention to how corporeality encompasses embodiment as well as cultural representation.

I define corporeality here as an intertwining of sensation and perception where the body remains anchored as the central scope of awareness. In order to use corporeality as a category of reception, it is crucial to think beyond the most obvious effects of vision and language. We need to learn to appreciate the elusive contours of somatic meaning. Although embodiment is enjoying a renaissance in contemporary cultural theory these days, it is most often elided with discussions of affect. I want to resist this well-trodden path, however, and branch off into a territory that is not

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2 See the Introduction to Albright (1997) [in Greek: Ann Cooper Albright, *Χορογραφώντας τη Διαφορά: Το Σώμα και η Ταυτότητα στον Σύγχρονο Χορό*. Athens: Nissos, 2016].

as clearly charted. That is, I want to conceptualize feeling as the practice of sensing (I am feeling) rather than the object of possession (I have feelings). Keeping the verb fully active without letting it settle into the stable structure of a noun not only helps us to resist the psychological construction of an interior self so endemic to discourses of affect, but also disrupts any easy equation of physical corporeality with social identity. Within the context of performance, corporeality circulates between the bodies onstage and those in the audience; but those relationships of power and exchange are rarely predictable. This is not to suggest, however, that they are entirely subjective either. Audience members and performers can share the process of feeling together without necessarily imbuing that experience with the same meaning. My task here is to incorporate a critic's sensibility within a theoretical inquiry such that I both describe onstage events and conceptualize their impact without assuming either a normative, universal audience reaction, or a completely random series of individual responses.

Located in the intersection of reportage and ethnography, *The Laramie Project* is not exactly standard theatrical fare. It is what one might call a "reality drama".<sup>3</sup> The script is based on a series of interviews conducted by the Tectonic Theater Project with local community members after the 1998 brutal beating, hospitalization, and subsequent death of Matthew Shepard. Shepard, a gay student who attended the University of Wyoming in Laramie, became a cause célèbre as candlelight vigils were held in his honor around the world. Each performer in the cast takes on the persona of different characters, each of which narrates their experience of the events surrounding Shepard's assault. News reporting blurs into storytelling, truth into fiction, and life into performance as the actors weave individual responses (both those of the community members as well as their own) within discussions of the media's representations and misrepresentations of the community. The fact that the same actors play homophobic as well as gay community members unsettles any easy or direct correspondence between dramatic characters and their respective physical bodies, complicating the audience's ability to empathize with any one character. The performance progresses like a series of switchbacks, zigging and zagging through multiple interpretations of what happened and why. In the end, there is no resolution to the tragedy and the audience is left on its own to sort out the larger ethical ramifications of the community's response to the event.

This particular production of *The Laramie Project* was directed by Caroline Jackson-Smith, whose theatrical vision is influenced by both African-American performance traditions and her experience with Suzuki actor training. The minimal set allowed for a very dynamic staging which beautifully reflected the multiple voices and points of view of the community members. The actors were constantly moving around the raked stage, entering from the far reaches of upstage or downstage and then abruptly crossing to the center to replace one another like billiard balls ricocheting

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3 This quasi-ethnographic approach to telling stories and reimagining local, individual experiences of highly politicized events is a theatrical genre pioneered by Performance Studies scholars such as Dwight Conquergood and made popular by performers such as Anna Deavere Smith and ensembles like the Tectonic Theater Project.

across a pool table. There was a sense of movement flow to each scene that held its own integrity and operated like a separate physical script, at once splitting from the storytelling and yet intimately connected to it.

I am noticing a similar integrated corporeal sensibility in many theatrical productions these days. It is not uncommon for directors such as Anne Bogart or Peter Sellars to suspend the narrative structure of the dramatic action in order to incorporate moments of individual abstract movement or group gestural sequences as a dynamic intersection with the spoken text. This post-modernist approach is distinctly different from the usual models of theatrical blocking or staging of dramatic action where individual gestures or movements are crafted in the service of portraying a character. In this more traditional approach to staging, it is rare that the whole stage becomes caught up in one dynamic movement or rhythmic sequence that sweeps across the stage space and pulls the audience out of their normal mode of attending to the story. The same kind of parallel yet split physical text also threads through much contemporary dance, where a kinetic texture is woven in ways that operate very differently from traditional choreographies, affecting the audience's bodily sensibility without necessarily registering as an obviously choreographed sequence.

In his survey of contemporary theater practices Hans-Thies Lehman maps out the contours of an international range of contemporary performance work that both confuses and refuses any simple distinctions between theater as strictly focused on a text and dance as movement-based performance. Throughout his book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Lehman catalogues the many aesthetic and ideological differences between mimetic dramas, where the script is the clear priority for the staging and more experimental productions in which the frame of realistic representation is disrupted. "Wholeness, illusion, and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real" (Lehman, 2006, p. 22). One of the major differences that Lehman outlines in his survey is the difference for the audience between the experience of watching a traditional narrative in which the final scene almost always stages a resolution before "the end" of the script, and that of witnessing the multi-layered, often conflicting and unresolvable aspects of much contemporary performance work. While his discussion of these performance elements is descriptive rather than prescriptive, Lehman insists that there is a fundamentally different audience dynamic within postdramatic theatre. This is not just a question of a new style of staging, but rather a new conception of what constitutes the performance experience. He writes (*ibid.*, p. 85): "it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information."

*The Laramie Project* is a telling example of postdramatic theatre precisely because it refuses any personal dénouement or larger political statement. In Lehman's taxonomy, *The Laramie Project* would be categorized as "documentary theatre", which he claims (*ibid.*, p. 56) is "less the desire for direct political action, and even less its conventional dramaturgy". Rather, it disrupts the ideologies of either discourse. In this kind of theater, Shepard's death is not the tragic event that

results in any kind of resolution or classical sense of enlightenment. The emphasis and delivery of the text communicates more disruption and confusion than illustration or explanation of the historical events, or even of any individual's motivation. Moments of dramatic dialogue between characters quickly dissolve into citations of various news reports and discussions of the growing media sensation around the event. As Debby Thompson (2001, p. 644) writes in her review of the November 2000 Wyoming premiere: "The deliberate accumulation of fragments, by turns colorful, understated and conflicting, gradually documents the complexity of the Laramie community."

As staged by Jackson-Smith, *The Laramie Project* confounds any easy identification between certain bodies and their respective political positions. The cast members play a dizzying array of roles and engage with one another only briefly before turning to address the audience directly, often with a meta-commentary on the scene they have just enacted. This self-referential aspect cuts through any mimetic interpretation, highlighting instead the complex mechanisms of individual posturing and institutional justification, not to mention the tensions between local and global media depictions of the situation being enacted onstage. To put it bluntly, there are no good or bad guys, no feel-good redemptions, no final realizations that serve to make the world (or even the town of Laramie) a better place in the end. Thompson concludes her review by comparing the production to the Names Project's collective quilt commemorating friends and relatives who have died of AIDS. "Its [*The Laramie Project*'s] strategy of sewing together fragments captures the community's unresolved struggles, the variety of its individual personalities, and, finally, its ultimate resistance to ever being wholly contained within any representation" (ibid., p. 645).

In the course of reading various reviews of both the New York premiere and the Wyoming production, I was struck by how quickly many of the articles moved past the specifics of the performance itself into discussions of anti-gay bias, homophobia in the West and the status of hate crime legislation. Although it is understandable that these writers would highlight the ongoing connection between the source story and the resulting upswing of gay activism, I was disappointed at how often the theatrical contours of the production were collapsed into pedestrian journalism, making Matthew Shepard, as *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley (2000) succinctly put it, "a poster boy for the casualties of anti-gay violence". With a few wonderful exceptions, the theatrical experience, with all its nuances of kinetic exchange, echoes of images, rhythmic phrasing of dialogue and spatial dynamics, seemed to carry little meaning outside of the direct references to the original scene. Looking at the critical responses to *The Laramie Project*, I realize that this production is an example of how the narrative text still registers as the most significant element, even in the midst of a calculated splintering of any one story line. Although his death is the stone that breaks the placid surface of this small town community where people supposedly "live and let live", Matthew Shepard is never depicted. Instead, the production focuses the audience's awareness on how his absence ripples out to affect us all.

If *The Laramie Project* is part of what Lehman calls "documentary theatre", then many of the performances put together by Liz Lerman and the Dance Exchange could similarly be considered

“documentary dance”. As artistic director of a multi-faceted dance organization, Lerman piloted a number of important collaborations that address ethical issues through the creation and production of work that combines movement, text, and video images. Several years ago, Lerman published *Hiking the Horizontal*, a memoir in which she articulates the possibilities as well as the challenges inherent in what she terms “subject matter choreography”. Subtitled *Field Notes from a Choreographer*, this reflection on her working process locates meaning in performance as an interweaving of critical issues and the somatic insights accrued by moving, witnessing and experiencing those ideas in an embodied way. “In subject matter choreography, various thinking processes are subjected to physical examination” (Lerman, 2011, p. 74). In a section titled “What Is the Dancing About?” Lerman (ibid.) explains: “Subject matter dancing doesn’t feel less than, or like a crutch, or like some simplistic pretend game. It offers, rather, a fantastic dialogue of intellect and impulse, feeling and the matter of the mind, gathered in a weird kinesthetic wrapping.”

*Small Dances About Big Ideas* (2006) was commissioned by the Harvard Law School as part of an international conference on human rights and the legacy of the Nuremberg Trials. In a lengthy program note for the inaugural performances, Lerman details a conversation between herself and Martha Minow, the Dean of Harvard Law School at the time and one of the organizers of the event. In this exchange, Lerman asks: Why? Why choose dance to address the atrocities of genocide? Minow’s reply is remarkably insightful about the potential of performance to saturate the audience with the corporeal experience of ethical discussions.

These are my hopes: that a dance would reach people who seldom think about mass atrocities – students, lawyers – with the chance to be drawn in emotionally and intellectually, with the pacing that can allow people to absorb or begin to absorb the incomprehensible scales of atrocity [...]. For those who think about these matters often ... the chance to imagine images and voices about these things, and to have a shared experience with others who seldom attend to these issues, would be a gift. (ibid., p. 88)

*Small Dances About Big Ideas* begins in the dark. As a single light brightens, it reveals three women of different ages and ethnicities slowly rising and reaching upwards as if awakening from a long sleep. These sister-witches, with long loose hair and flowing skirts, move across the space silently. Looking out through the darkness, they seem frightened. One by one, they venture out to explore the unknown and then rush back to the embrace of the others, their contorted faces reflecting the horrors of the other side of the night. At times instigators, at other times healers, these three crone figures will take on the role of otherworldly witnesses to the human stories and judicial proceedings that make up the rest of the evening’s performance.

Soon, the mysterious and somber music abruptly changes to loud shots, sirens, and the sound of a helicopter overhead as the rest of the cast darts frantically across the stage, hoping to escape the shots that fell each one in turn. Over and over again people flail as if they have been shot, fall, and then get up to run again. The repetitious effect of each body arching backwards and then crumpling forwards into the ground reflects the bittersweet layering of a provocatively beau-

tiful movement sequence with powerfully devastating consequences, splitting our attention between mimesis and abstraction, the literal and the figurative. Eventually the cast lines up with their back to the audience and we cannot tell if they are facing an unseen firing squad onstage, or if we, as the audience, are being implicated in that position. This opening scene dissolves as three people come downstage to sit on benches and tell their stories of persecution and survival. A young black man, an older white woman, and a young white woman relate three different experiences in three different languages, weaving a tapestry of voice and gesture that is echoed in the movements of the dancers behind shadowing them. The personal and lyrical quality of that scene shifts into the stark angular gestures of the men in ties who enter with chairs and set up the repetitive structure of judicial proceedings.

Throughout this dance, institutional narratives are juxtaposed to individual memories. In one of the most extraordinary sequences, a young woman dances to a recitation from Clea Koff's memoir *The Bone Woman*, creating a gestural counterpoint to the horrifying forensic descriptions of collecting fragments of human bones at sites in Rwanda. As the voice-over details her desire to both document the atrocities of that war and to gather the bone fragments to send back to the families, the silent dancer shifts back and forth, edging closer to a pile of bodies onstage, as if she were being pushed by the incoming tide. This contrast between moving figures and still prone bodies speaks its own corporeal language that intersects with the textual progression of historical details of Nuremberg, Rwanda and Bosnia. For Liz Lerman, dancing is not an escape from but rather a process through which we can deal with the recognition and memories of these atrocities.

About halfway through the evening-length work, the cast members drop their performance personas and all come downstage as the lights come up on the audience. What follows is a dialogue between the performers and the audience (basically a talk-back in the middle of the evening) that begins with small group discussions about the issues of justice, retribution, and reconciliation that animate the performance. One of the performers acts as a master of ceremonies and suggests that people begin a conversation by asking themselves: "What it is that we teach our children about questions of justice in the world?" After a while, the cast comes back onstage to report on their conversations. Intentionally repeating many of the gestures used by the original speaker as they actively remembered a comment from the audience discussion, the dancers build a gestural sequence from everyone's contributions, adding a few of their own. One that was particularly striking was "looking back to the past and moving forward", which translated into a turning movement and sweeping of the arm in a big arc from behind to forward. Another striking moment was a description of events unfolding while the hands revolved around one another in front of the chest. It was interesting to me to realize how many audience members were doing the sequence along with the cast onstage. Indeed it was quite an amazing experience to see hundreds of hands doing the unfolding gesture more or less in unison, especially as someone spoke about remembering the feeling that sponsored the original gesture. In this way (admittedly, a tad bit pedantic), the audience was drawn into the theatrical process of the work as both civic and corporeal witnesses.

Merging ideas and ethics with the fleshy substance of their implications, *Small Dances About Big Ideas* insists that our sense of justice – as it is played out across the world's bodies – is inherently connected to our physical selves.

I want to pause for a moment in the midst of this analysis of various contemporary theater and dance productions to think about the nature of the communication I just described. Even though I did not participate in learning the gestural sequence, I could not help but be affected by the movement rippling across the rows of spectators in that performance. Here, for me, was a moment of “*communitas*”, a term that I learned from Richard Schechner, who, in turn, has adapted it from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. Schechner uses “*communitas*” to describe similar sweeps of energy that are a palpable aspect of many ceremonial gatherings, including theatrical productions, religious rites, political demonstrations, or rituals of transformation such as a wedding or a bar mitzvah. The term suggests a sense of heightened receptivity that is never only intellectual or even strictly emotional, but is also always rooted in a bodily awareness. These situations can be quite magical and remind me of the fact that the etymological root for “communication” is “*commune*”, a word that – like feeling – also splits into a verb and a noun, echoing both the act and the experience. It is in the intimate vibrations between the doing and the being that we find the “*communitas*” of corporeality.

I realize that it may seem to some as if I am edging pretty close to describing a moment of dramatic catharsis, the Aristotelian telos of ancient Greek tragedy that has long been the aesthetic yardstick of Western theater. Many scholars point to the passage in his *Poetics* where (depending on the translation) Aristotle declares: “[T]ragedy is the imitation of men in action [...]; tragedy through pity and fear effects a catharsis of such misfortunes” (cited in Chute, 1971–72, p. 283). One of the distinctions that I want to draw in this talk is the difference between a descriptive perspective and a prescriptive one. Although the moment of “*communitas*” that I am describing may sound similar to catharsis, it is not necessarily the same kind of psychological “purging” of emotion that resolves the conflicts onstage. Nor is it necessarily a “universal” experience. Rather, I want to assert the real possibility of *feeling* together without insisting that we all *feel* the same way.

In a postscript to his erudite essay “On Catharsis, or Resolution”, literary scholar Kenneth Burke unpacks the etymological root of the Greek word “*peran*”, which most often gets translated as “opposite shore”. He suggests a more appropriate term might be something like “*beyonding*”, rather than the conventional use of catharsis as “*purge*”, to signify the cleansing of the emotions of fear or pity. Burke points out the kinetic tension in the fact that pity is conceived as a movement towards and fear as a movement away. Traditionally, catharsis is seen as an experience that transcends that opposition and leads the audience towards a resolution. Burke (1959, p. 366) notes: “Such an order of development gives the feeling of *going somewhere* [...]. The curative effect that comes from a sense of direction in the unfolding of an implicational structure may explain why purgative rituals are so often built around a *procession*.” But if we keep the notion of “*beyonding*” alive, we can replace the implicit teleology of a resolution with an ongoing somatic resonance. That

is to say, we could replace an emphasis on dramatic action with a focus on theatrical states of being, which is precisely what Lehman identifies as an essential aspect of postdramatic theatre. “The theatre here showed less a succession, a development of a story, more an involvement of inner and outer states” (Lehman, 2006, p. 68).

I am intrigued by Burke’s use of “beyond” as a gerund, for *beyonding* reverberates past the prepositional or even nominal uses of the word to indicate at once a sense of possibility and the *im*-possibility of ever arriving there. This tension between textual and corporeal meaning animates the power and the complexities of much contemporary performance work, insisting that what happens in the theater actually makes a difference. Indeed, as Burke reminds us, the original experiences of Greek tragedy were civic ceremonies in which the political and the familial were constantly echoing one another such that the human body, the world’s body, and the body politic all reflected and refracted one another.

In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed offers a perspective that, interestingly, tells us a lot about these split intimacies of meaning and (e)motion in theater and dance. She writes (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11):

The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the “where” of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others.

As a phenomenologist, Ahmed is attuned to the lived experience of interpersonal exchanges, including communal ones. Her book also tries to shift the emphasis of affective studies from “feelings” to the activity of feeling itself. As Ahmed points out, emotion is derived from the Latin term *emovere*, which literally means “to move away”. Attending to feeling as the movement in between people rather than the psychological possession of emotion, Ahmed offers “[a]n analysis of affective economies, where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation” (ibid. p. 8). Although Ahmed is much more interested in how power relations become embedded in somatic exchanges, her emphasis on the circulation of feeling highlights the social work accomplished in the contemporary genre of community-based performance.

*A Life Without* was the culmination of a three-month-long collaboration between the educational outreach arm of Cleveland Public Theatre and Y-Haven, a transitional housing and addiction recovery program in Cleveland’s west side. Performed by an intergenerational cast of twelve men (many of whom had spent time in jail), this devised theater piece was staged in a variety of venues, including a church, a high school auditorium, a community center, and at an experimental black box theater. The event itself was framed by casual introductory remarks by the directors before the performance began, as well as by the final talk-back with the performers themselves after the show. While these discussions highlighted the “professional” standards of the work (which meant

showing up on time, memorizing the text, and being able to repeat the scenes with consistency), *A Life Without* was clearly embedded within a specific situational and therapeutic context. Although some men had more dramatic personas than others, and some had a clear appetite for performing, all the men helped facilitate the group transitions and joined in the choral moments, which were especially strong.

The narrative scaffolding of the play is a story of a sister's accidental death and the way that loss creates choices and the possibility of community in the face of individual isolation. In their notes for the program, the directors write: "Experiencing loss – the loss of an opportunity, a job, a loved one – any kind of loss, can amplify our experience of choice. [...] It's ironic; to have such agency at the precise moment when loss leaves us feeling powerless, cheated, even devastated." For me, the melodramatic recitation of the plot was distracting and the character embodiment felt forced much of the time. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of the whole experience transcended the lack of theatrical mastery or skill. This was due, in part, to the corporeal subtext embedded in the communal moments of stillness, unison gesture, and song. In *A Life Without*, the deep intimacy and sense of kinship among the men came to the fore when they all sang spirituals together, or in moments of group motion such as the time they crossed the stage slowly, rocking back and forth and singing as they marched along to signify a funeral procession.

Collaborations between theater practitioners and people in a specific community often stage a performance to mark the completion of a project. This immersion in a process of making something together is a rite of passage, a baptism of sorts that insists that each man confront his own vulnerability and willingness to trust and compromise within the group dynamic. The talk-back after every performance in which the men share individual stories of survival and transformation highlights this aspect of the process. Indeed, this last stage was crucial in acknowledging the power of the exchange between performers and the importance of the audience's role as witnesses. Renewed applause and verbal affirmations followed each person's discussion of his particular challenges and achievements, including the response to one man's declaration that this was the first time he had ever finished anything in his life. The audience's role as witness in performances such as *A Life Without* raises the stakes of our own participation, allowing us to recognize the real social labor involved.

I began this talk with a description of a recent production of *The Laramie Project* and ended it with one of a community-based collaboration entitled *A Life Without*. Both of these performances navigate the space between mimesis and abstraction, life and art, in ways that call upon a very different engagement with the audience. My discussion of corporeality is an attempt to expand how we might think about the circulation of embodied energies in performances that are based neither on the cathartic reception of a literary text in a traditional play, nor on the belief that a legible kinesthetic impulse underlies all forms of expressive movement. I am interested in the less theorized and often invisible exchanges of somatic and cultural meaning that affect us in ways that we find hard to articulate and conceptualize. Often this is because our primary remembrance

traces the elusive experience of being moved by the current of events (feeling), not necessarily the residue of emotion left behind after it is over (feelings). The examples of work presented here deploy theatrical elements of text, image and motion in ways that confound our usual modes of audience reception. Splitting across the corporeal registers of language and movement, contemporary performance can take us beyond ourselves, leading the audience to develop new responsibilities toward what is happening onstage. As someone who is deeply committed to the intimacy of body-to-body interactions, I think that is a good thing.

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