

**Emma Willis, Justine Shih Pearson, and Caroline Wake**

Editorial:

## Performing Southern Feminisms

This issue of *Performance Paradigm* locates itself within a body of recent scholarship on contemporary feminist performance; see, for example, Gorman, Harris, and Harvey's issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review*, "Feminisms Now," or the recent issue of *Australasian Drama Studies* on "The Actress in the Twenty-first Century." We have a particular interest in *Southern feminism*, taking a cue from Celia Roberts and Raewyn Connell's special issue of *Feminist Theory*. Drawing on Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (1997), Roberts and Connell point out that:

*Theory* is normally produced in the metropole and exported to the periphery, while the periphery normally produces *data* and exports this raw material to the metropole. All academic disciplines show these patterns; viewed as a whole, feminist, women's and gender studies are no exception. (Roberts and Connell 2016, 135-136)

Neither are the disciplines of theatre and performance studies, both historically dominated by North American and European scholars. Rather than solely adding some Asia-Pacific *data* to feminist theatre and performance studies, this issue asks: what might Southern feminist performance—and performance theory—look like if we were start with our own "peripheral" selves? The articles in this issue span a range of settings—from South Africa, to South Korea, to Australia, and to Aotearoa New Zealand—and includes examples that include theatre and live art, dance, film, and television.

Part of the work of answering the question posed above begins with the theory and vocabulary of Southern feminisms for theatre and performance studies. In their issue, "Feminisms Now," Gorman, Harris and Harvie remark on "the inadequacy of the term 'feminist' for non-white artists and scholars" (2018, 280). This "inadequacy" has particular regional resonances. For example, on the experiences of Pacific women, artists Lana Lopesi and Louisa Afoa write that, "the liberal feminist idea of a universal women's experience

can be unrelatable for women from cultures who have been victim to colonisation" (2015). Similarly, in her analysis of *Hot Brown Honey*, Sarah French draws on the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka nation, to argue that "Australian feminism has consistently excluded Indigenous women and [...] there are necessarily limitations to Indigenous women's involvement with white feminists" (Moreton-Robinson 2000, cited by French 2018, 322).

Responsive to these concerns, Nicola Hyland (Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, Ngāti Hauiti) demonstrates the significance of bringing indigenous conceptual frameworks to bear on our analysis of performance in her article "'I Am Not a Princess': Navigating Mana Wahine in Disney's *Moana*." Hyland's response to *Moana* is framed by the Māori concept of *mana wahine*, "founded in principles and philosophies of Te Ao Māori engaging with gender, politics, and the cultural and historical realities of Māori women" (14). Her careful unpacking of the different dimensions of *mana wahine* powerfully illustrates how indigenous paradigms open up objects of analysis to a much richer contemplation. Moreover, Hyland's take on the film is a nuanced demonstration of how "uncomfortable feelings" (8) in relation to Disney's pan-Pacific and neo-imperialist representation may yet sit side-by-side with a critical championing of such representations, wherein Moana is "the heroine that Indigenous girls have been holding out for" (ibid.). As Hyland rightly points out, there is much to support an analysis of the former that is damning in its critique. However, the article owes much to Hyland's own affective response to the film—to Moana as "proto-feminist South Seas protagonist" (ibid.)—interweaving this response into a layered analysis which brings the local and global into conversation with one another, ultimately privileging the indigenous voice as plural and complex. Hyland's scholarship recognises and encompasses what she describes as "a complex connectivity between the mind, body, and the metaphysical" (9), a connectivity at the centre of *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world).

Aylwyn's Walsh similarly identifies a complex affectivity at play in her discussion of South African artworks *I Stand Corrected*, by choreographer Mamela Nyamza and writer Mojisola Adebayo, and *Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail, the Dark Lioness* by "visual activist" Zanele Muholi. Working from an intersectional perspective that recognises the interlocking oppressions—violence, homophobic hate crime, systemic racism, and historical trauma—that constitute the context within which these artists are working, Walsh uses her case studies as "an opportunity to think through Black agency as refusal in performance, via an aesthetic of ambiguity and complicity" (24). In doing so, she takes up Brazilian feminist ethicist Denise Ferreira da Silva's concept of a *poethics of Black refusal*, which Walsh explains as "forged in dwelling with the matter of work (material and decompositional), as opposed to emphasising the 'critical' project" (26). Walsh's engagement of da Silva's work makes an important contribution to the conceptualisation of Southern feminism, which both allows for ambiguity, complexity, and contradiction, and at the same time privileges the knowledge that comes from the lived experience of the body. Ultimately, Walsh argues, the concept and practice of *poethics* lends itself towards an articulation of radical hope.

Fiona Gregory's discussion of Australian comedians Kate McLennan and Kate McCartney's subversive television program *Get Krack!n*, examines the makers' own critical self-consciousness of this position. The duo's satirical comedy show, Gregory demonstrates, follows in a line of successful comedic television shows in which satire of genre—in this case the morning news program—is used as a vehicle for "exposing the very elements of performance technique that viewers have come to accept as markers of authentic, real, factual TV" (43). In the case of morning news, *Get Krack!n* makes the dominant cultural paradigm of whiteness and domestic femininity visible as a performative instrument of power. Focussing her analysis on the second season—in particular, the final episode co-written with and presented by acclaimed Indigenous performers Nakkiah Lui and Miranda Tapsall—Gregory argues the program ultimately "made its intersectional politics impossible to ignore" (49). Significantly, through their self-reflexive critique, McLennan, McCartney, and their collaborators begin to open a space that allows poethic affectivity to assert its significance.

The tension between intellectual critique and a politics that privileges affective knowledge is an implicit factor across many of the articles in this issue. This stems in part from the political and geographical complexity of defining what constitutes *Southernness*. While Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are all geographically Southern, the first two are part of the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance with the UK, US, and Canada, which firmly positions them at the geopolitical centre. The inclusion of South Korea in this issue was also debated. On the one hand, the broader project here is to put on the record scholarship that lies beyond the dominant British, European and North American feminist discourse; on the other, South Korea is both geographically and economically North. Perhaps we need an Eastern Hemispheric Institute—or a Pacific or Indian Ocean Institute for that matter—to build on but also counter-balance the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, which takes in North, South and Central America.

The complexity of defining *Southernness* of course also complicates articulations of Southern *feminism*. Across the issue, authors variously point to the complex intertwining of the local and the global when it comes to unpacking performances from this hemisphere, where colonialism, indigenous paradigms, and intellectual "globalism" all shape what *feminist* might mean in these contexts. For example, like their sisters around the world, the women of the Asia-Pacific raised their hands and voices in 2017 to say #metoo. However, regional differences mean that the movement has unfolded differently here. In Australia, strict defamation laws have stymied the naming of perpetrators and instead facilitated the effective "weaponisation" of the #metoo movement (Maley 2018). In China, women were using the hashtags #我也是 (#IAmAlso) and #MeToo在中国 (#MeTooInChina) until the tags were banned, at which point they switched to the user-generated nickname for the movement, 米兔, which translates as "rice bunny" but is pronounced as *mǐ tù* (Zeng 2018). In other instances, the movement served to reanimate previous efforts, for example the Australia Council of the Arts' report *Women in Theatre* (Lally and Miller 2012) and in the Republic of Korea, Seo Ji-hyun's complaint against her senior colleague in 2010 (Haynes and Chen 2018).

Against this backdrop, Park Younghee and Jeremy Neideck's "A Single Drop of Water: Vulnerability, Invisibility, and Accountability in South Korean Theatre's Moment of Crisis," delves into the impact of the global #metoo movement in South Korean context, highlighting the difficulty of looking at South Korean power imbalances from a Western viewpoint. For example, they consider how "the plasticity of Confucian patriarchy," the "militarisation of masculinity," and the "politicisation of female sexuality" all function as contextually specific factors that have shaped both expressions of and reception to the #metoo movement in South Korea. Notably, the authors' discussion of sexual abuse and harassment draws from Younghee's own experiences, thereby providing a perspective that moves powerfully between personal reflection and political analysis. Significantly, Younghee's poetry frames the authors' discussion in a move that, like Hyland's, recognises the particular knowledge that affectivity brings, and creates space for this on the page.

Younghee's poetry and her reflections on practice with Neideck sit alongside other practice-informed writing in this issue, notably an interview with documentarian Olivia Rousset by Helena Grehan, and a dialogue between New Zealand performance makers Nisha Madhan and Julia Croft. One of the strong themes that emerges from this writing—as well as other articles—is that of collaboration, and, relatedly, the political power of feminist friendship. Evident from these discussions is a concurrent political commitment and commitment to the welfare of the collaborative other, whether artist or interview subject. Interviewer Helena Grehan writes of Rousset: "She asks those who engage with her work to take action, not just to empathise. She makes space for the subjects of her work to speak directly to her audience, to call on their humanity, and to push them to do more; to take action and to make change" (81). This point is especially significant. For example, whereas Rebecca Solnit (2019) has recently argued for political significance of writing and other artforms' ability to let us "live inside ideas," thereby imagining other futures as a process of slow unfolding, Rousset more urgently suggests that, "if all we are left with is the capacity to be moved, or to know and share the information, it's no longer enough" (83). Certainly, Rousset's sense of urgency is responsive to the very materiality that da Silva points to; that is, the material conditions of precarity experienced by her subjects, in particular asylum seekers detained indefinitely by the Australian Government in appalling conditions. Through her own example, Rousset calls for collaboration from her audience, asking them to "take action."

The significance of collaborative practice is also central to Hannah Banks' contribution to the issue, "Feminist Live Art in Aotearoa New Zealand: Bound and Unbound Tensions in the Work of Julia Croft, Virginia Frankovich, and Nisha Madhan." Responding to a throwaway comment from a UK performance maker to Croft about the "fierceness" of Antipodean women on stage, Banks unpacks this perception from the perspective of Aotearoa New Zealand. Through her case studies, Banks identifies what she calls "a complicated tension at work in the processes and practices of female experimental makers in New Zealand," which she characterises as being "both *unbound* and *bound*, often with a 'scrappy' aesthetic quality" (98-99). Banks's attention is trained as much on the context of the works' production and the creative relationship underpinning them as the works themselves, and in this sense gives a rich perspective on why "fierceness" might be

perceived in such works by outside audience, while also recording the deep collaborative commitment which sustains this practice. The published dialogue between Croft and Madhan, "Messy, Feminist, Subversive, Uncertain: Three Snapshots of Collaborative Practice," gives us further insight into their collaborative relationship.

While the scope of case studies considered in this issue is necessarily limited, the articles and interviews are a contribution to the work of analysing feminist performances from the Southern hemisphere, bringing the perspectives of those who belong, live, and work in this part of the world to a wider audience.

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