“Be Uncomfortable with Me for a Moment”
Performing an Uneasy Solidarity in the New Black Fest’s Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments

Catherine Ming T’ien Duffly

Thirteen minutes is a long time to hold your hands above your head. And yet, that is exactly what the audience is asked to do in the 3 December 2016 performance of Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments, a play composed of monologues inspired by the 2014 events in Ferguson, Missouri. In the final monologue of the play, “How I Feel,” performer La’Tevin Alexander begins by asking for “a showing of solidarity.” Alexander asks audience members to hold their hands in the air, and the audience is asked to do the same.

Figure 1. La’Tevin Alexander asks the audience to hold their hands in the air, in “How I Feel” by Dennis Allen II, the final monologue of Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments. Wieden+Kennedy building, Portland, OR, 3 December 2016. (Photo by Sierra Bri Ponce Rickards)

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to hold their hands in the air and keep them up for the entire monologue. He implores the audience, “I’m asking you to be uncomfortable with me for a moment; for this moment in time, let’s attempt to experience the same experience together.” These uncomfortable final moments exemplify the tensions and possibilities inherent in this powerful play.

Following the police shooting of a young, unarmed black man—in this case, Michael Brown—and the protests and violent police response that followed in Ferguson, Missouri, New York–based theatre organization the New Black Fest commissioned *Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments*. Composed of seven monologues by black playwrights, the play explores the experiences of being black in America in the current context of racialized violence and institutionalized racism. The New Black Fest is a producing organization dedicated to supporting and showcasing provocative new work by black theatre artists. Artistic director Keith Josef Adkins has commissioned several new works in recent years in an effort not only to support black artists, but to spark conversations around black identity, black resilience, and experiences of racism. For example, in addition to *Hands Up*, Adkins commissioned *Facing Our Truth: Short Plays on Trayvon, Race, and Privilege* (2013) and *Untamed: Hair Body Attitude* (2015), the latter a series of short plays engaging with black womanhood and social perceptions of black femininity.

*Hands Up* opened in Portland, Oregon, on 14 April 2016, directed by Kevin Jones and produced by Portland’s August Wilson Red Door Project, an organization whose mission is “to change the racial ecology of Portland through the arts” (Red Door Project 2017). Since its 2015 premiere by Philadelphia’s Flashpoint Theatre Company, readings and full productions of the play have been staged around the country. Each production is required by the New Black Fest to host a talkback; Portland’s Red Door Project is known for hosting meaningful postshow conversations, specifically around issues of race, and Jones had been looking for a play that could spark serious dialogue about race and the resiliency of the black community in Portland. *Hands Up* promised such a conversation.

As the dramaturg of the Portland production, I participated in early conversations with Jones during which we planned for just six performances of *Hands Up*. However, the play had such a profound community response in the city, due in large part to its ongoing relevance in light of our national race crisis, that what started as a 6-show run developed into a 30-show run, with its final performance of the year on 3 December 2016 and more shows planned in 2017. As an artistic collaborator on the show, I have seen multiple iterations of the production and witnessed numerous talkbacks with audience members in different contexts around Portland, giving me insight into the profound ways the piece sought to impact its performers and audience members.

*Hands Up* asks the audience to bear witness to both the pain and the resilience of black Americans in a context of white supremacy and institutionalized violence. As evidenced by the final monologue, *Hands Up* provides an opportunity for black and non-black audience members to come together in solidarity around a divisive issue. However, the Portland performance, in one of the whitest cities in the United States (over 70%), with a deep and often obscured history of white supremacy and black erasure, raises questions about the pitfalls of enactments of solidarity. Although *Hands Up* provides an important space for crossracial conversation about race and white supremacy, it is through its enactment of an uneasy solidarity that the play holds the most potential for change. The Portland production asks black and non-black audience members to come together with their differences intact to address local and national issues of racial trauma.

As the audience waits for *Hands Up* to begin at the 3 December 2016 showing, the music and words of contemporary black artists and activists—including singer Janelle Monae, rapper T.I., and footballer Colin Kaepernick—fill the performance space, a traverse stage area surprisingly located in the atrium of a

1. All quotes from *Hands Up: 7 Playwrights, 7 Testaments* are from the unpublished manuscript provided to me by Kevin Jones (Allen et al. 2015).
downtown Portland office building (of advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy). In an effort to bring Hands Up to as many Portlanders as possible, and for free, the Red Door Project has produced the play in numerous spaces including more traditional theatrical venues, but also college and community college campuses, a movie theatre, a comedy club, and community spaces in the historically black Albina neighborhood. Audience size has ranged from 25 people at the first show (Cerimon House) to over 420 at one showing (Portland State University). The set is elegantly simple in its design, comprised solely of the enlarged photographs, mounted on folding screens, of 17 black people killed by police (Alonzo Smith, Dante Ivy, Darrius Stewart, Dontre Hamilton, Jamar Clark, Jason Moland, John Crawford, Kendra James, Matthew Ajibade, Michael Brown, Natasha McKenna, Samuel Harrell, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Trayvon Martin, and Zamiel Crawford). This spare set serves a practical purpose, allowing the show to be performed in a variety of different types of venues. However, the simplicity of the set design also serves to underscore the images of the slain, acting as a kind of memorial to some of the black people who have been killed by police in the United States. The Portland cast of actors (which has included over its run, La’Tevin Alexander, James Brooks, Alonzo Chadwick, Sekai Edwards, Joseph Gibson, Tim Golden, Jasper Howard, Jonathan Thompson, and Ashley Williams), all African American, are dressed in street clothes and speak in direct address to the audience, acting as the representatives of the those pictured on the set. In the hour and a half that follows, as the audience is invited to bear witness to the diverse experiences of seven black Americans struggling to cope with the trauma that results from the constant threat of police violence, the faces of the slain pictured on the set become the literal backdrop for the performance, an ever present reminder of the empirical reality of that violence.

Before each showing of Hands Up, Jones speaks directly to the audience. He tells them: “What you’re about to witness are seven depictions of the African American psyche—all forged in the democracy we call the United States of America” (Jones 2016b). The monologues in Hands Up deal with the experiences of “driving while black” (“Superiority Fantasy” by Nathan James), questioning racial identity and legitimacy (“Holes in My Identity” by Nathan Yungerberg), microaggressions (“They Shootin! Or I Ain’t Neva Scared...” by Idris Goodwin), police violence against women (“Dead of Night... The Execution of...” by Nambi E. Kelley), conflicted feelings over bringing a child into a threatening world (“Abortion” by Glenn “NSangou” Gordon), light-skinned privilege (“Walking Next to Michael Brown” by Eric Holmes), and the power and danger of expressing black rage (“How I Feel” by Dennis Allen II). The playwrights commissioned by the New Black Fest hail from New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Each monologue is written in a different voice and style, from the intimate, confessional mode of “Holes in My Identity,” to the lyrical, spoken word style of “They Shootin,” to “Abortion,” which contrasts evocative, poetic language and a sweet coming-of-age story with a violent ending. The multivocal world of the play as a whole is constructed via the particularity of experience the play por-
trays, and the differences the monologues evince among the characters onstage and between those characters and the audience.

When Tim Golden, the first performer of the play, begins his monologue, “Superiority Fantasy,” he speaks from his seat in the audience, “I think there is a difference between a Caucasian person, and a white person.” In the opening moments of the monologue, Golden immediately calls attention to the racial construction of whiteness, highlighting both a racial category that often goes unmarked and the fact that there is nothing essential about that racial category. He continues, “A Caucasian person is […] just trying to get through life in America just the same as black people are […] But a white person? When a white person walks into the room or on public transportation, you can tell by the way they look at you that they KNOW they’re white and you’re black.” It is unclear exactly whom in the audience he is hailing. When Golden refers to the audience with a collective “you,” positioned as he is within the seated area of the audience, he creates a unified group that can include both white and black audience members by implying a “them” — the white people who just don’t get it. But this moment also leaves room for a possible “them” within the audience. In these opening moments, do white viewers scramble to determine on which side of the racial coin they fall? This complex racial hailing in the first lines of the opening Hands Up monologue is sufficiently ambivalent such that white audience members in particular might be left on unstable ground as soon as the performance begins.

This effort to destabilize white audience members is particularly noteworthy given the location of the production in Portland, a city that has developed a national reputation as a progressive, outdoorsy urban center that is obsessed with bikes, beer, and artisanal foods. What the city’s quirky reputation does not capture, however, is Oregon’s history of racial exclusion and segregation. For example, Oregon’s constitution did not permit black people to live in the state until 1926. This history has had ongoing ramifications for communities of color in Portland and the surrounding Multnomah County (see Gibson 2007; and Semuels 2016). A 2010 census report confirmed Portland to be the whitest big city in the United States and a report published in 2010 by the Coalition of Communities of Color in Multnomah County further elaborates the disparity that exists in and around the Portland area. It is within this context that, in the fall of 2011, partners Jones and Lesli Mones founded the August Wilson Red Door Project, the producing organization of Portland’s Hands Up. The Red Door Project takes its name from the red door in August Wilson’s plays, which symbolizes a connection to an African American past, the importance of remembering and honoring that past, and the spirit of transformation. Just as those who walk through the red door in Wilson’s plays are looking for redemption and spiritual cleansing, the Red Door Project invites audiences to walk through the metaphorical red door when they go to the theatre.

Most nights Jones tells the audience, “We’re not asking for your agreement or disagreement but rather we request that you be open to what you hear and experience and allow it to have impact on you” (Jones 2016b). This request—to listen and to sit with the potential discomfort from the monologues—captures some of what is powerful about these Portland performances. Night after night during the facilitated talkbacks that follow each of the performances, black and non-black audience members alike express gratitude, grief, anger, and despair in the wake of bearing witness to these stories. The conversations that follow, during the talkbacks, are often tense and difficult. On more than one occasion an audience member has left angry or agitated. One striking example of audience response is that of Portland Police Captain, Michael Crebs. After attending the 29 July 2016 performance of Hands Up, Crebs spoke up during a talkback to say

2. With a population that is approximately 74 percent white, people of color earn half the income of white residents and experience unemployment rates that are 35.7 percent higher than whites. In Multnomah 30 percent of communities of color do not graduate from high school, as compared to only 7 percent of whites. Overall, the study found that disparity with regards to income, poverty, and education greater in Multnomah County than it is in similar communities of color in other parts of the country (see Curry-Stevens et al. 2010).
that while he had been reluctant to attend the performance, the play had given him a better understanding of why African Americans fear police. Upon hearing Crebs, performer Alonzo Chadwick began to cry. “That was the first time I had heard any officer acknowledge, ‘We didn’t realize how difficult this must be for you all,’ [...] I have felt some sense of healing. I felt like I was kind of being apologized to” (in Parks 2016). Following the performance, Crebs and Chadwick met for coffee and shared their stories. Since then, Jones has also been in communication with Crebs and other members of the Portland Police Department and Red Door has plans to perform Hands Up for new recruits of the Portland Police Academy.

This outcome reveals both the powerful potential of the play and its possible pitfalls. Jones asks the audience to sit with their discomfort. But what does this really look and feel like? Does the example of Officer Crebs reveal the impact of Hands Up on the Portland community? Or does it reveal its ability to be coopted by the very forces it seeks to critique? The Hands Up monologues open up a conversation about systemic racism and its violent consequences. But what happens after the hands are put down and the lights come up? After the momentary enactment of solidarity, are audiences left with a false sense of commonality? Or are they left with an uneasy sense of their real differences?

The “How I Feel” monologue exemplifies this tension most clearly. Sitting in the audience of Hands Up, I, like most of the other members of the audience, hold my hands up when performer La’Tevin Alexander asks the group to raise hands in solidarity. After about a minute, it begins to hurt. After about five minutes, my shoulders are burning, my arms are drooping. As Jones puts it, “It is hard to think when you are in a state of fear and pain” (Jones 2016a). That, he says, is precisely the point. The gesture is not about easy solidarity, but one of physical discomfort that asks participants to experience a fraction of the pain felt by many black Americans. (During the talkback after the performance that I attended, a white audience member said, “As soon as I put my hands up, I started crying. I realized that I’ve never had to say that. I’ve never had to say, ‘Don’t Shoot.’ I felt so vulnerable.”) Ten minutes in, Alexander calls, “Hands up! For the sake of black people here in America and abroad keep your hands up!” And so I keep my hands up, because in that moment it feels important, shared as it is (the moment and the gesture); because I want to be in solidarity with Alexander, my fellow audience members, and black Americans. Even as I know the gesture won’t save any lives, I keep my hands up. In that moment I feel both the positive symbolism and the futility of the gesture.

The dual awareness of the power and powerlessness of the “hands up” gesture evokes what Anusha Kedhar has referred to as “the black body’s repertoire of survival” (Kedhar 2014). The bodily enactment of “hands up” by the Portland audience places them in solidarity with the performer onstage as well as “black people here in America and abroad.” Contained in that enactment is the reference to Michael Brown’s failed sign, the gesture that was meant to signify surrender, but failed (Kedhar 2014). It also references the protest gesture of activists in Ferguson and across the country. Kedhar describes the complexity of this protest choreography, pointing out that it is “through the ultimate and most recognizable gesture of cooperation that these protesting bodies tactically perform non-cooperation with an unjust state” (2014). Thus, Alexander’s hailing cites Brown’s failed gesture at the same time as it elicits a physical enactment of solidarity within the audience. It also places the performance in solidarity with a larger national context.

The dual performance the gesture elicits—both failure and solidarity—raises some questions about the effects of enactments of solidarity. In his presidential address to the American Studies Association, David Roediger confronts the way easy invocations of solidarity can erase important differences of experience. He cites the example of activists across the country asking whether non-black protestors should be raising their hands in a gesture of solidarity while chanting “Hands up! Don’t Shoot!” As he points out, with regards to these debates, “some populations face threats of extralegal and unpunished violence in ways very different from what others face” (2016:223). Roediger calls for reflection on the difficulties of enactments of solidarity and he connects his reflection with current rethinking of the notion of...
“optimism” (see Eagleton 2015; and Berlant 2011), reminding us that “the desire for reassurances that social motion is proceeding in our favor can lead in practice to immobilization [...]. We ought to be willing to make solidarity uneasy as well, seeking it by owning its difficulties” (2016:245).

*Hands Up* does not leave its audiences with reassurances that social motion is proceeding. The trauma to which it refers is a present and ongoing trauma that no single performance can heal. But if the performance does hold hope for communities like Portland, it is in those moments of uneasy solidarity. *Hands Up* is full of both utopic possibility and the recognition of systemic and individual failure. It asks us to seek solidarity while also “owning its difficulties,” to reach across difference to act in uneasy solidarity with each other.

**References**


Street Theatre East of Eden
The 10th International Street Theatre Festival in Mariwan, Iran

Doug Paterson

In the fall of 2015, my wife Marghee and I attended a street theatre festival in Iran, where I gave three prefestival workshops in Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. While there, we were also able to attend upwards of a dozen performances by both local and international companies. These events included occasional commentary on performance styles, Iranian history, street life, and current political dynamics. This account details some of the more salient elements of what turned out to be an extraordinarily positive adventure.

On 1 July 2015 I received, out of the blue, an email invitation to attend the 10th International Street Theatre Festival in the small city of Marivan, Iran (population c. 100,000). Centered at the top of the email was the invocation: In the Name of God. I am not making wise to say that my first thought was that this was yet another appeal to respond to an unknown wealthy donor in Nigeria. But the email continued in a very rational way: “We are eagerly ready to host you in Marivan as you may give lecture, to hold workshop, to present lecture in theatre fields for Iranian artists in 10th International Street Theatre Festival. It will be great pleasure for Dramatic Arts Center of Iran to host you in Iran.”

I thought, “why not?” It concluded with: “Please keep in touch and let us know your timetable and schedule to participate in our festival,” signed on behalf of the Director of the Dramatic Arts Center in Tehran.

Perhaps it needs to be said that this invitation came during the intense period of international negotiation on the status of the Iran nuclear arms activity and two weeks prior to the deal struck by the Obama administration (14 July 2015). More than a decade earlier, in January 2003, I had gone to Baghdad, Iraq, with 40 US university professors to attend a Peace Conference at the University of Baghdad. That trip was our attempt to learn more about the Iraqi perspective on “weapons of mass destruction” and get more war resistance coverage on US television. Our efforts clearly failed either to get the coverage or fore-stall the US invasion of Iraq two months later. In a sense, going to Iran—even in these similarly tense times—seemed substantially less risky than the urgent Iraq dialogue. Therefore, I responded by email to the assigned address, asking about the details of the arrangement and what they expected of my participation in the festival. I had a few more concerns:

[…] Would my work represent an insult or affront to any of the more conservative elements of Iranian society, especially if this might result in some jeopardy to our safety?

I regret having to ask these questions, but they are necessary for me even to consider your kind and entirely unexpected invitation.

Let me also regret the fact that you are required to communicate in my language—the somewhat imperial one—while I know nothing of Persian. I do appreciate your cultivating this, for now default, international language.

The Center never addressed the matter of our safety, but in a very real sense what could they say but that we would be safe? And not surprisingly, we continued to correspond in English.

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In a very few days, I received the following encouraging response:

Thank you very much for your kind reply. I am really happy to hear from you again.

Theatre of the Oppressed is a good field as you have suggested for Street Theatre Festival in Marivan. Your suggestion seems to be fine for festival and acceptable and would be credible for theatre artists and educators. Please let us know your other option and opinion to have workshops and dialogues in Festival.

Because someone had apparently found my name on the internet, the Dramatic Arts Center was asking me to do Theatre of the Oppressed workshops, which I have done extensively, even in Iraq. I told Marghee of the invitation and we decided almost immediately to pursue the residency.

With this approval, the Center began a very generous process of helping us with the intricacies of acquiring Iranian visas, providing a translator available to us at all times, and securing accommodations. We then made our own airline reservations for which we were reimbursted for my airfare only.

For the next three months we prepared. Marghee resolved to acquire scarves and coverings, first because she likes scarves, and second because she wanted to show respect for the cultural traditions and not stand out as hostile. We both studied the Persian/Farsi language. Marghee did very well, I less so. However, Marivan is a thoroughly Kurdish city in Kurdistan. While Persian/Farsi is very useful and the people take pride in their links to Persian heritage, the Kurds do not identify strongly with the current history of Iran nor with the Persian/Farsi language. In Kurdistan, the language is Kurdish, and while related to Persian/Farsi, the differences range from modest to substantial. Indeed, the residents spell the name of their town Mariwan, not Marivan, in part due to the region’s history and name prior to 1950, and in part in order to resist Persian/Farsi hegemony.

We were on site from 27 September through 2 October 2015. Fortunately, our translator and guide Amjad Panahi—assigned to us up to 18 hours a day—was an exceptional human being as well as an excellent translator and historian. His wife, Leila Weisi, also spoke English very well. We learned much from our time together. While a Wikipedia page describes Kurdish history ranging from the 7th century BCE, Amjad insisted Kurdish culture reaches back to at least 2000 BCE, while Persian/Farsi is “derivative” and, according to him, began at least 1000 years later. I’m at best a lay historian of this region and most of the information I pass along is under the category of “as I understood it” or “as I was told.” Regardless, the current resistance of the Kurds in Iran against the dominant culture, as well as in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, is adamant. With the fall of the Shah in 1979, Kurds in western Iran and especially around Mariwan rose up along with many other “progressive” forces, but the emerging Islamic state made a deal with the Shah’s army to remain neutral. Then the new state proceeded to brutally crush Kurdish resistance. Both regional powers and, earlier, the usual colonial suspects made sure that Kurdistan would not become an independent state either before or after the two world wars. Some believe there is little hope for an independent Kurdistan, but I have also read that others see it coming into existence by 2030.

The irony here of course is that, without Kurdish fighters, especially the Peshmurga in Iraq and Turkey, the US position against ISIS would be even more of a shambles than it already is. As I understand it, however, the Kurdish fighters are fighting to protect Kurdish people and Kurdistan areas, not to advance US interests. This reliance means the US has a sizeable tiger on its side — by the tail. Recent developments since 2015 have proven the Kurdish independence movement can add layers of complexity that no power in the region can simplify. If the US indeed thinks it has this tiger by the tail, the biting end remains disciplined in its militancy and continues to challenge at least Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and what’s left of Syria.

Mariwan is a recent city, perhaps 150 years old at most, though probably small settlements existed for millennia. In fact, this region is one of the sites claimed to be the Garden of Eden (in Biblical myth). Some in Mariwan believe their city and lake is the precise location. The area is dotted with many rural villages, and
driving around the nearby large Lake Zeribar (Kurdish: Zaribar) where our hotel bungalow was located we saw a dozen or more villages. The lake is beautiful, but threatened. The national government determined that ongoing drought meant Lake Zaribar’s main inflowing river had to be dammed (sound familiar?); in the last five years grasses and reeds have replaced almost a third of the lake. The lake used to be 20 meters (60 feet) deep but is now rarely deeper than four meters (12 feet). Progress? The End of Eden?

Daily life downtown was active and flourishing. Every day there was a rapid and steady stream of automobile traffic on the main streets. Cars drove very close to each other, changing lanes and weaving through traffic circles in ways I thought hazardous but which Marghee admired. There are many intersections in the city but we saw only two traffic lights, and no stop signs. While our guides said there were indeed many crashes, we saw just one fender bender the entire week. That was the only time we saw any police. The tradition is to make your own way, to avoid others, and to get where you are going as quickly as possible. After some alarm, we settled into mild apprehension, trusting our driver.

Turning to the Festival itself: teachers and community people in Mariwan began to organize the first festival in 2005. Having been invited to conduct Theatre of the Oppressed workshops at the Festival, I offered to work with the same group of people for three days culminating in a public performance. I believe the problem with this proposal was that the nature of this performance was not known beforehand and therefore the producers did not have control of the content. All the other performances had been screened by means of the videos required in the application. My workshop performance proposal was rejected, so I instead offered three three-hour introductory Theatre of the Oppressed workshops involving approximately 40 community members and festival participants in each.

While a full summary of that workshop is beyond the scope of this account, I can say that it went smoothly despite the simultaneous translation, as I was experienced giving workshops under these circumstances; and the participants were thoroughly willing to commit to the games and structures. Because casual public touch between men and women is strongly discouraged, I chose only games where no touch was involved except for one called “lead with a finger.” I got permission from both our hosts and from the workshop participants to play this game, in which one partner leads the other, whose eyes are closed, by touching only the tip of the partner’s index finger. The result was first delight and a few laughs, and then silence as the game revealed how good humans are at learning to communicate well with a very limited language of touch.

While the 2006 inaugural Festival was a relatively small event featuring performance companies from Mariwan, later years expanded the scope to include all of Iran. Now there is a growing international component. It is likely our invitation was part of this development but the closing ceremony made it clear we were invited as individuals and not as US repre-
sentatives. For the final awards ceremony, the flags of the four invited nations—Spain, Italy, Greece, and Azerbaijan—were featured on the ceremony stage but, not surprisingly, no stars and stripes. The speaker not only explained this but pointed to us directly, saying we were special individual guests, not to be considered invited representatives of the United States.

In addition to the international companies, about 20 companies from Iran participated. Marghee and I attended all the international performances as well as a number of the local and national companies. We were barely able to determine the time, location, and home city of these performances because the schedule was available only in Kurdish/Farsi. Our translator ably read aloud the performances we selected, but since we were literally running from performance to performance, event to event, often sitting on the ground, information such as play titles, directors, and actors is probably not entirely accurate.

Before describing several of the street performances, let me make one generalized observation. I soon recognized that a technique practiced at all the performances was a very smart “Swan Theatre Flag” device: a powerful sound system that could be turned up to attract an audience, turned up further to start the production and get an audience’s attention, and then turned down or up for a carefully arranged score. All the productions we saw used powerful amplification equipment to attract audiences and score the highly physical performances moment-by-moment.

The first international play we saw was by Tesseract from the Republic of Azerbaijan. It indicted systems of sponsored violence, whether in war or on the street. A shadowy character coerces two assassins to shoot each other. Relying on images, movement, and props with enormous amplified sound, the story shows the assassins dying with high theatricality, then getting up to shoot each other over and over. Finally both “realize,” and turn to shoot the sponsor responsible for this mechanical reproduction of slaughter. An audience of perhaps 200 roundly cheered this performance that took place alongside Lake Zaribar.

That same night, two companies—one from Greece (Atropos), the other from Kurdistan (Kani)—worked together prior to the festival to create two related metatheatre events called Purgatory. These were jointly directed by Rahim Abdul Rahimzadeh and Stamatis Efstathiou. The first, grounded in an Iranian myth called Saydawan, was a bold presentational performance based upon Kurdish traditional music. In the Saydawan myth, Abdol-aziz has a horrific nightmare. He decides to arrange a majestic marriage ceremony for his oldest son to avoid the omen, but his son dies. So he decides to give the bride to his second oldest son but due to an accident he also dies. Desperate to avoid this apparent curse, Abdol-aziz arranges the marriage to his last son Saydawan, who inadvertently is killed by his father—either actually, or in the father’s dream.

The setline was truly challenging. On an 8’ by 30’ runway tennis-court style, ground-cloth stage, a male character appears on either end of the runway. Each is the same character. One believes he killed his son, the other believes he dreamed the horror. A raised 8’ platform in the middle supports a woman who lies keening. She is presumably the mother/wife. While the assassin piece from Azerbaijan relied largely on images, movement, and props, the Kani piece was a series of dramatic monologues alternating between the two male characters. Not knowing Persian or Farsi, we missed all verbal nuance. Both father/husband characters, however, presented intense physicality in the initial storytelling and progressed to extreme arm, leg, and body contortions, individualized by each in their personal style. With their struggles to remember which memory is true the performance might be described as a growing image of internal strangulation, matched by faces stretched to the breaking point. Narratives broke into howls, capturing the suffering implied in the story. The mother on the central platform used similar but less intense gestures, yet the whole combined to create a hideous psychological profile. Iranians apparently knew this story of extreme grief, while we were able to at least appreciate the intense physical work.

Atropos, the other company in this two-production project, took their name from the ancient Greek goddess of Fate. Their work was The Story of Er, with a narrative taken from Plato. My initial thought was that the
philosopher, who kicked theatre out of his Republic, would spin in his grave if he knew his ideas were being performed by actors. The rendition was visually complex and compelling with dense physical pictures created by actors’ bodies, singly and in groups. Still, we lacked detail because of language. What we could decipher was that a dead man in purgatory watches or is forced to watch his life history. Like a slide show seen projected under water, the production presented a series of speaking images that flowed from one to the next. It was like looking at celluloid five thousand years old—grainy, even foggy because of the shards of light from piercing side lamps made more effective by the nighttime performance. Told with an astonishing array of physical “slides” and with a series of disciplined responses from Efstathiou as the dead man, the play kept the rapt attention of an age-diverse audience, some of whom perhaps first encountered Plato’s philosophy through the riveting human images of the production.

Faber, a group from Italy, offered a stilt performance called Parada (parade). Three tall characters with quasi-Commedia masks wielded large flags used as weapons against the people, represented as an actual street band playing popular music. The advance of the stilt walkers caused (mimed) injury to the band and seemed to be indicating the injustice of the authorities—often the theme in children’s stories that deal with “giants.” Indeed there were many children crowding around and moving through the performance. I was impressed by the stilt walkers’ ability to navigate through this large crowd of young people. They were experienced performers who were always up to the task. In time the band got the best of the stilt walkers and literally brought them to the ground. However, like other stories in the festival, the stilt walkers were allowed to regain their height but not their weapons and so there was a kind of reconciliation.

Charebdar was another highly visual piece that I believe was from Tehran, but we did not learn the company’s name. “Charebdar” means “livery stable owner” in an ancient non-Persian language. Hundreds of years ago, charebdar were men who ventured in caravans from small rural villages to larger cities to acquire provisions for the people back home. Their adventures are part of a locally well-known distinctive regional history; the story of tragedy on a bridge over troubled waters is basic lore. Performed in the main outdoor festival theatre (which was strikingly Hellenistic), the history was the springboard for a love story. We see the charebdar return from getting provisions on their fabulous, theatrical “horses” and witness a young village woman’s love for one of the men. Courtship ensues, parents are consulted, approval is won, a party is held, and the girl finally accompanies her charebdar on horseback to his village.

The horses deserve description. They were larger and more elaborate versions of cardboard horses one might make for children. A 5’ by 2’ box was fitted with straps so an actor could stand or run inside the box, which was supported by the shoulder straps. Fanciful heads and tails were added on either end, and images of blankets or saddles on the painted sides.

The stage was set initially left to right with a 5’ high by 30’ long bridge or trestle that was walkable. Large blue bolts of cloth, waved by actors up and downstage, designated the dangerous waters to confront the lovers. Because this arrangement took up most of the stage space and the entire stage was needed for other scenes, the bridge-and-water ensemble was deftly struck and re-set several times as we watched the men cross it once, the lover cross it once, and then the lovers together. As the two come to the wave-whipped trestle, they decide to try the bridge before nighttime, her horse carrying her just a few feet behind the man. Suddenly the female actor literally fell through her theatrical horse, through the bridge, and out of sight, causing the charebdar to grieve profusely. It was an arresting piece of theatrical magic. The song-filled production was a spectacular piece of popular street theatre.

Two street clowns, Lusco and Fusco from Spain, gave us our favorite presentation, from a series called Encontros. They stunned the audience with their physicality. Most left aching with laughter and wonder. Their story, The Trip, was simple, with some clear human-relationship politics. Two friends, each carrying a very solid suitcase and wearing regular ragged street wear and no makeup, meet, perhaps after a trip. They have been away and are glad to see each other.
again. One leans on the other’s shoulder, the other, not caring for that, deftly turns the tables and leans on the first. The leaning turns around again and their story becomes a lesson in petty competition. For 45 minutes each tries to get a physical advantage over the other.

There is no makeup, no red noses, no clown garb. Just ill-fitting street clothes. The “friends” use the suitcases to compete and even race. Imagine each standing on top of a suitcase and then leveraging the sides sequentially with feet only, to repeatedly flip and thus “walk” them fairly quickly—without their feet ever touching the ground. The entire main theatre orchestra area became an arena for taking the lead, getting the big suitcase, avoiding embrace, and finally sitting on the big suitcase with the other being fooled into sitting on the smaller one.

The final competition involved juggling pins. The performers tossed them in entirely new ways, with pins sliding from an upraised hand down the arm, across the shoulders, down the lower arm, and into the lower hand. I was awestruck. Young boys and girls along the front rows howled continuously. The series ended with one performer stealing pins as the other juggled, so that four hands moved like the East Indian goddess Kali juggling, finally ending in chagrin when the pins suddenly end up back in a suitcase. The two made up, embraced, and exited to the tumultuous sound of an audience shouting for more.

Like so many new popular clowns in the West over the last 40 years, these clowns had a political point of view. First, they engaged in no violence. There was no hitting, slapping, or kicking, but instead much hugging with just the occasional lean on the other. Neither one hurt the other except by momentarily bruising egos in their elaborate dance of one-upmanship.

Underlying all the comic brilliance was their profound suggestion that not only is petty competition a fool’s pursuit but that obsessive competition itself easily draws us all into pettiness. Some in the sports world—and certainly the performance we witnessed was in part an athletic event—have adopted the maxim, “friendship first, competition second.” As the two actors took bows and walked offstage, arms around shoulders at last, they clearly physicalized for the happy audience an essential priority for their work: friendship first.

A truly cumulative experience occurred at the performance of The Bride of Peace presented by Shin (which is “blue” in Kurdish), a company from Mariwan and directed by Mariwan resident Mokhtar Muhammadi. Another local company of just women named Rega (meaning “way”) collaborated. This was remarkable from start to finish. While several villages sponsored performances, this village, Yengigeh, was located on the far side of Lake Zaribar and was in many ways typical of small villages in

Figure 2. In The Bride of Peace, the baby is seized by ISIS. Presented by Shin, a company from Mariwan, Iran, and directed by Mokhtar Muhammadi. International Street Theatre Festival, 2 October 2015. (Photo by Doug Paterson)
the region: home to rural workers and families, perhaps 300–500 people, whom I sensed were familiar with the festival. To get to the site, our car had to go up fairly steep and narrow streets leading to the center of Yengiğeh. While driving in, we passed another performance in front of what might have been a city building or a mosque. A large audience was gathered, but we went up further to a small courtyard dominated by a very large tree—probably an oak, since oak trees are native to the region and by far the heaviest growth in what were virtually oak jungles.

In a large corner of the courtyard was a white, square, heavy-canvas drop cloth—perhaps 25’ by 25’. Within this square was placed a separate red cloth/plastic circle that nearly touched each side of the drop cloth. When the previous performance a block and a steep walk away was over, the soundtrack of *Bride of Peace* was raised to a very high volume, and indeed in a few minutes the crowd of about 200 began to gather, nearly surrounding the playing area of white and red. An upstage entrance/exit to an alley corner of the courtyard served as backstage. The spectators stood or sat on the ground, on haunches, or on building ledges.

Some chickens clucked by. Nobody noticed because they were a daily presence. Just before the play began, a woman herded her cow through the courtyard, maybe 10 feet from the large white square. Then lovely music was broadcast over the speakers set around the courtyard, and a girl walked and danced into the square/circle, happy, carefree. She circled the set several times laughing and smiling. Crash—very edgy, loud and dangerous recorded music poured out of the speakers, and four menacing military men with black uniforms, black cloths covering their faces, appeared with helmets and stage rifles/weapons. They surrounded the girl, reduced her to helpless screams, and took her off to the back exit.

The music score changed back to lighter, lyrical tones as another woman appeared with a basket and picked fruits and vegetables. Soon, again, we heard the crash of threatening music and the four men—now clearly ISIS fighters waving flags—entered with different military-colored helmets and larger weapons. The woman was surrounded, terrified, and forced offstage. Lighter music resumed and a woman entered with a portable child’s covered play swing on her back and presumably a child inside. She seemed to be enjoying the day by giving her child sunlight and movement. Music again changed to a dangerous tone and the ISIS soldiers entered a third time with different colored helmets and this time with weapons that were truly huge. A fifth soldier, off to the side, was an older com-

Figure 3. Women trap ISIS fighters under the red circle in *The Bride of Peace*, presented by Shin and directed by Mokhtar Muhammadi. International Street Theatre Festival, Mariwan, Iran, 2 October 2015. (Photo by Marghee Paterson)
mander with his face visible. He ran to grab the play swing off the woman’s back, tore at it roughly causing her to rush the commander. But the soldiers surrounded her and like the others she was forced off but without her child. Finally a very old woman entered and the story played out again, this time with weapons that looked like small howitzers. It was clear the audience was very attentive and uneasy. Marghee said she saw women and male elders suddenly weeping as they watched this performance of ISIS terrors.

The four women reentered, indicating they were in some kind of custody as the ISIS men entered behind them. But the women gathered together, talked, and seemed to formulate a plan, luring the ISIS fighters to the side of the square. Suddenly the women quickly ran to four places on the circumference of the red circle and lifted it in the air. The ISIS group rushed toward one of the women as the four began to run in a circle, raised the red floor piece high over their heads, then slowly lowered the bright red cloth over the fighters and trapped them under it. The ISIS fighters were defeated and the audience cheered wildly. Wildly! The women took the hated ISIS group off to the backstage area as the cheers continued.

Enter the Bride of Peace in brilliant white with large bolts of white cloth or scarves draped on her, and carved doves adorning her large-brimmed white hat. The music for her entrance was luxurious. She stood in the center of the very white square as the four women entered, took a bolt of cloth each, and stretched it to a corner, anchored with a rock. This made a lovely stage picture. The women then ritualistically brought in four sets of helmets, 16 total, and arranged them geometrically as spokes around the Bride. At last, the ISIS fighters entered, broken and weaponless, took a knee, and begged for forgiveness, which the Bride of Peace allowed. The women and fighters exited, leaving the Bride of Peace alone on the stage. Beautiful music soared, and the performance was over with actors and audience mingling and talking with great energy. Barely a word had been spoken in what was an Image Theatre presentation that I believe Augusto Boal would have applauded.

Virtually everywhere we went people wanted pictures with us. This was probably because we were from the US and not that we were in any other way celebrities. Shortly after The Bride performance ended, one man asked for a picture with me and this exploded into everyone wanting a picture of everyone. So Marghee and I made our way to a circular

![Figure 4. The Bride of Peace gives her blessing and forgiveness to ISIS fighters. The Bride of Peace, presented by Shin and directed by Mokhtar Muhammadi. International Street Theatre Festival, Mariwan, Iran, 2 October 2015. (Photo by Marghee Paterson)](http://direct.mit.edu/dram/article-pdf/62/1/176/1825319/dram_a_00730.pdf)
garden surrounded by a stone wall. The first picture arrangement included the cast and crew and then it seemed everyone in the village wanted both to be in or take a picture. It was a lovely, flattering, and humbling experience.

The revolution of 1979 created historic openings in Iran, but also many restrictions. While speaking with a director of the large organization that brought us to the festival, the Dramatic Art Center of Iran, I learned that the Center was created in the wake of the revolution, and that there was no such entity prior to the overthrow of the US-backed Shah Pahlavi dictatorship. The DAC is now more than 35 years old and its director, Mehrdad Rayani-Mahsous, received his PhD from Manchester University in England, well after the revolution. Given there are now four major theatre festivals in Iran, further international engagement seems to be inevitable.

However, one seemingly knowledgeable person with whom I spoke said without equivocation that most of the country did not see the Shia/Ayatollah absolutist rule coming. Many looked forward to some kind of open government and society after the 25 years of US-installed Shah regimes. That of course did not happen. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini observed shortly after his movement seized power that the religious state they envisioned had a divine obligation to “supervise” its people. In short, this is a wholly religious, closed state with dictatorial powers that have taken deep root in the daily lives of the people.

It seemed clear that the government effectively if unobtrusively supervises all media communications including electronic journals. While I could get to my university’s website in Mariwan, I found in Tehran I could not get to any US university’s home web page at all, including UNO (mine), UCLA, or Harvard.

But the apparatus of dictatorship was not visible to us in Mariwan. We saw no army personnel and the local police only at a fender bender. One man in the festival wore what appeared to be a religious head wrap and seemed to be a religious leader, but he was as much a part of the crowd as we were. Enforcers of women’s dress code for head coverings were to us invisible but we were told such “supervision” was handled by virtually anyone in the population who wanted to register disapproval with a look or a word. Self-censorship has indeed taken hold.

I don’t want to go into further detail with a political analysis of Iran based on very limited experience, and therefore conclude by saying this was a remarkable and demystifying journey. Our translators, Amjad Panahi and Leila Weisi, were as capable and personable as we could have hoped for. Colleagues in Omaha had told us that the entire culture of Iran, Iraq, and the Kurdish people was known the world over for its hospitality. Amjad and Leila demonstrated this, as did every aspect of the residency. It is fair to say we were not merely hosted; we were cared for, considered, and supported every day.

The tradition of hosting is a good subject on which to end this travelogue because more and more people from the West may be going to Iran. There seemed to have been a kind of resolution of the nuclear weapons crisis which could have stimulated tourism and professional visits. Recent tensions raised by President Trump and Republicans, however, undermine my optimism. Still, theatre-makers from the US might contact the Dramatic Art Center to inquire about possible residencies, research opportunities, or attendance at one of the festivals. If so, as long as you are not linked to the US CIA, FBI, NSA, or probably now the Republican Party, look forward to being treated very well.

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Sordid Ironies and the Short-Fingered Vulgarian

Alison Jackson’s Mental Images

Tony Perucci

The tone is such hatred [...] I’m really not a bad person, by the way. No, but the tone is such—I do get good ratings; you have to admit that. The tone is such hatred.

— President Donald J. Trump (OPS 2017)

The United States is facing a mental health crisis: the newly diagnosed “Trump Anxiety,” which was first noticed in March 2016, and has only increased since the inauguration (Schwartzman 2016). Psychologists and massage therapists alike advise sufferers to treat Trump Anxiety by “feeling your feelings” and admonish the Trump-Anxious to “take a break from the news” (Jamieson 2016; Steinberg 2016). Meditation teacher Lodro Rinzler advises sufferers to follow His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s compassion meditation, suggesting they construct statements about Trump that are “both positive and negative—and adding the phrase ‘just like me’” to the end of the sentence:

Donald Trump wakes up every morning trying to do the best he can—just like me. Donald Trump doesn’t like getting called names—just like me. Donald Trump is a liar—just like me. [...] You know that experience. You’ve done and been through the same kind of emotional states. (in Jamieson 2016)

If these strategies fail, New School professor Dominic Pettman advises patients to let go of the “cruelty of the optimism” and just “watch the parade” (in Jamieson 2016).

I sought treatment for my own Trump anxiety, my therapist confessed that for the first time in her career, she simultaneously suffered from a condition for which she was also treating patients.

Ever since a Trump presidency seemed more and more likely in the spring of 2016, I found myself unable to heed the sage advice of mental health professionals and instead compulsively checked news websites in the hope of discovering the revelation that would finally expose Trump as the con artist I knew him to be. With this unfounded faith in the efficacy of exposure, my Trump Anxiety expressed itself through the fantasy of “publicity,” which political theorist Jodi Dean argues makes contemporary capitalism operative: “All that is necessary to realize the ideal of the public is to

Figure 1. Not (Not) Trump enjoys the power of whiteness, wealth, and patriarchy, taking a selfie with models portraying Miss Syria, Miss Mexico, and Miss Kenya. (Photo by Alison Jackson. © 2016 Alison Jackson. Courtesy of the artist)
uncover these secrets, to bring them to light” (2002:10). This response, shared by so many on the Left, belied the fact that with Trump nothing remained to be exposed.

As my Trump anxiety expressed itself in October 2016, I stumbled upon an article in the online edition of The Daily Mail, finding myself arrested by images of Donald Trump groping bikini-clad women in front of Trump Tower (Bryant 2016). In actuality, these photos were by British artist Alison Jackson, documenting her performance “stunt.” Her photographs of the event depict an uncannily realistic Trump look-alike and a group of female models driving up Fifth Avenue, and then disembarking at Trump Tower where they are met by a swarm of anti-Trump protesters organized by Jackson, who held signs that read “Let Go of My Pussy,” “Don’t Snatch My Pussy,” “I am a nasty woman,” and “Grab America by the Pussy.” Dozens of tourists and New Yorkers took selfies with the Trump doppelgänger as he groped the accompanying models, evoking the Access Hollywood “hot mic” video of Trump where he bragged of his now infamous propensity to “grab them by the pussy” (see Fahrenthold 2016).

Jackson had staged the performance to promote Private, an exhibition of her work, which was set to open that night at the HG Contemporary Gallery in Manhattan. Jackson’s staged photos of celebrities have brought her much notoriety in the UK, particularly for her photos of the royal family, which have included her controversial “The Queen on the Loo” (2014) and “Diana, Dodi & Baby” (2014), her staged family portrait of Lady Diana and Dodi look-alikes with their “child.” Double Take (2002), her television series on BBC Two, which earned her a BAFTA, utilizes similarly styled videos underscored with pop songs to portray the “relationship between society and celebrity” as one governed by our desire to see behind the public façade (Jackson 2016c). Her careful staging of both her look-alikes and of the paparazzi photographic style renders them virtually indistinguishable from the “real thing,” so much so that they enter the realm of the hyperreal. Propelled by our desire to see, her photographs aim to become “more real than the real life model they are based on, evolving into a ‘mental image’ rather than a direct record of reality” (Jackson n.d.).

Shot in early 2016 after an arduous search for a Trump lookalike, six of the images initially appeared in a photo spread of Trump’s “private life” in the October 2016 issue of Vanity Fair (Jackson 2016a). A more extensive collection of Jackson’s Trump photographs, published in her book, Private (2016), shows the degree to which she blurs the distinction between fiction and documentary. By imitating the tabloid style of surreptitiously taken snapshots (blurred focus, obstructed view, etc.), Jackson’s photos invoke what she calls the “furtive” characteristics of voyeurism. While they mimic the codes of authenticity seen in paparazzi and hacked mobile phone snapshots, their status as being “for real” is balanced by the ironic play that establishes their fictionality, such as her comic use of Miss Mexico, Syria, and Kenya sashes to satirize the cynicism of Trump’s racist appeals. And yet, the undeniable pleasure to be found in her photos of Trump having his hair mussed by leaf blowers and getting finger extensions is that they feel true even when we know them to be staged. In this way, her photos produce an enjoyment in what Tom Gunning (channeling Stephen Colbert) calls an aesthetics of

Figure 2. The humiliation of Not (Not) Trump—Alison Jackson realizes a fantasy we didn’t know we had. (Photo by Alison Jackson. © 2016 Alison Jackson. Courtesy of the artist)
“truthiness,” in that their factuality need not be questioned since they confirm our preconceptions about Trump, rather than challenging them (Gunning 2012:184).

However, *Vanity Fair*’s framing of the photos suggests the winking, smug liberal superiority that characterized the Left during the campaign, exemplified in the captions: “The torch will be passed, and a new leader must be capable of gripping it securely. Will he prove equal to the challenge?” Indeed, the photo of Trump receiving finger extensions wittily references the magazine’s own role in publicizing Trump’s now well-known anxiety about the size of his hands, and its implications about his penis. Before he was *Vanity Fair*’s longtime editor, Graydon Carter originated the small-hands jibe when he referred to Trump as a “short-fingered vulgarian” in a *Spy* magazine 1988 parody ad for Trump’s book, *The Art of the Deal*. Reflecting on their decades-long feud, Carter commented in 2015:

“To this day, I receive the occasional envelope from Trump. There is always a photo of him — generally a tear sheet from a magazine. On all of them he has circled his hand in gold Sharpie in a valiant effort to highlight the length of his fingers. […] Like the other packages, this one included a circled hand and the words, also written in gold Sharpie: “See, not so short!” (Carter 2015)

At first, it seems that Jackson’s photos are simply another example of *Vanity Fair*’s irony and snark, an attitude exemplified by *Spy* co-founder Kurt Anderson’s remark, “I don’t want [Trump’s election] to happen, but I gotta say, up until the moment he’s sworn in, I find it wondrous and astonishing and a perverse pleasure” (in Folkenflick 2016). What, then, is to distinguish Jackson’s work from what art critic John Sherman termed the “sordid irony” of #DaddyWillSaveUs, the pro-Trump performance art exhibition that included provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos soaking in a bathtub filled with pig’s blood next to photographs of purported victims of violence by “illegal aliens” (Sherman 2016)?

Jackson contends that what distinguishes her works from satire is that they address not the celebrities themselves, but rather our psychic investment in the fantasy of “knowing them.” The play of “real and fantasy” that Jackson targets in her work is not so much what is depicted in the photographs, as it is “in our need to look — our voyeurism — and our need to believe” (Jackson 2016c). They hinge

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2. At a March 2016 debate for the Republican nomination, Trump responded to reports that presidential candidate Senator Marco Rubio had mocked his small hands. As reported by CNN in the article, “Donald Trump Defends Size of His Penis,” Trump held up his hands to the debate audience, declaring, “Look at those hands. Are those small hands? And he referred to my hands—if they are small, then something else must be small. I guarantee you, there is no problem. I guarantee you” (in Krieg 2016).
3. Sherman notes that the “irony of self-styled anti-establishmentarian art in praise of beneficiaries of the establishment is as illogical as it is mind-boggling” (2016).
Upon the performative gesture of the “double take,” in which the viewer belatedly recognizes their prior misrecognition of fiction as documentary. This need to believe persists even in the face of our knowledge in the inability of photography to provide direct access to the real.

"We all know that photographs lie, and yet you’re still seduced and you want to believe they’re real to the extent that you do believe there’s an element of real. There is an element of real or authenticity in everything, but you never know how much." (Jackson 2017a)

This desire for uncovering the “element of the real” in Jackson’s photography parallels the faith the Left held that uncovering the “real Donald Trump” would defeat him. Jackson aims not to expose Trump’s cynicism and vulgarity, but rather to challenge what she describes as the superiority of the “arrogant Left” and “liberal losers” who happily engage with her fictions as if they were real, because “people prefer to deal with what isn’t real than reality” (Jackson 2017a).

By challenging our preference for the “not real,” Jackson sees her work as being “about simulation,” citing the influence of Jean Baudrillard’s description of that which “threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’” (Jackson 2016c; Baudrillard [1981] 1994:3). Simulation is not only the subject of her work, but also her method. She specifically identifies the above Baudrillard quotation as “what I aim to do” (Jackson 2016c). In order to explore what she calls the “gap and confusion” between “reality and the imaginary,” her photographs produce that very experience for the viewer (Jackson 2016c).

Jackson describes her work as staging a “seemingly real” documentary scenario which is in fact a fiction in order to construct the viewer’s “temporary confusion” (Jackson 2016c). The “indecidability,” to use Hans-Thies Lehmann’s term, of Jackson’s seemingly real and in fact a fiction leaves the viewer, she claims, “suspended in disbelief” so that she can call on us to critique our “psychological relationship” between the seen and the imagined image that is spurred by our need not only to look, but also to believe (Lehmann 2006:101; Jackson 2016c).

Jackson’s invocation of Baudrillard provides its own bit of “temporary confusion” as she suggests that the photographs are the “simulations,” in that they take “the place of the ‘real’ for a moment” (Jackson 2016c). However, for Baudrillard simulations are not things, but rather the process of “substituting signs of the real for the real” ([1981] 1994:2). In fact, as Sylvère Lotringer explains, “simulation” is an “anthropological diagnostic” rather than an “esthetic statement,” let alone the “template” for artistic practice it came to be understood as in contemporary art (2005:14).

Baudrillard saw this misguided appropriation of his theory as part of the “conspiracy of art,” which had come to speak in a “metallanguage of banality” that would produce art “as indifferent to itself as the world has become” (Baudrillard 2005:116). Having acceded to and even colluded with the precession of simulacra, contemporary art’s “real conspiracy” is its “shameful complicity with itself, its collusion with reality, becoming complicit as the mere return-image of this Integral Reality” (89). In the act of mirroring “the obscenity of visibility,” we are left only with “ ironic indifference” (26).

All it can do is make a final, paradoxical wink—the wink of reality laughing at itself in its most hyperrealist form [...] In any case, the dictatorship of images is an ironic dictatorship. (26)

But then, what am I to make of the enduring pleasure I feel even now when I look at these photographs? Is mine simply a “perverse aesthetic pleasure” in which Jackson and I share complicity in “[r]aising originality, banality and nullity to the level of values?” (27).

However, perhaps it is Jackson who misrecognizes her works as simulations. They are, instead, part of a process of simulation—a process of our own investment in them as if they are “for real,” even when we know them to be staged. Thus, what constitutes her “work” is not what she describes—the photographic “clones” or “copies” of the real—but the performance of cloning and copying that the photographs performatively document, as well as the performative exchange with the spectator that they stage (Jackson 2016c). The pho-
graphs enact reperformances of simulacra, imitations of nonexistent paparazzi photographs with an actor whose uncanny resemblance to Trump functions as a trompe l’œil (or, a *trump* l’œil, if you will). Even “This is not Donald Trump,” the Magritte-esque legal disclaimer that accompanies her work, participates in this process of simulation. The disavowal of being “for real” stages the work of what Baudrillard calls simulation’s “deterrence machine” ([1981] 1994:19). That is, Jackson’s pronouncement of the operative illusion of simulation — that the real is elsewhere — is what constitutes the work as an act of simulation, rather than a depiction of one.

By staging simulation’s deterrence machine, the photos show Trump’s presidency to function as a simulation on the order of Baudrillard’s examples of Disneyland or Watergate. As with those instances, the “scandal” of Trump’s corruption and deception supports the collective delusion that capitalism can produce otherwise. Artist Sean Patrick Joseph Carney’s “translation from English to American” of Baudrillard’s “Precession of Simulacra” makes clear how “scandal” functions as a diversion from the violence of capital.

We have to say this over and over again, you see, so that maybe people will stop calling [Watergate] a scandal, reinforcing a fictional moral standard. People are flipping the fuck out about this because they’re scared shitless that we might actually see the reality of what capitalism is: a cruel, ferocious, and immoral system. Now, THAT’S what I call “scandalous!” Even super-leftists don’t account for this. The idiots. Capitalism DGAF about you or any idea that you have regarding how it can be positive if not abused. It is a clusterfuck of brutality, nothing more. (Carney 2012:114)

However, for all of his avowed nihilism, Baudrillard contends that simulation is not a “perfect crime,” since it must continually reperform the act of appearing in the visible world. And, as such, the political task is to “recover the trace of the noting, of the incompleted, the imperfection of the crime” (Baudrillard [1996] 2008:3). That trace might be found in the affective charge of pleasure and anger we experience when confronted with the “temporary confusion” of Jackson’s process of simulation.

Jackson relies not on Photoshop manipulation of the images to create their seeming-to-be-real, but on the posing of her carefully chosen actors and her staging of photographic style. The indecidability of their status as fictions enables the photographs to perform, and draws us in so that we do so as well. The images are intended to misfire — as we are to first misrecognize them and then perform the gesture of the double take. But, our double take does not provide the certitude of revelation that the photos are “not for real.” Rather, because of the uncanny resemblance of the lookalike, we then engage the photograph on its theatrical terms, ourselves stilled, “suspended in disbelief” in the moment when we behold both the not Trump and the not not Trump.

Enabled by their perpetual present-ness on the internet, the double take of looking at the photos during Trump’s all too real presidency is fundamentally a temporal misrecognition. As Rebecca Schneider notes in photographic stills, “the stilled image [is] a call toward a future live moment when the image will be re-encountered, perhaps as an invitation to response” (2011:141). The viewer’s participation is produced through photography’s “time-lag,” which constructs our “complicity” in the image. The seeming real and in fact a fiction of Jackson’s photos operate as what Schneider calls a “problematic double-ness,” wherein to recognize the not-Trump as such “requires that the viewer labor to recognize operations of misrecognition” (156). To experience these photographs in the now of the Trump presidency is to encounter a future that was imagined and staged in the past, but in which we live in the present — the time when “Post-Apocalyptic Fiction has been moved to our Current Affairs section,” as a postelection sign in front of a Massachusetts bookstore announced (Higgins 2016).

However, not all of Jackson’s Trump photographs enact this recognition of misrecognition. For instance, in Jackson’s staging of Trump with hooded Ku Klux Klan members who take selfies with him in front of a burning cross, the photographs may not be (mis)recognizable as fictions. They invoke not
only the racism that characterized Trump’s campaign rhetoric, but also the ways in which the Klan has been specifically associated with him in multiple ways. First, is the fact of Trump’s endorsement by both the KKK and former Imperial Wizard David Duke, endorsements he only belatedly and half-heartedly rejected (Kessler 2016). Second, is the revelation that his father, real estate mogul Fred Trump, had been under investigation for discrimination against African American renters in the 1970s, and had been arrested at a Klan rally in 1927 (Pearl 2016). Third, is the viral photograph of Trump with his parents that had been Photoshopped to make it appear as if his mother and father were wearing Klan robes (Evon 2016).

Jackson’s KKK photographs do not compel the double take in the same way as do the other photos. Their focus is so blurred that it is unlikely that we will experience them as a fiction unless it has been framed for us as such. In perhaps the most ominous and visually compelling photo in her series, Trump stands with his arms draped around the shoulders of the Klan members. Backlit by the fire of the burning cross, we are unable to identify the figures as not actually being “the real” Trump.

As these photos depict a look-alike who does not appear to be just uncannily similar, but is instead indistinguishable from him, they later circulated on social media as if they were documentations of actual events (Jackson 2017a). The viral spread of these photos was pervasive enough that hoax-debunking website Snopes (which had previously debunked the Trump-parents-in-Klan-robes photo) clarified that, “An image purportedly showing Donald Trump at a KKK cross burning was fabricated by a photographic artist” (Evon 2017). However, in an article written for International Business Times warning against “state censorship and artistic suppression,” Jackson asserts that the photos were intended to be plausible, not actual.

Publishing staged photographs of “Donald Trump” using a lookalike is asking the viewer to question whether this scene could happen or not. This is exactly what I am asking in the KKK picture with “Donald Trump” (this is John Smith not Donald Trump) but in your mind you think it is really him for a split second—you can’t rely on your own perception when it comes to photography. (Jackson 2016b)

Jackson does, then, intend them to be taken as real, but only in a way that occupies the temporally limited “split-second,” despite her book’s “not Donald Trump” disclaimer. When the photographs go viral, detached from their art context, “in your mind you think it really is him” not for a split-second, but only at some later time when (and if) it is revealed to you that they are “really” a “hoax.”

It is in their plausibility that the KKK photos function as that which Carrie Lambert-Beatty calls “parafictions,” artistic works wherein “fictions are experienced as fact” (2012:118). In parafictions, plausibility (as opposed to accuracy) is an attribute not of the story or image but of its encounter with viewers, whose various configurations of knowledge and “horizons of expectation” determine whether something is plausible to them (135).

Jackson is emphatic that she does not intend for the photos to be taken “for real.” But, not only could they be, they most certainly have been (Jackson 2017a). In this way, we find ourselves back at the crux of simulation, the impossibility of “staging illusions” (Baudrillard [1981] 1994:20). In his well-known example of this problem, Baudrillard explains the impossibility of a “simulated holdup”:

You won’t be able to do it: the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with the real elements (a policeman will really fire on sight, a client of the bank will faint and die of a heart attack; one will actually pay you the phony ransom). ([1981] 1994:20)

In the KKK photos, Jackson’s attempt to construct a simulation approaches the condition of creating the “perfect simulacrum.” And at that moment it breaks down, which is to say that it breaks through, working the unrealizability of simulation’s “perfect crime” (20). In the face of the radical ineffectiveness of exposing Trump’s deceptions, perhaps the porous and unstable boundary of the “make-believe” and “make-belief” is our best hope in the face of what Hannah Arendt in The Origins of
Totalitarianism presciently described as the “extreme contempt for facts as such” (1968:350).

A reflexivity about misrecognition can point to what was not recognized about Trump supporters—their sophistication in reading Hillary Clinton’s hollow slogan, “Love Trumps Hate.” Rather, they (and the millions who refused to vote) understood all too well that Clinton’s slogan more accurately would have been “Neoliberalism Trumps Rage.” And, of course it doesn’t, because neoliberalism has produced so much violence, deprivation, and suffering that such rage is inevitable. Trump effectively stoked and redirected this rage away from capitalism and towards immigrants, Muslims, and elites. His “post-truth” campaign succeeded by blurring the boundary between the “seeming real” and the “in fact fiction” because it addressed what Clinton could not: neoliberalism cannot trump the very rage it has produced. Arendt explains that Trump’s the Nazis’s “perfect world of appearances” was supported by signs which the real world still offers [...that] are, so to speak, its lacunae, the questions it does not care to discuss publicly, or the rumors it does not dare to contradict because they hit, although in an exaggerated and deformed way, some sore spot. From these sore spots the lies of totalitarian propaganda derive the element of truthfulness and real experience they need to bridge the gulf between reality and fiction [... T]hey then acquire the reputation of superior “realism” because they touch upon real conditions whose existence is being hidden. (1968:353)

The “sore spot” that propelled Trump’s post-truth campaign comprised the material and psychic failures of neoliberalism to make good on its “free market fantasy [...] that everyone will win” (Dean 2009:55). As a neoliberal through and through, Clinton could not speak the shibboleth that if slavery was “capitalism with its clothes off,” Trumpism is neoliberalism with its clothes off (Gilroy 1993:15). That is, Trumpism performs neoliberalism’s primitive accumulation, and does so without apology (see Perucci 2017).

Jackson’s photos push at this “sore spot”—and in so doing, they highlight the imperfections of capitalism’s criminality. Thus, they invoke not the comfort of truthiness but the radical discomfort of the collision experienced in what Gunning terms the “more than real,” which activates the “unfamiliar, the intense, and even the disturbing breaks” (2012:183). While Jackson does not identify her work as activist, her description of her anti-(not) Trump protesters suggests the political character of temporal disorientation:

4. Rebecca Schneider troubles Richard Schechner’s distinction between “make believe” and “make belief,” arguing that “making belief is precisely where ‘make-believe’ takes place as experience and flips, almost imperceptibly, into the actual” (2011:127).

5. The slogan seems to have first appeared in a 2015 tweet by Hillary Clinton, in the weeks after Trump launched his campaign. It appears as an image using the font and coloring of Clinton’s campaign material. The tweet reads, “Tell Donald Trump: Hate is not an American Value” (Clinton 2015).
These photos stoke my very real anger, rather than Jackson’s “temporary confusion.” And they help to stave off resignation, despair, and dread. Moreover, as Stefan Dolgert suggests, an affective politics of ugly feelings provides a political opportunity wherein “the Left should be harnessing the energy of this current rather than trying to reverse the flow of the stream” (2016:367). This ressentiment can propel not just resistance to Trump and the Republican-controlled congress, but can also provide a basis for a broad-based challenge to the neoliberal consensus. And even if Trump’s sheer incompetency ultimately forces an early end to his presidency, then the Left must not misrecognize once again the ugly feelings held by so many towards neoliberalism as well as its effects and its affects. A Fellowship of Ugly Feelings could propel a movement of movements against both reactionary Republicans and the neoliberals of both major political parties.

A triple- and quadruple-take of Jackson’s photographs initiates another fantasy — that Trump might see them. Jackson believes that (the actual) Trump would find the photographs of the not-not-Trump to be “hilarious” (Jackson 2017b). But, as these photographs mirror back the spectator’s desire, I over-recognize another mental image — one not staged by Jackson. Perhaps this mental image will happen not in fiction but in fact. Maybe if I make-believe strongly enough, it will become plausible: Donald Trump holds Jackson’s book in his hands. He sees her photos of the nude not-not-Trump receiving his finger extensions and nude spray tan — and he feels humiliated. He sees the KKK photos and his fury at “fake news” overtakes him. He weeps and rages. He rages and weeps. Trump, you have the photos in your hands, your tiny, tiny hands.

Now that the short-fingered vulgarian is President, we have gone backwards in time to arrive at Jackson’s dystopian future, now our own dystopian present. Reader, now you have her photos of not-not-Trump in your hands — hands that are so much bigger than theirs.

Figure 5. @realDonaldTrump, when you see this Not (Not) Trump, may you finally feel shame for the first moment in your life. (Photo by Alison Jackson. © 2016 Alison Jackson. Courtesy of the artist)

They’re all women who feel strongly about what’s happened with the audi-tapes, the way Donald Trump’s been talking about women the past few months — pigs, s***s and whatever it is, dogs — and I think it would be a catastrophe if he was president, for them, I’m not American, on that basis, it’s like going backwards in time. (in Bryant 2016)

Backwards and forwards in time to Trump’s presidency, a double and triple take of Jackson’s photographs produces access to something like Walter Benjamin’s “unconscious optics” (1968:237). Still, even now, I (mis)recognize and (over)read them so that they no longer simply depict the narcissist-in-chief, but now photographically document the unabashed, unashamed, and unrestrained spectacular enjoyment of wealth, patriarchy, and white supremacy. As I hold the book that contains these photos now, it shakes with my anger. We should see such anger not as disabling, but as essential when faced with a short-fingered-vulgarian-authoritarian who has so successfully capitalized on the resentment and ressentiment bred by capitalism.

And this ressentiment may well be an example of what Sianne Ngai terms an “ugly feeling,” but I also know that it is an improvement over the paralysis of Trump Anxiety (Ngai 2005). A Fellowship of Ugly Feelings could propel a movement of movements against both reactionary Republicans and the neoliberals of both major political parties.
the President’s. And if “[w]hat you do with your hands becomes the photograph” then what do these photographs do to your hands (Schneider 2011:163)? Do they curl your hands into fists? Will they punch not only a Nazi, but also a neoliberal?

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By asking how and where bodies experience or incorporate toxicity, Lindman seeks to ease the tensions stored in those bodies, but also to forge a new performative language that folds differing durations and temporalities together. As Lindman notes:

The treatments are all about reading the language of the bones, which draws on age-old knowledge. The human body has evolved over thousands of years so nowadays when people have pains or injuries, it’s usually because of a conflict between the modern ways we use our bodies and the original purpose for which our bones evolved. (Lindman 2016)

What does it mean to “play bones”? In her recent text “Learning from Mold” on the networked patterns of growth and communication in mold, Lindman writes, “Bones include information of former life tens of thousands of years back in time” (2014:60). Playing bones, then, activates this very concrete knowledge that our bones hold, asking us to reflect on how pain is triggered or eased by certain gestures, postures, or poses of our bodies. This experiential language of the body posits a shared history, yet one that exists over an extraordinary duration that erases individual identities and psychologies.

While the treatment in A Kalevala Duo targeted one single body, realigning Timothy’s joints and thereby reducing any stiffness, pain, or lack of mobility he might be experiencing, the event itself addressed all the bodies in the room—from the musicians who had previously been given a session of bone-setting treatment to the audience’s collective bodies seated in a semicircle around the performers onstage. As Lindman began the treatment, Timothy was lying down, first on his stomach and later on his back. As she progressed from treating his feet and moved upwards to his legs and back, he moved to an upright position. The flow of the treatment from horizontal to vertical progressed as the music soared, elaborating a communal notion of care and collaboration that enveloped the audience, which
had been brought out of the darkened space of the rows of concert hall seats and onto the illuminated stage.

This focus on the body and healing in the performance strongly clashed with the setting of Buffalo’s modernist stage. Designed by Finnish architects Eliel and Eero Saarinen and built between 1938 and 1940, the Kleinhans Music Hall combines the clean geometry of a windowless brick exterior with a flaring, wood paneled curvilinear interior. The space is emblematic of what architectural historian Barbara Miller Lane has described as the Scandinavian synthesis of national romantic and Nordic modern styles (Lane 2000). Its curved façade functionally echoes the shape of the chamber music hall while also calling attention to its setting on Symphony Circle—a leafy west-side Buffalo neighborhood. This unique placement amidst reflecting pools softens the otherwise geometrically severe brick exterior of Kleinhans and indicates the extent to which Saarinen’s modern style emerged from romantic precedents. Lindman animated this architectural heritage during her performance as she challenged how modernism both absorbs and erases vernacular traditions, forms, and knowledges. If the Kalevala tradition was familiar to the audience there that night, it was most likely via its status as epic literature, nationalist heritage, and inspiration to composers such as Jean Sibelius, whose Kullervo (1892) is a series of tone poems that tell the story of a tragic figure in the Kalevala epic.

Lindman’s A Kalevala Duo sought to intervene in this more familiar history by referencing other sources of Finnish wisdom and knowledge that were not part of Lönnrot’s epic. Kalevala had already entered the 20th century with a sharp divide between its enactment at the hands of its healing practitioners and the famous artists and musicians who referenced it across European concert halls and museums. By taking her point of departure from songs of healing and the bone-setting tradition, Lindman notes that A Kalevala Duo connects to other parts of this vernacular tradition archived in the Finnish oral tradition that did not make it to the heroic stories commonly known as The Kalevala. This other part of Kalevala comprised everyday wisdom of how to live, farm, and heal from within the mainly agrarian communities in Finland. This oral tradition includes an entire book of anatomy in the form of songs as well as techniques for how to align bones and joints in bodies to heal ailments. (Lindman 2015)

Bringing the folk wisdom of healing and its haptic engagement onto a stage that normally asks for a contemplative viewing and a disavowed corporality, A Kalevala Duo challenges the legacy of modernist erasures of the body and rural folk ways and wisdom. While the “high art” Kalevala of Sibelius and others helped to forge the national concept of “the
people,” what of the other Kalevala of skin, sweat, and bones?

Lindman’s performance challenged the soaring architectural space of Kleinhans Hall by acknowledging its customary repression of the audience’s collective bodies. Moved from the dark spellbinding rows of seating onto the brightly lit stage, the audience members were not just observers, but also participants. Concert halls, if we agree with Adorno’s evaluation of Wagner’s influential theatre in Bayreuth, grew to dominate the audience into spectacular submission (Adorno [1952] 2005). The phantasmagoria of the concert hall, designed to hide the orchestra in a darkened pit, offered up instead a cult of the individual, manifest in the illuminated body of the composer or conductor. As art historian Jonathan Crary has argued, the phantasmagoric concert hall, diorama, and film theatre are foundational to modernity and its visual practices (Crary 2002). Lindman, by staging her work in this setting, disrupts the phantasmagoric space of modernity and its audience, who were left in the dark to celebrate the epic, monumental, and heroic over the daily, the haptic, and the embodied forms of vernacular traditions.

Onstage at Kleinhans Music Hall, the participants, musicians, artist, and audience in Lindman’s performance blurred divisions between contemplation and distraction, individual body and collective, healer and patient, and “high” and “low” art. As he received the bone-setting treatment, Timothy was seated, or at times lying, on a massage bench in the middle of a ring of chairs with musicians flanking the back of the stage. Lindman moved around him as she performed the treatment, sometimes with a light touch, and at other moments with lots of pressure and motions that included stretching, pulling, kneading, and hugging. Lindman may have been rattling the bones of a Sibelius or Saarinen, but there was also much more going on in her performance. Lindman was massaging not only her participant, but also the dialectical tensions of modernism.

In contrast to the work of Ragnar Kjartansson, who also handles the history of Scandinavian romanticism in his work, Lindman’s performance is not subsumed under the weight of the past. Kjartansson gives us Scandinavian Pain rather than curing our bodies of it. His sculpture from the 2016 Hirschhorn Museum exhibition of his work, scrawls the words “Scandanavian Pain” across the wall in glowing hot pink neon signage, recalling the history of Scandinavian romanticism in order to amplify alienation and revel in melancholy. Lindman however challenges that version of Scandinavian modernism by inviting what had been written out of history back to the modernist stage. She challenges the past to take a tiger’s leap forward into the future, to retexturize the present moment.

There is a certain temptation in performance art from artists as discrepant as Joseph Beuys and Lygia Clark to activate this language of the body via rituals of healing. In Beuys’s work, however, the labor of the ritual was often overshadowed by his use of symbols and totems like fat, felt, fur, etc. He relied on myth— from his fabled rebirth as an artist after being healed by Crimean Tatars during WWII to his adoption of mythic characters—in his performances that sought to heal the “contemporary Auschwitz” aspects of postwar society (see Figure 3. Pia Lindman, A Kalevala Duo, Playing Bones. From left: Katie Weissman, cello; Evan Courtin, violin; Esin Gündüz, soprano; Brendan Fitzgerald, guitar. Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, New York, 11 October 2015. (Photo by Kate Lovering)
Buchloh 1980). This symbolism—deployed in such performances as Beuys’s 1969 Titus-
Iphigeneia where he appeared onstage in a fur coat, manipulated a mound of fat, fed sugar to a
horse, and imitated the flight of birds—reduces the collective to the individual, aborts the heal-
ning process, and turns the shamanistic aspect of his work to mere sham.

In counterpoise, Lygia Clark sought to
erase any mythic reference in her performance so as to construct a group body or collective
frame of reference to escape individual neuro-
ses, as in her 1973 performance Anthropophagic Slobber for which participants pulled thread out
of their mouths and piled it on top of a single recumbent person. The work, filled with ten-
sions of devouring another’s body and vomiting it back up, viscerally foregrounded her
elimination of representation and her refusal, as she wrote, of “all myth external to humanity”

Just as Clark sought to upset the parasit-
ism of ritual by creating rituals without myths,
so too does Lindman by creating rituals that
reshape individuals into group bodies. By “play-
ing bones,” Lindman frames the politics of col-
lective bodies seated in an auditorium via not
only an experimental musical score, but also via
her focus on bones, ligaments, cells, and fluids.
Emotion also plays a role. Taste, tactility, mem-
ory, and genetics compose an expanded notion
of senses and skin. A sensory organ, she writes,
“is not a separate entity, rather its borders are
fuzzy and porous” (Lindman 2014). Lindman
is laboring (“playing bones”) on one individual
body, which is also a proxy for the social body
built by our narratives of romantic modernism
and nationalistic fervor.

The temptation to revive ritual in con-
temporary performance today, after Walter
Benjamin’s 20th-century celebration of art’s
separation from its parasitic dependence on rit-
ual, may give pause (Benjamin [1935] 2006). As
Benjamin famously noted, ritual obscures the
social value of art and mythologizes dominant
social norms. However, Lindman’s work does
not subscribe to Benjamin’s dialectical rela-
tionship of aesthetics to politics. Highlighting the
body as a nexus of social and cultural norms,
Lindman reveals our sensorial capacity as a
basis for political exchange. Her work on ges-
tures, for example her New York Times pro-
ject performed from 2004–2007, highlighted
how the body is already politicized prior to its
representation. In this series, Lindman pub-
licly and privately recreated gestures of suffer-
ing she had collected from news photographs
for an entire year after 9/11. Reproducing these
highly mediatised gestures of grief, Lindman
explored the relation between the biological
and social aspects of emotion, and the inter-
play between exterior stimuli and our affective
responses. By dressing in grey and leaving out
any indication from the photos of identity or loc-
ation, in these performances Lindman exam-
ined how the media uses bodies and its ges-
tures to generate or hijack a desirable affect
in its readers. These gestures of pain and suf-
fering, performed in differing cities world-
wide—including New York, Vienna, and
Mexico City—revealed the extent to which the
body is both imminent and highly mediatised.

Similarly, A Kalevala Duo, Playing Bones
examines the constitutive power of representa-
tion by contrasting Kalevala bone-setting
with the legacy of Saarinen’s modernist
stage, requiring both histories and their lega-
cies to show that bodies are equally imminent
and political. Lindman suggests that there is
another aspect of Kalevala that undoes its more
familiar status as national heritage or sym-
bol. Her performance does not, however, seek
to revive bone-setting as a lost aesthetic tradi-
ition or offer a single-minded political critique
of the exclusive nature of Finnish modernism.
A Kalevala Duo, Playing Bones was, after all, a
multimodal performance in which performed
massage became a visual event rather than one
that is experienced bodily and privately. The
work’s duration commanded many sensory
modes of the spectators’ attention, which faded
in and out with the music’s flowing tonality.
Postperformance, one audience member con-
fided to me, “I came here with my shoulder
hurting and all that tension is now gone.”

If the politics of durational performance and
its ability to require audiences to attend to the
body is dismissed as insignificant, A Kalevala
Duo, Playing Bones, like Lygia Clark’s perfor-
ances in the past, runs a risk of being eas-
ily dismissed as “mere” healing—however
meaningful the relief of bodily pain may be.
However, as backs, shoulders, and joints are realigned in Lindman’s piece, tension is reinserted into the work by targeting all the ways in which our bodies are conscripted for the utilitarian purposes of a specific society or state.\(^1\) Like the mold she is interested in for its networked facility of communication, or gestures that exceed the psychology of the individuals making them, bones are used to communicate beyond their utilitarian function. As with her Public Sauna project at PS1 in Queens, New York (2000), in which Lindman built a functioning sauna in the museum courtyard and invited museumgoers to partake, the sweat and flesh of the bodies exhibited in Kalevala Duo, in spaces not typically designated for such displays, encourages her audiences to consider more visceral types of exchange.

Pairing individual sweat and flesh alongside the nationalist legacy of Lönnrot’s Kalevala challenges its claims to forge a nationalist identity with a singular and coherent citizenry. Bones talk in Lindman’s performance, not in the language of citizens, nor of individuals representing specific national and personal identities. Instead, as Lindman herself says, “What inspires me in working as a Kalevala bone-alignment healer (in addition to the thrill of healing) is the fact that I get to speak directly to the bones of our humanity. While healing, I connect with tens of thousands of years of human life” (Lindman 2015). Playing bones allows Lindman to rethink notions of being together beyond the continual classification and labeling of bodies.

References


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1. For more on performance art’s relation to citizenry see Hinderliter (2014) and Badovinac (1999).