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Staging Real People:

On the Arts and Effects of Non-Professional Theatre Performers

Performance practice since the 1990s has been characterised by an increased interest in theatre that either operates without professional performers or minimises their involvement. Instead, those performing have included a diverse array of specialists in areas of expertise other than that of performance-making. Often referred to as ‘experts’, they have frequently been selected according to their life experiences and/or connection with particular social categories such as economic class, field of work, ethnicity, age, and (dis)ability (Bishop 2012: 219).¹ The concept of the ‘expert’ and the many theatre practices and discourses connected with it often challenge the professional / non-professional opposition. For example, while experts may not fulfil the criteria of people who are regularly engaged in the paid occupation of acting or performing, they do share with such professionals an ability to demonstrate special skills, training, and/or knowledge, often including advanced skills in performing a version of one’s self. We are aware that our use here of the term ‘non-professional’ could reinstate the type of binary troubled by the word ‘expert’. Nevertheless, we find the term useful as a way of referring to those figures, in works and events created by professional artists, who are not extensively trained in acting or performing and who usually do not earn their living from appearing on the stage.

Precedents for the display and use of non-professional performers within Western performance traditions abound. They include the medieval mystery plays performed by members of various trade guilds—during which on occasion a real criminal was cast (and executed!) as Christ (Favorini 1994: xiv)—as well as the various forms of freak show that became popular in the European Renaissance, and the imperialist ethnographic displays of the 19th and 20th centuries that exhibited live humans in ‘authentic’ settings. Indeed, the professional performer is a relatively recent phenomenon on the European theatre stage, one that began to emerge most forcefully in the late eighteenth century. Prior to the widespread professionalisation of acting, European actors exhibited varying degrees of professionalism, due to, for example, the diverse nature of their (access to) training, and the state of play in their theatrical context with regard to the regulation of actors and the quality of their acting. To some extent, the effectiveness of casting non-professional performers depends on audience awareness and expectation of professional performance standards. For example, Hajo Kurzenberger notes that, in Germany, it was ‘only after the establishment of the municipal and state theatre and the related professionalisation of their actors’ that amateur performers could become socially and aesthetically interesting (Kurzenberger 2013). Nonetheless, one might argue that similar effects were available prior to the professionalisation of acting, providing that differences in performance status among performers could be drawn upon to create performative meaning.

However, it was not until the early 20th century that theatre-makers began systematically to foreground opportunities for meaning-making and political intervention opened up by the inclusion of various types of non-professional performers. These included, for example, school children and radio listeners, amateurs for whom theatre was an educational or leisure activity rather than the main means of earning a living (Ridout 2013: 29).² In the field of director-led theatre, one of the goals of Brecht's and Piscator's work with both experts and amateurs was to enhance the participation of the working class and other culturally marginalised groups in the production of art, knowledge and collective social action. In the 1960s, the second surge in the practice of putting non-professional performers on the Western stage was connected with an increased emphasis on collective theatre-making, self-representation, cultural diversity and the blurring of boundaries between art and life. Since the early nineties there has been a third wave of interest in working with and watching non-professional performers, and one that can be attributed to a number of political, economic and technological factors. These include, first, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the rise in neoliberalism, and the Global Financial Crisis that have contributed to a renewed 'artistic orientation towards the social' and accompanying interest in participatory art (Bishop 2012: 1–2). The increased incidence of the non-professional performer – in the sense of a temporary and inexperienced stage worker – has been read both as a symptom of the ubiquity of outsourced and contract work in a neoliberal context (Karschnia 2007: 155), and as a resistant vehicle for demonstrating bodies made fragile by socio-economic precarity (Bishop 2012: 223–24; Festjens and Marthens 2015: 128–87). A second causal factor is the unprecedented levels of voluntary and enforced global mobility that have inspired theatre work that gives voice to multiple and diverse others (Mumford 2013: 154). The factor most commonly associated with the recent fascination with the non-professional performer has been the escalation of new digital technologies and media forms, and the contribution of recent media culture to capitalist spectacle (Diederichsen 2012). These technologies have heightened a yearning for the 'real' (Shields 2010: 81), and for unmediated access to everyday people and their lives, as well as the desire to explore and resist 'the implications of the culture of the artificial, of spectacle and event' (Garde and Mumford 2013: 148).

Since the early twentieth century, the interest in non-professional theatre performers has been part of a broader engagement with what Carol Martin calls 'theatre of the real'. For Martin, the 'phrase "theatre of the real" identifies a wide range of theatre practices and styles that recycle reality, whether that reality is personal, social, political, or historical' (2013: 5). Such recycling involves the explicit citing, quoting, simulating and summoning of the world outside the theatre through a variety of means that may include: verbatim text, archival photos, film, audio recordings, set pieces and objects, real clothing, and also the use of 'actual people to perform narratives of their own lives' (2013: 80). The practice of using self-representing people as both the artistic medium and material of a theatre event is a key component of what we call 'Theatre of Real People'. A subset of theatre of the real, we define Theatre of Real People as a mode of performance that is characterised by the foregrounding of contemporary people who usually have not received institutional theatre training and have little or no prior stage experience. These 'real people' are either represented or literally appear 'on stage' as consensual protagonists in a variety of theatre forms and genres, including: Bürgerbühne (Citizens' Stage), community-based theatre, delegated performance, documentary theatre, participatory performance, refugee theatre, re-enactments, testimonial theatre, theatre of everyday experts, and verbatim theatre.³ A key feature of real people performers is that they present aspects of self – their perspectives, personal histories, narratives, knowledges, skills, environments, social worlds, and/or socio-economic categories. Occasionally Theatre of Real People may involve trained actors or performers, but when it does, they usually represent and demonstrate aspects of their own selves, and/or work alongside people who are not professional performers.

It was our research into the currently prevalent Theatre of Real People mode and its manifestations in theatre work from both Australia and Germany that was the starting point for our involvement as editors for this edition of *Performance Paradigm*. To date this research has comprised engagement with productions and formats that seek to represent contemporary people through very diverse means, including those which utilise professional actors or performers, such as the headphone verbatim plays by Roslyn Oades and the documentary pieces by Sydney-based company version 1.0, and those which literally put such people on stage (see, for example, Garde 2011, Garde 2013, Garde & Mumford 2013, Mumford 2014). With regard to the latter, our focus has been on productions fostered and/or showcased at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) production house, which since the turn of the millennium has been a hub for significant Theatre of Real People innovators such as Mobile Academy, Rimini Protokoll, She She Pop and the HAU's former artistic director, Matthias Lilienthal (Garde & Mumford 2016). On the occasion of Rimini Protokoll's visit to Australia in 2012, we organised a panel on the topic 'Putting Real People on Stage' whose members included Helgard Haug (Rimini Protokoll) and four Sydney-based artists—Claudia Chidiac, Alicia Talbot, Alana Valentine, and David Williams. During correspondence with *Performance Paradigm* about publishing an edited transcript of the panellists' discussion, we mutually realised the value of embedding the transcript within a guest-edited issue devoted to the topic of staging real people. The remit of this issue would be to enhance knowledge and practices with regard to the nature, histories, contexts, aims, effects and socio-political implications of engagement with non-professional performers in post-1990s theatre and performance.

Diverse Figures and Artistic Approaches

The essays and transcript featured here in *Performance Paradigm* 11 reflect the diverse types of non-professional performers that are figuring in theatre today, and the manifold, intriguing and often provocative nature of their deployment. For example, our opening two articles address work where people with little, if any, prior training in acting are employed to play semi- or fully fictional characters, an approach to casting that tests the boundaries between amateur and professional, character-actor and self-representing performer. In her analysis of the recent production by Bravo 22 Company of *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* by playwright Owen Sheers, Ariane de Waal considers a form of post-traumatic theatre sponsored by The Royal British Legion's Recovery Through Theatre Programme. In this production wounded soldiers play characters that are based on their own lives, and appear alongside actors who play other semi-fictional roles. In the case of *The House of Bernarda Alba TNT-El Vacie Version*, premiered in 2009 in Seville and analysed here by Natália da Silva Perez, theatre-makers from the Territorios Nuevos Tiempos International Centre for Theatre Research (TNT) prepared eight first-time actresses of Roma ethnicity from the impoverished neighbourhood of El Vacie to perform a highly successful adaptation of Federico García Lorca's play. In both productions professional teams tended to move towards an approach similar to what Miriam Dreysse and Florian Malzacher have termed a 'dramaturgy of care that protects and challenges the performers simultaneously' (2008: 8). For example, the teams sought to negotiate the performers' particular kinds of vulnerability, such as the psychological and physical wounds carried by the mostly male service personnel in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, as well as the social marginalisation and the low levels of literacy of the Romani female performers in TNT's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, while also requiring that many of the standards of professional acting be achieved.

The following article by Chris Hay shifts the focus from work that seeks to enable and support non-professional performers to productions that purposely build on their participants' failure to perform to the standards that Western audiences have come to expect of performers on the professional stage. The author also foregrounds misperformance as an essential element of

contemporary performance work,⁴ such as the 2014 production of *Oedipus Schmoedipus* by the Sydney company post, during which the company members worked with and alongside a new chorus of twenty-five minimally-prepared non-professional performers for each show. In addition, Hay discusses participatory productions by British / German Gob Squad and Belgian ensemble Ontroerend Goed that invited spectators during the event to become performers. In the fourth article Eleanor Massie focuses on the incorporation of non-professional performers in three devised autobiographical performances: *Testament* by She She Pop of Germany, and two works by British companies—*Where We Live & What We Live For, Part 1* by Kings of England, and *Dad Dancing* by Second Hand Dance (with the Battersea Arts Centre). Premiered between 2009 and 2014, the three works under examination present company members together with their fathers and, in one case, with other parents and children. In the broader context of her examination of affective labour, Massie shows how the heightening of the vulnerability of the older fathers' bodies in She She Pop's *Testament*, through methods such as burdensome costumes, lays bare the efforts of care and long-term familial connections that take place off stage. The performances assessed by Massie use vulnerability as a dramaturgical tool, but in ways that contain risk, due to the valuing of care and emotional ties.

The next two articles in this issue address work that differs from the theatre discussed thus far because it increases the prevalence or numbers of the non-professional and minimises the role of professional performers. In his assessment of how and why different German theatre institutions and systems have recently been engaging with the non-professional performer, Jens Roselt observes the diverse nature of the performers that inhabit Rimini Protokoll's Theatre of Experts and the Bürgerbühne. In the latter, municipal and state theatres welcome and train all interested citizens who wish to present themselves and the issues close to their heart in professional productions of both dramatic and non-dramatic texts. While Rimini Protokoll have often sought to avoid the situation where experts become amateurs, in the sense of partially trained people who act characters, this type of amateur has appeared in Bürgerbühne shows. Roselt contends that in both forms of work, the performers are offered security through strategies such as: creating a distance between self and role; offering opportunities to perform in a group; the use of direct address to the audience that tends to lead to simple and manageable movements; and a repertoire of familiar skills, actions and stories.

In the final article Michael Bachmann analyses *Wanna Play? (Love in the Time of Grindr)* (2014) by Dutch artist Dries Verhoeven, a form of installation piece where the artist engaged in visible online dating conversations in a glass container set in a public space. The piece made headlines during its first outing at a Hebbel am Ufer festival due to its staging of real people—both through the visible conversations and invitations to join the artist in the container—who in some cases did not know they were being staged. Verhoeven's use of initially unwitting and off-stage non-professional performers explored the boundaries between the public and private performance of individuals through site-specific and digitally mediated performance. In the 4 April 2012 panel discussion transcript that concludes this journal issue, consideration of the non-professional performer is supplemented by attention to other forms of Theatre of Real People where such a performer may not actually appear. For example, in some forms the contributions by real people—or experts—are restricted to the content and dramaturgy, while in others only filmed images and other traces of their bodies are spatially and temporally co-present with the audience.

Drama and Theatre Contexts

One of the issues contributors were invited to consider was the way in which types of contemporary performance that either work without or minimise the involvement of professional

performers interact with theatre histories and traditions. Roselt's article in particular responds to this invitation, exploring the continuity with and departure from traditions in his analysis of Rimini Protokoll and the Bürgerbühne's relation to classic dramas. These texts include canonical works by Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians* (Rimini Protokoll), as well as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (Bürgerbühne). He argues that the work with these dramas involves an intersection (rather than an interweaving) of biography, theme, and literary text. In a number of case studies in this issue, the same elements can be found at play, though often in a more interwoven manner. For example, She She Pop's devised autobiographical production *Testament* engages with William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and associated themes, such as intergenerational relations and inheritance. TNT's version of Lorca's drama *The House of Bernarda Alba* also operates an intersection between the biography of the main Romani actress, the approach to honour in Romani culture, and the ongoing relevance of the honour plays that were of great significance to the Spanish Golden Age of the 16th and 17th centuries.

In his exploration of German theatre histories, Roselt focuses in particular on the way Theatre of Experts and the Bürgerbühne continue a revolutionary move made by Enlightenment bourgeois theatre. Just as this theatre opened the stage to contemporary middle-class characters, the Bürgerbühne opened it further by bringing diverse contemporary Germans directly into the limelight. Roselt acknowledges that the Bürgerbühne was inspired by Rimini Protokoll. However, features such as its casting processes arguably make a more extensive contribution than Rimini Protokoll's Theatre of Experts to the democratisation of German theatre. While Rimini Protokoll spend considerable time and effort on finding and selecting suitable experts for their productions (Rimini Protokoll 2012: 60), increasingly German state theatres who have a Bürgerbühne invite any citizen with enthusiasm for performing to participate in workshops that might lead to a public show developed under professional production conditions (Kurzenberger 2015). Initiatives such as the Bürgerbühne also appear to challenge the exclusive nature of canonical drama and much professional theatre by opening out access to a broader range of participants than professional directors and subscription audiences. According to Hay, *Oedipus Schmoedipus* also breaks through the inaccessibility of Western canonical drama, but in this case through gently ridiculing the claims of cultural universality that have sometimes been attributed to it. At first glance, Verhoeven's project *Wanna Play?* seems to leave the realms of mainstream professional drama and theatre. However, Bachmann argues that the artist's intimation of a private space through the use of semi-transparent curtains, which can be drawn around the artist and his guest in the container, establishes a contradictory relationship with the intimacy and seeming autonomy of the darkened auditorium of the nineteenth century. Moreover, we would suggest that, not unlike TNT's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Verhoeven's work continues the ongoing engagement with a theme repeatedly sounded in classical drama, in this case romantic love.

Aims and Effects of Non-Professional Performers

In her recent discussion of the (re)turn to participatory art, and of projects that 'primarily involve people as the medium or material', Clare Bishop draws attention to work where non-professional performers are hired by artists 'to perform their own socio-economic category' and categorises this work as 'delegated performance' (2012: 5, 219). During her appraisal of such art she arrives at a useful summation of its underlying aims, and one that could be applied also to a broad range of theatre that features the non-professional performer or uses other methods to create contiguity with real people:

Artists choose to use people as a material for many reasons: to challenge traditional artistic criteria by reconfiguring everyday actions as performance; to give visibility to certain social

constituencies and render them more complex, immediate and physically present; to introduce aesthetic effects of chance and risk; to problematise the binaries of live and mediated, spontaneous and staged, authentic and contrived; to examine the construction of collective identity and the extent to which people always exceed these categories (2012: 238–39).

In the contributions featured in this issue, many of these aims are claimed by the featured artists and/or interpreted by the article authors as embodied in the case study productions. Across the practitioners and works showcased here, prominent aims include: to provide social constituencies and communities with an opportunity for visibility, self-reflection, and/or change; to provide strategies for effective meaning-making within the context of contemporary society and professional theatre; and to extend or challenge other public spheres of representation and encounter. Many of these aims are informed by the broader goal of exposing, resisting, or transcending current social, political and economic orders.

According to Roselt's presentation of the Bürgerbühne, the making visible of non-professional performers is clearly linked with an agenda for correcting the nature of political representation. Roselt positions this visibility agenda as an extension of eighteenth-century bourgeois drama that conceived 'of contemporary citizens as having equal status and rights to representation as the heroes of the historical and mythic past, and by analogy, rights to take part in political and cultural life'. A similar representational goal informs the inclusion of the non-professional chorus in post's *Oedipus Schmoedipus*, which Hay interprets as 'a kind of "mash-up" of famous death scenes from across the theatrical canon ... in part designed to critique the under-representation of marginal voices therein'. Visibility is complex and potentially problematic terrain, as it does not necessarily lead to empowering representation, and can sometimes reinforce the invisibility or objectification of some parties. The complexity of visibility is taken up, for example, in de Waal's discussion of the representation of the British wounded soldiers in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, where she argues that the affective impact of access to the visibly injured bodies contributed to a casting of the soldiers as victims rather than perpetrators, and an obscuring of the pain they had inflicted on others. In her analysis of *The House of Bernarda Alba TNT-El Vacie Version*, da Silva Perez notes how the representation of Romani people by artists and other knowledge producers requires careful consideration of power dynamics, especially given that in Spanish history 'making visible' has been a form of control that Romani communities have resisted by seeking to remain inconspicuous. Da Silva Perez also observes how the shift from a social inclusion project to a professional production opened up a disconnect between, on the one hand, a marketing campaign that seemed to objectify the El Vacie women's illiteracy and poverty in an exploitative way, and, on the other hand, the director's attempt to work with the Romani actresses ethically, and the performers' own desires to use the professional stage to show who they were and to gain respect.

The non-professional performer has been a popular vehicle for contemporary artists who seek to represent marginalised or insufficiently visible individuals and communities, or to shed new light on protagonists already in the public eye. This is in great part due to its ability to generate (and destabilise) a sense of contiguity with such people. However, as the artists in the 'Putting Real People on Stage' discussion make clear, these goals and this sense of contiguity can be pursued by other means. For example, rather than putting experts on stage, Alicia Talbot employs people who have particular experiences or industry knowledge—such as highway sex workers, or members of the Indigenous stolen generation in Australia—to work alongside her as expert consultants during the making process of a fictional play based on social realities. Motivated by the belief 'that it is everyone's human right to sit in an audience and watch on stage a version of their life', verbatim playwright Alana Valentine cites and reworks the recorded words and actions of a broad spectrum

of historical and contemporary people, ranging from Afghani-Australian Muslim women, Pitjantjatjara kidney dialysis patients, and children born from sperm-donor fathers to rugby league fans and chocolate, wine and tea connoisseurs, among many other examples. For Valentine, good verbatim work not only makes individuals and social constituencies visible but also takes 'the community' to a point where they're questioning what are the good and bad things about that community'. According to David Williams, the documentary productions of version 1.0—which were staged by professional performers and often put the less visible commentary and actions of government and business figures in the spotlight—used 'expert conversations with experts' in order to encourage 'a kind of civic conversation around what kind of society we want to live in'.

With regard to meaning-making, a number of the analyses presented here reveal the ways in which the figure of the non-professional performer can offer forms of misperformance—such as failure to perform according to professional standards—that prove memorable vehicles for the exploration of concerns such as death, authenticity, and affective labour. In his discussion of *Oedipus Schmoedipus*, Hay draws productively on Ridout's association of forms of misperformance, such as corpsing or stage fright, with metaphorical death, including those moments when 'the theatrical act itself collapses into some kind of oblivion' (2006: 132–34; 142–43). For example, Hay notes that a non-professional performer's infectious failure to repress her desire to laugh while playing a dead body during one of the performances invoked a form of oblivion that is productively aligned with the work's thematic focus on death and the way it belongs to everyone. Moreover, this occasion and the many others where the volunteers fail to perform—often because the company post have set up situations which offer opportunities for such failure—provide an often joyous illumination of the life that animates the stage figure. Hay also reads the misperformance in this production as an irruption of the real that contributes to a type of authentic communication of emotion that often eludes the professional stage. By contrast, in her evaluation of the autobiographical performances featuring the artists' fathers, Massie argues that the productions deconstruct the impression of authenticity that the fathers' misperformance appears to generate. After noting the way the fathers' laboured movements are often dubbed 'awkwardness' in both academic and journalistic receptions, and received as an authentic bodily quality stripped of labour, Massie demonstrates how the productions actually utilise awkwardness as 'a dramaturgical tool and, as such, an act of labour intended to instigate thought or feeling in the audience'. Drawing on feminist theories of immaterial and affective labour, Massie also argues that while the fathers' awkwardness is repeatedly received as revealing intimate affects—such as love—that come straight from the heart of family members with 'natural' emotional ties, the productions show how the emotions of familial care-givers involve concerted effort and contractual obligations, and constitute a form of work that occurs both within and outside domestic spheres. In so doing they contest the historical devaluing of and blindness towards the work of both non-professional performers and affective labourers.

The involvement of non-professional performers in professional theatre today is often connected with an interest in encouraging reflection on the way other public spheres represent and provide encounters with people. In his analysis of Verhoeven's *Wanna Play?*, Bachmann gives extensive attention to assumptions concerning the potential of avant-garde theatre to expose and transcend commodified public spheres. In this case the contested public space is digital culture as represented through a Social Networking Site, the popular Grindr dating app. The non-professional performers here were Verhoeven's online chat partners, who were initially unaware that their chats were not private and whose status as non-professional performers was thus unwitting, a status that changed when, having been made aware of their participation in a performance event, some of them went on to agree to visit the artist in his glass container. According to Bachmann's interpretation, both Verhoeven's concept paper and production indicate

a desire to liberate the non-professional performers from a life controlled by capitalist market forces. The liberation was to be effected through moving these performers from the Internet platform, positioned as the place where the private self is turned into a commodity and romantic love is reduced to an economic transaction, to the theatre space where live encounter and the mutual execution of banal tasks are used to stage the epitome of intimate communication. However, what Bachmann describes as the production's 'carelessness' regarding the projection of the participants' chat messages and profile pictures, created what was perceived by some as a violation of intimate spheres. For example, one of the guests to the container, not having been advised that he was taking part in a public performance event, issued an explosive statement on Facebook where he claimed that his own power over his sexual expression had been abused without consent for the artist's own personal gain. Bachmann links this carelessness with 'assumptions about the autonomy of theatre, the role of the artist in socially engaged practice and the performance protocols of digital media'. His article provides not only an example of where the desired effects of an aim seem to have been compromised, but also an instance where theatre's attempt to escape the socio-economic order through use of non-professional performers arguably reiterates aspects of that order and in a potentially damaging way.

Approaching the Politics and Encounter with Vulnerability

According to the commentaries in this issue, recent professional theatre with non-professional performers has sought to reveal people and practices that are insufficiently seen, heard or understood, and has resisted problematic assumptions about and relations with them. However, many of the commentaries here also illuminate the blind spots and problems that can inform and be created by such theatre, as well as by its recipients. A major source of these problems is the complex nature of the power dynamics and ethical issues that often surround such performers. Here we return to one such issue that has surfaced repeatedly in the contributors' analyses: the issue of the performers' vulnerability. Reasons for this vulnerability can include reduced access to the training, skills and protective strategies usually available to professional performers as well as cultural and socio-economic factors such as exclusion and marginalisation. Art that uses non-professional performers and/or their vulnerability as a vehicle for making meaning, or for effecting artistic and social change, takes the risk of reiterating or magnifying that vulnerability and of reinforcing its causal factors.

As da Silva Perez points out in her assessment of TNT's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, it is possible that the precarious life conditions of the Romani actresses and 'the consequently vulnerable situation in which they were placed' during the production, provide 'the very conditions of possibility for their resistance'. This positive appraisal of vulnerability within the context of theatre draws on ideas from a conversation between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou about performative politics in conjunction with the politics of precarity. In this conversation Butler observes that 'performativity names that unauthorised exercise of a right to existence that propels the precarious into political life' (2013: 101). While da Silva Perez raises the liberatory and resistive potential of vulnerability, Roselt and de Waal explore how specific theatre companies and theatrical forms seek to contain vulnerability through the management of distancing mechanisms. Roselt focuses in particular on strategies in the Bürgerbühne that create a distance for the performer from both the self and the spectator, such as: having on-stage primary witnesses listen to their own (traumatic) narratives from behind a semi-transparent screen as these texts are presented to the audience by professional actors; the demonstration of reflection on one's personal roles; and the exhibition of an emotionally neutral attitude and calm comportment. In her discussion of Bravo 22 company's presentation of the British wounded soldiers, de Waal points out a number of protective distancing mechanisms, such as the transformation of the performers'

own private stories into semi-fictionalised characters and script, and the linear, factual rendering of traumatic events. De Waal argues that while it is open to debate whether the occlusion of trauma's 'haunting force' through these mechanisms is a desirable representational outcome, the failure to acknowledge both the inaccessibility of trauma and the workings of these distancing strategies problematically encourages the spectator to regard the performers as authentic ordinary speakers, and to identify with them. In some ways, these mechanisms for distancing the performer from self paradoxically contribute to a proximity between the spectator and the soldier, and one that, in de Waal's assessment, 'impedes a critical engagement with the ethical and political questions at stake in this encounter'.⁵

De Waal situates the use of the non-professional performer within what she refers to as a 'poetics of immediacy', and, like Bachmann, unravels the blind spots and problematic assumptions that often come hand-in-hand with such a poetics. However, as a number of the art works and practices explored in this issue demonstrate, in certain contexts the non-professional theatre performer can provide a very effective figure for interrogating such poetics. Moreover, it can also challenge and change our thoughts, feelings and actions when it comes to those important issues of our contemporary world—visibility and representation, precarity and vulnerability, misperformance and oblivion, authenticity and intimacy, affect and labour—with which this figure is so frequently associated.

Notes

1. For further discussion of the term 'expert' as used by Rimini Protokoll, see Malzacher 2008: 23, and Birgfeld, Garde and Mumford 2015: xv-xvii.
2. Aspects of the historical overview given in this paragraph are considered in greater depth in our forthcoming co-authored book *Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016).
3. In *Theatre of the Real*, Carol Martin raises the difficulty of maintaining the real's ambiguity when writing about it: "'Real" in quotation marks insinuates that the real is not real. Real (without quotation marks) insinuates that the real is real' (2013: 177). Following Martin's practice, we do not present the real in quotation marks, but seek to clarify how the term and concept are being used here.
4. The concept and practice of 'misperformance' was first fully explored at the 15th PSi conference (Zagreb, 2009). Findings from this conference were subsequently published in a special issue of *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 15. 2 (2010), edited by Lada Cale Feldman and Marin Blažević.

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