



Danspace Project Platform 2011: **BODY MADNESS**
absurdity, wit, rhythm, humor



**...to dramatize all
the discoveries
(no matter how
unlikely, weird,
and antitheatrical)
that our talent is
discovering in the
subconscious, in
ill-defined forces...
in body-madness.**

Italian Futurists' *Synthetic Theatre Manifesto*, 1915
by F. T. Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli, and Bruno Corra

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PART I
absurdity, wit



CURATORIAL STATEMENT

By Judy Hussie-Taylor

“My art is about just paying attention” —Robert Rauschenberg^[1]

“Body Madness” is a phrase borrowed from the Italian Futurists’ *Synthetic Theatre* Manifesto of 1915, in which F. T. Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli, and Bruno Corra declared their commitment to:

DRAMATIZE ALL THE DISCOVERIES (no matter how unlikely, weird, and antitheatrical) THAT OUR TALENT IS DISCOVERING IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS, IN ILL-DEFINED FORCES, IN PURE ABSTRACTION, IN THE PURELY CEREBRAL, THE PURELY FANTASTIC, IN RECORD-SETTING AND BODY-MADNESS.

This Platform was not directly inspired by the Futurists. Rather, the interests of the artists presented here, emerging out of this peculiar 21st century moment, led me to the above referenced manifesto. The Futurists’ “habit of energy and fearlessness . . . courage, audacity, and revolt” all apply to the work presented in section one of *Body Madness* which, in part, asks why wit and absurdity are still used as performative strategies in contemporary dance and performance.

While the Italian Futurists’ zealous embrace of war as “the world’s only hygiene” and their proto-Fascist and anti-women proclamations are disturbing, their insistence, a century ago, on an aesthetic of dynamism and movement across the arts announced an era that is still with us.

The Futurist project was nationalist from the start, and as nationalism mutated to fascism, the experimentation, edge, wit, and humor that defined the movement were pushed to the margins. The connections between today’s provocative artists and those of the last century are perhaps more accurately reflected in Dada and in Dada’s early but brief New York activities. According to art writer, historian and activist Lucy Lippard, “New York [was the] first stronghold of the as-yet-nameless phenomenon, [and it] produced a hybrid activity, French-accented, since its prime movers were Duchamp and Picabia. It flourished [in NYC] in 1915 – 17, before America entered the war, and was, therefore, the product of disgust once removed.”^[2]

What we share—the Futurists, Dadaists, and art-making citizens of the world today—is a political climate that espouses democracy and equality but fears difference, ambiguity, and questions that do not resolve quickly from pre-conceived notions to foregone conclusions. The Italian Futurists celebrated the radical right. Today we all—right, left, and middle—are suspect in this regard. There are no clear-cut party politics, no easy ways out, and as in the volatile climate of a century ago, old forms no longer quite hold.

The artists who were commissioned for the Wit & Absurdity section of *Body Madness* share certain characteristics: 1) they employ wit (both physical and intellectual), often with a Beckett-like humor; 2) they make work that is intentionally off-kilter, creating uncertainty in the viewer; 3) they are rigorous improvisers and place a high value on the

CURATORIAL STATEMENT CONT.

performative unknown; 4) they walk a fine line between art and entertainment and are intentionally ambiguous about the difference; 5) there is a structural madness, just when you are convinced it's all falling a part, it suddenly comes together.

This brings us to our multi/inter-disciplinary moment. The more we try to go back to clear definitions of things as they have been, whether artistic, political, or personal, the more those definitions slip through our fingers. And here we are in this moment with its fluid identities, transformative realities, and strategies to disarm audiences by introducing radical ideas and experiences. Experiences can be queer things. They *must* be. Pay attention.

[1] Rauschenberg quoted in Kenneth Silverman: *Begin Again*. NY: Knopf, 2010.

[2] Ed. Lippard, Lucy, *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp and others*. Dover, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Dover, 1971.



Roundtable Discussion
Wednesday, February 9,
2011 at 7pm, the Parish
Hall of St. Mark's Church.
The artists of *Body
Madness*, Part 1 joined
curator Judy Hussie-Taylor
in an informal discussion
about how absurdity and
wit is used as a springboard
in their work.



Cori OLINGHOUSE

Voix de ville

An evening created by
Cori Olinghouse.

The Animal Suite: Experiments in Vaudeville and Shapeshifting

Creation: Cori Olinghouse in
collaboration with the performers.
Performance: Neal Beasley, Kai
Kleinbard, Mina Nishimura, Cori
Olinghouse, & Eva Schmidt
Costume Design: Andy Jordan
Lighting Design:
Roderick Murray
Branch elements: Kelly Hanson
Sound Design: Jake Meginsky
Production Stage Manager:
Liz Jenetopulos
Production Interns: Kay Ottinger,
Kristi Schopfer, Ashley Vellano

Itsuko san

Choreography & Performance:
Kota Yamazaki
Music: Alva Noto, Cocteau Twins,
King Crimson, Stuttgart Piano Trio

Elements of Vogue

Creation & Performance:
Archie Burnett & Javier Ninja
Music: "Din Da Da" by George
Kranz, "Love Is a Message" by
Masters at Work

Morph/Era Portrait

(featuring: The Wounded Cartesian
Love Song)
Choreographed and performed
by Bill Irwin
Music: "Boogaloo Brooklyn
3:23PM" by Deepak Sharma
(Saturday, February 5 only)

The creation of *The Animal Suite:
Experiments in Vaudeville and
Shapeshifting* was made possible,
in part, by the Danspace Project
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Center.

EXCERPT FROM WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE ESSAY, 02/09/11

Far from the psychic and corporeal distancing implied by the term 'appropriation', Olinghouse describes her engagement with vaudeville as one attempt at being more human, more 'direct', closer to some collective experience of life in the contemporary moment. It is perhaps more similar to what Walter Benjamin understood as the 'anthropological tendency' in Surrealism. Something Jonathan Crary described in 1981, in contrast to many of the postmodern techniques in visual art at that moment, as a strategy that "incarnated a refusal of the imposed present, and in reclaiming fragments of a demolished past ... was implicitly figuring an alternative future." Such a strategy does not treat past forms as a set of unfettered tools for the artist beyond or after history, nor does it return to them merely to make visible their contingency or inauthenticity. Instead, this 'anthropological' strategy pulls into light those past forms whose invisibility, whose forgetting, lays at the root of a present order. In Olinghouse's piece, as in the polyglot movement of voguing and butoh, other languages are taken on to model a way of being in the world beyond a heterosexist, racist, and otherwise bounded, "imposed present."

—Huffa Frobes-Cross

CONVERSATION WITH CURATOR JUDY HUSSIE-TAYLOR

On 'body madness':

I've been researching a variety of movement forms that explore the shapeshifting capacities of the body. From the eccentric dancers of the 20's and 30's, irreverently winding their rubbery legs and corkscrewing themselves to extremes. To the clowns like Bill Irwin, Grock, Keaton, and Chaplin—shrinking and growing—masters of illusion and humor. To the underground voguers—arm clicking and contorted in polyrhythmic grace. As an artist, I'm interested in this collective body madness and in exploring the complexity of patterns that are embedded in our own experiences and physical realities. For me, the body is a rich point of entry because it is a deep place of possibility—containing within it complex patterning, plasticity, and the ability for change.

On wit and absurdity as strategies:

Wit and absurdity are not direct strategies in my work. I am interested in the forces that shape human identity. Exploring this through rigorous play, observation, and improvisation, I am often plummeted into the unknown—and into unusual places of absurdity.

On transformation:

In *The Animal Suite: Experiments in Vaudeville and Shapeshifting*, I was interested in creating a vaudevillian landscape in which we move through a variety of embodied states—forms—and possibilities, using these different possibilities as a kind of mask—and place for transformation or morphing.

I was also interested in a transformation of space. Compelled by the two-dimensional shaping of vaudevillian space and the three-dimensional ways animals inhabit space—I wanted to morph between these sensibilities. Telescoping between these multiple senses of time, space, and identity, I was seeking fluidity inside a primitive theater.

I have invited artists from different dance cultures to share this evening with me. Although our forms and processes diverge radically, I perceive a shared interest in shapeshifting and transformation—attempting fluidity across forms, gender, and culture.

—Cori Olinghouse

