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DIS/CONNECTION: MULTISENSUALITY AND SHAME'S TOUCH IN THE WORK OF GABRIELLE GOLIATH

Like the air we breathe, [touch] has been taken for granted as a fundamental fact of life, a medium for the production of meaningful acts, rather than meaningful in itself.¹

Art does not illustrate or embody a proposition but produces sensations or affects that stimulate thought.²

The body, in my view, is where we encounter a range of perspectives that may or may not be our own. How I am encountered, and how I am sustained, depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which this body lives, how I am regarded and treated, and how that regard and treatment facilitates this life or fails to make it livable.³

More important than thought there is “what leads to thought” ... impressions which force us to look, encounters which force us to interpret, expressions which force us to think.⁴

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¹ Constance CLASSEN, “The Book of Touch,” in *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Oxford: Routledge, 1996), 2.

² Ernst VAN ALPHEN, “Reading for Affects: Francis Bacon and the Work of Sensation,” in *How to Do Things with Affects: Affective Triggers in Aesthetic Forms and Cultural Practices*, ed. Ernst van Alphen and Tomáš Jirsa (Leiden: Brill; Boston: Rodopi, 2019), 165.

³ Judith BUTLER, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), 53.

⁴ Gilles DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Continuum, 2008), 161.

In his much-celebrated work *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes declares that the origin of all thought is that which we sense, “for there is no conception in Man’s mind which hath not at first totally or in parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense.”⁵ Hobbes thus probes the complex relationship among the senses, knowledge and ideas. He worked hard at actively dismantling the dismissal of sensory knowledge as trivial, ephemeral or “merely” subjective. John Locke agreed with Hobbes’s “claiming that the entirety of human experience was derived from two sources, sensation and reflections”.⁶ In the introduction to *Touching Place, Placing Touch* Mark Paterson, Martin Dodge and Sarah MacKian suggest that the “primacy and living immediacy of sensory experience does not reside solely within the boundaries of the skin, somehow locked within discrete, disconnected bodies.... The cultural chronology of the formulation of a ‘sensorium’ necessitates that the senses are ineluctably social: felt individually, but also always shared intersubjectively.”⁷ I ask what has stifled our ability to “sense” and how might the arts as a mode of communication beyond words open us to be “touched” in ways that help us feel and in feeling, think. In this discussion I do not merely refer to physical touch but also how we are touched in embodied moments of meaning-making, in how affects make us experience certain sensations. John Locke agreed with Hobbes’ and stated that the entirety of human experience and thus thought could be derived from “sensation and reflections”.⁸ In this article I trace how the performance art piece *Stumbling Block* (2011) created by South African visual artist and performance artist Gabrielle Goliath⁹ “touched” me in an agentive way. In tracing my reflections, I probe what it might mean to be “touched” even when we deliberately choose not to touch or be touched and attempt to “disengage” our body from feeling. Furthermore, I consider how the performance of a wrapped body in the threshold of a doorway works to heighten the border between the seen and unseen, activating a residue of shame’s stickiness in

⁵ Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

⁶ Mark PATERSON, Martin DODGE, and Sarah MACKIAN, “Introduction: Placing Touch within Social Theory and Empirical Study,” in *Touching Space, Placing Touch*, ed. Mark Paterson and Martin Dodge (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 1.

⁷ PATERSON, DODGE and MACKIAN, 2.

⁸ PATERSON, DODGE and MACKIAN, 105.

⁹ Gabrielle Goliath is a PhD candidate at UCT and an ICA fellow. She has a background in Fine Arts and works in multiple mediums. She is the recipient of the 2019 Standard Bank Young Artists Award for Visual Arts and was awarded the Future Generation Award in 2019.

making me acutely aware of the boundaries of the abject. This is central to my argument about what a performance like *Stumbling Block* and the affective touch it produces might offer us in better understanding shame's affect. The discussion therefore includes how the practice and role of the senses in doing research offers an engaged and alternative relationship to research.

Stumbling Block is a powerfully simple performance art piece, consisting of one performer whose body is completely covered in a grey-and-white striped blanket¹⁰ placed on a sheet of cardboard made from discarded packing boxes. The wrapped body "sleeps" in the doorway or the entrance to the event. In order to enter, the "stumbling block" has to be navigated by attendees in some way. I recall how on my arrival at the opening of the Institute for Creative Arts (ICA), at the University of Cape Town (UCT), on first noticing the body wrapped in blankets, I immediately thought it was a protest piece assembled by students, on account of the protests and demonstrations taking place on campus at the time.¹¹ I was surprised, hesitant, unsure. I stood by the stairwell and looked at the staged piece from a distance, thoughts of institutional privilege, white privilege, what access privilege grants and what thresholds certain bodies can cross entered my mind. It was only when I needed to move from the stairwell lobby into the gallery hall that the transition generated an internal negotiation of unease and confusion adding to what I was already feeling in my body.¹²

I purposefully use the word 'encounter' in describing my engagement with this performance, for as Gilles Deleuze points out in the fourth epigraph above, an encounter does not involve recognition but is rather some-

¹⁰ This type of blanket is iconic in its South African context. The blanket is distributed in prisons and supplied by shops such as PEP Stores. As a cheap blanket that still gives warmth, it has become a symbol of poverty. Many homeless people are seen covered in this variant of blanket. The majority of the poor and homeless in South Africa are Black and People of Colour (BPOC). The blanket is therefore primarily associated with black bodies. *Stumbling Block* performs the "theatre of the unhoused" in the cities of South Africa and across the world. This performance opens us to think what it means to be an invisible actor in a packed house. The placement of the specific blanket used in the performance also works to highlight the bodies that still remain "stuck" in a failed prison system where they are unable to move beyond this liminal space, stuck in a damning state of liminal existence.

¹¹ The performance of *Stumbling Block* I notate was performed in March 2016 amidst the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall Movements.

¹² Visual images and footage of the piece can be viewed at https://www.gabriellegoliath.com/stumbling-block_documentation. I strongly encourage the reader to view this footage before continuing with the paper. Goliath's first performance in 2011, as well as the performance at the ICA 2016 and her more recent staging at the ZEITZ MOCCA are all visually archived. Performances from 2011–2019 are catalogued here.

thing that forces us into a position of feeling.¹³ Deleuze terms this “the encountered sign”.¹⁴ He specifically defines the “encountered sign” as something felt rather than recognised or perceived at some level of cognition.¹⁵ The felt experience produced by a body/object is not an end in itself but rather a moment that forces us to engage with the material in uncomfortable ways. Affect engenders a reflection on ourselves in relation to the encountered sign as it grasps us involuntarily. It is this heightened awareness associated with affect that makes us sensitive to relationality. It is therefore the sensation¹⁶ felt through affect that acts as a catalyst. Arguably, Marcel Proust identifies an affect as a particularly effective trigger for thought because it communicates to “us in spite of ourselves”.¹⁷ In being positioned to feel things we may have not felt or things we may have chosen not to feel forces us to “stick” with these uncomfortable feelings.

Sara Ahmed uses the metaphor of stickiness to evoke the visceral relation of shame to the emotions, to describe how the felt feeling draws the body in relation to something else—sticking to it.¹⁸ Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank also use this notion of stickiness in their description of shame, as it is “both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating”.¹⁹ In *Queer Attachments*, Sally Munt describes shame as “gluey”, “with a revolving cycle of separation-attachment-disattachment”.²⁰ Stickiness, therefore, by definition, interrupts individuality; it describes the state of converging with something outside of yourself. Simultaneously, stickiness describes a state of attempting to isolate oneself from another, because one cannot feel stickiness unless one attempts to become unstuck, which highlights the term’s similarity to the experience of shame’s affect. “Stickiness can also produce reflexive self-consciousness through an attempt to separate the self from

¹³ DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs*, 139.

¹⁴ This term at first may appear paradoxical if we consider that affects move and exit beyond signification and the production of meaning (VAN ALPHEN, “Reading,” 165). Furthermore, the sign is felt as opposed to what is “cognitively perceived, recognised or identified through familiarity with a ‘code’” (165).

¹⁵ DELEUZE, *Proust and Signs*, 139.

¹⁶ Sensation is a term Deleuze identifies as modelling a way of thinking.

¹⁷ Marcel PROUST, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, *Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright and Joanna Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 61.

¹⁸ Sarah AHMED, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 89–92.

¹⁹ Eve SEDGWICK and Adam FRANK, eds., *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 36.

²⁰ Sally R. MUNT, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 24.

the self, as when one's gluey fingers stick to each other."²¹ Stickiness "entails a dialectical struggle between adhering to something and seeking freedom from it" (even, and especially, when that something is the self), as well as a struggle between contagion and isolation.²² To feel the texture of stickiness is inescapably to pay attention to one's body, to feel the relationship between one's body and the sticky substance or glue. In this moment it feels as if it is one's body that will need "to be washed or otherwise attended to, the self is defected, the self needs to be rubbed, scrubbed and cleansed".²³ Thus stickiness, like shame, produces a self-conscious sense of the borders of the self.

I cannot remember if I chose to step over or around the body lying still in the entryway into the gallery hall but I do remember thinking: "Do I step over or around? Should I not enter? Should I address the person beneath the blanket? Or do I ignore the person completely and continue entering the room? Is there even a human body underneath or is it just bundles of newspaper?" However, in that transitory moment, one that I refused to acknowledge and see in the quickness of moving through the door-frame, I assumed I had entered unscathed. Only when I sat on the other side and started to process what the moment had done to me, did I start to see how this action of numbing and pushing aside an internal tension had occurred in me on many other occasions, not so distinctly curated. The work requires a response. You have to make a choice about how you are going to interact with the work, even if unconsciously. In their physical interaction with the work, the attendees publicly perform an internal response. Do you see the body as human or object? And if you see it as human how do you respond? Yet in this instance, is it not justified to see the body as an aestheticised art object? Or does the discomfort emanate from the body's being both subject and object, human and inanimate? Had I seen the work as artobject my reaction to the work would have been more calculated, distanced and observational. I would have been able to rationalise my response by convincing myself that this was merely a piece of art.

Stumbling Block is a durational performance. The performance length is determined by the duration of the event where the piece is staged. As long

²¹ Robin BERNSTEIN, "Toward the Integration of Theatre History and Affect Studies: Shame and the Rude Mechs's 'The Method Gun'," *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 2 (2012): 223–24, note 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41679579>.

²² BERNSTEIN, 224.

²³ BERNSTEIN, 224.

as the event takes place, so too does the body lie in stillness. My interaction with the piece was one of the quickest engagements I have had with a performance, yet the emotional negotiation and negation engendered by that brief moment were profound. Applied Theatre practitioner and theorist, James Thompson, attests to the power of affect in unsettling audiences and provoking them to engage, ponder and reconsider. He argues that after the event has passed, “it is indeed through mediums of expression that agitate at a level of sensation that propels an inward demand to know more.”²⁴ It is thus the feeling which affect produces that sustains and drives the ongoing thinking about the encounter. Perhaps such affective moments are more efficient vehicles for sustained engagement of thought than theories? Is it perhaps also the case that these affective moments resonate with what feels right, true and authentic, forcing us to reflect? It is perhaps precisely because of how performance’s aesthetics affect us that the complexities of shame are laid bare in a way that theory cannot offer.

In a similar vein, Della Pollock suggests that “performance is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants—often by surprise—in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be.”²⁵ This “contract of possibility” is formulated in the both/and of performance, in how it is both staged and real, both a living and an aestheticised art object.²⁶ Performance blurs boundaries between what is known and unknown, between what is considered to be real or staged. Often this line becomes so indistinct that the audience is unable to distinguish between the two. It is this state of thinking with the both/and that Goliath introduces through her piece. I frame this understanding of the both/and as a way of holding two different (even opposing) thoughts together, seeing them as part of each other, each informing and shaping the other as opposed to being separate and removed.

Stumbling Block therefore facilitates a questioning of how certain codes of reading or performance conventions (in terms of which we see a body as not real but as an object) are also used in everyday life, as a way of stopping oneself from feeling or processing what is felt. The attendees at the opening of the ICA interacted with the body in the performance piece as

²⁴ James THOMPSON, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 125.

²⁵ Della POLLOCK, “Introduction: Remembering,” in *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

²⁶ POLLOCK, 2.

not a real indigent body. They stepped around and over the body while adhering to the rules of white cube spaces, where attendees do not interact with, touch or speak to the artworks. However, it is precisely this action of stepping over and around, in silence and inaction towards another body, that I had performed with real bodies in my day-to-day life. This passing around and over had occurred on the road just a few feet from the building where the piece was staged, a street where I had often passed by homeless people quickly and in silence, attempting to be unnoticed. I remember thinking that because the body was covered and concealed the performer would not be as engaged, connected to or aware of the reactions to their body of members of the audience as they passed by. I also remember associating the body as a black male. Perhaps this also made me feel less sensitive and attached to the emotional reality of the person underneath the blanket. Most noteworthy is that because the body was still, I felt justified in assuming the person was sleeping, not conscious and thus unaware of being judged. This assessment of marginalised bodies resulted from my rationalisation of discarding and disregarding the invisibilised body. The marginalised body is seen as, interacted with, treated as an object. In *Stumbling Block* the performance of a heightened state of stillness amplifies how privileged bodies have deadened invisibilised bodies to affect, to feeling, to being “touched” by them, or to any form of agency or vitality. The work also promotes a hyper-visibility for the invisibilised body by positioning the work in salient placements that cannot go ignored by those needing to gain access to the event. The performance therefore directly confronts the fabric of the visitor’s reality. By hyper-visibilising the body of a homeless person, Goliath’s work asks me why even when the body’s presence is made visible do I still ignore it and suppress external signs of my recognition of it? This lack of recognition speaks to a choice I made not to see the extreme vulnerability of the body because of the position in which it was placed. I chose to deploy my affective touch (in nearness, sensing another body in relation to mine) in a gesture that did not acknowledge the person’s being.

This idea of how shame affectively communicates the border between the abject, object, subject and abject object/subject in unspoken affective gestures that “touch” is powerfully expressed by black feminist Audre Lorde, in the following extract from her writings about travelling on the AA Subway as a child:

I clutch my mother's sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, Christmas-heavy. The wet smell of winter clothes, the train's lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us—probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes past my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on a strap in the speeding train. Born and bred a New York City child, I quickly slide over to make room for my mother to sit down. No word has been spoken. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I've done. I look at the side of my snowpants, secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here and I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.²⁷

Lorde's viscerally charged words speak to an affective exchange between two bodies shared amongst other bodies in a cramped subway train. Although the affective moment is often quick, passing outside of words and difficult to put a finger on, Lorde makes sense of this traumatic experience through what she feels. Although not fully comprehended at the time ("something's going on here and I do not understand") the thing that sticks ("I will never forget it") is the affective touch trafficked between her and the woman. Lorde experiences this in her body, and this felt sensation that solidifies and shapes her notion of self in relation to others is the affect she felt ("the hate"). The power in this shaming experience generates a looking away in the young girl, a secrecy and a fear in acknowledging or talking about what has transpired. A young Lorde knows that something has occurred. Even though she is unable to make sense of or articulate it, it does not diminish the visceral bodily knowing—"I will never forget it." After reading Audre Lorde's reflections and considering my interaction with *Stumbling Block* I started to realise how withdrawal from certain "abject" bodies still touches the body, and that it is through this intimate affect that the transfer of shame operates.

²⁷ Audre LORDE, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 147–48.

It is also worth mentioning how—because I encountered *Stumbling Block* amongst other bodies—I felt less exposed, seen or watched. Perhaps this is what the woman in the train described by Lorde, above, felt too, that her affective touch on and communication with the black child's body was concealed by the collective body crammed into the train with her. The crowd of bodies the night I witnessed *Stumbling Block* at the ICA opening made me feel a sense of commonality in being part of a community of bodies that had behaved similarly to mine (a habitus), in stepping over or around the body. What was of interest to me, was how I was more concerned for the collective body than I was about the body directly in relation to me and which was directly impacted by my actions. Though the performer beneath the blanket was blind to my action (the performer's body being completely concealed by the blanket), the action did not go unnoticed (as perhaps the woman in Lorde's narrative believed to have been the case). The interaction, although not "seen" by the body underneath the blanket, was witnessed by both bodies in the action's felt-knowing.

The encounter with *Stumbling Block* began an agitation within me leading to a new way of seeing and a conviction that I would not be able to "unsee". The work communicated to me outside of words and theories. I sat and pondered how on many other occasions I had responded similarly? And why so? Where had this self-perpetuating habit in respect of which bodies I acknowledged and which ones I ignored developed? My personal action created a dissonance. I had thought that this fleeting and discreet action, occurring in a stream of moving bodies entering and exiting the threshold, would make my interaction with the piece ephemeral, quick and indistinguishable from the responses implied by the hurried movement of other bodies. I had thought that this supposition about my interaction with the piece would make my action easier to forget, to erase and perhaps deny, and in this way remove a feeling of culpability. I turned my head away. I looked down. I tried quickly to find a seat amongst the crowd, to blur myself back into the mass of bodies, back into the comfort of other bodies who had also stepped over, around or not even noticed the body blocking the doorway.²⁸

²⁸ In my two Skype conversations with Goliath a point I found interesting was her mention of the differing reactions by audiences to her work. Besides the general act of ignoring, there appeared to be two extremes, on opposing sides of the neutral 'ignore'. Some audience members kicked, poked, hit, unwrapped and spoke directly to the performer, making bigoted and racist comments. Others purged their emotions, crying for minutes next to the still body. Some asked if the performer needed water, food or if they could help in any way. Some even offered

On my reading Jacques Derrida's words in *Spectres of Marx* my stillness became recognisable as a denial of what I had "touched" met. In that moment I believed it would be better to control my body into a stillness than to allow myself to think about what it was I was feeling, and in so doing remind myself of our nation's perpetuating of systemic oppression:

For it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to evangelise in the name of a liberal democracy that has finally realised itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of earth and humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the "end of ideologies" and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect the obvious microscopic fact, made up of innumerable singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved and exterminated on earth.²⁹

There was something in these words that resonated with how I had shamed others and how I in turn had felt shame. The shame evoked in me through *Stumbling Block* was directly associated with the act of ignoring and (thus) silencing injustices I had witnessed. The realisation made me feel the further shame of acknowledging how my inaction had helped to perpetuate and entrench these injustices. Shame in this moment therefore did not just pass between myself and the performance piece, but was summoned from, arose from and was entangled with many other moments when I had acted similarly.

In Derrida's description of "hauntology", my relationship to *Stumbling Block* is given a language: it is revealed as a resurgence of my past (previous encounters where I have acted similarly or experienced similar affects) in order to destabilise the present and the hegemonic "meta-narratives" that we tell ourselves. Derrida's theory of hauntology invokes the not-quite-present but not-quite-absent. Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a resonant contemplation with regard to the role the body of the performer and audience member play in their contribution to meaning-making through embodied

to pray for the performer. This interaction can also be viewed on through her live digital recordings of *Stumbling Block* uploaded onto her website indicated in footnote 12.

²⁹ Jacques DERRIDA, *Spectres of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85.

ways of knowing, an embodied hauntology: "Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object."³⁰ It is this embodied "haunting" that leads to an unearthing that disrupts and revises "ways of seeing", especially in terms of how we engage with bodies in our world. Haunting thus traffics in the affective realm and requires an embodied engagement and a sensuous knowledge.³¹ Shame haunts us. Shame unfaced becomes the most harrowing of spectres. The sociologist Avery Gordon suggests that reparation only comes about because a ghost "is pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding", a reckoning with the gaps and in-betweens, with that which has been lost or which we never had. The act of reckoning with the ghost is an attempt also to "offer it a hospitable memory out of a concern for justice".³² It is important to note that Gordon proposes a hauntological analysis as a way to focus on how people sense, intuit and experience the complexities of modern power.³³ Hauntology therefore seeks to focus on "what is usually invisible or neglected or thought by most to be dead or gone".³⁴ This internal hauntology unearths a scaffolding hidden in historical amnesia—a scaffolding of shame used to silence and be silenced by. The scaffolding demonstrates how certain social affects, such as shame, are exploited politically and used in hegemonic relations to shape how we remember and how we think we have engaged with people and the world. *Stumbling Block* reiterates these ideas as the performance piece requires an embodied engagement and felt knowledge in order to see, experience and talk to that which has been repressed but nevertheless still affectively haunts us.³⁵

As a white,³⁶ middle-class, English-speaking South African there is often a disengagement by people of similar background and upbringing in

³¹ Mark FLEISHMAN, "Remembering in the Postcolony: Refiguring the Past with Theatre" (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2012), 205.

³² Avery GORDON, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 83, 64.

³³ GORDON, 194.

³⁴ GORDON, 194.

³⁵ FLEISHMAN, "Remembering," 205.

³⁶ In this article specific racial classifications are used that are reflective of the ideologies of South Africa's previous dispensation. The Population Registration Act of 1950 required that all people living in South Africa register their racial classification according to the apartheid's system of racial characteristics. This system of racial classification was divided into White,

respect of the role “we” played in the formation and perpetuation of race relations and prejudice in our shared history of South Africa. In the eyes of many liberal, English-speaking South Africans, the white Afrikaner³⁷ bears the weight of culpability and judgement for the systemic oppression of people of colour in South Africa’s history. This serves to deflect attention from the significant role the liberal white English-speaking South African played. In my upbringing and in the social relations I had growing up, there were very few white, middle-class, English speakers who ever admitted to “actually” being “a part” of apartheid. Many voiced a rhetoric of non-racism, but within this liberal discourse there was a blanketing over of the role played by just being born white, a disregard of its inherent privilege. In the current context of South Africa, many white South Africans find a strong need to verbalise their identifying as non-racist.³⁸ I suspect that this heightened desire to label oneself as “not racist” is heavily laden with

African, Coloured and Indian. Classification by racial group brought with it certain social advantages, with Whites garnering the greatest social benefits. On June 17, 1991 the act was repealed, but these institutionalised constructs of race classification continue in South Africa today. The terms are not reflective of my personal beliefs. I rather share the thoughts of Zimitri Erasmus where “race” is seen as a cultural, historical and political identity and used to remind us of their “race science” and ignoble origins.

³⁷ An Afrikaner is a descent of white settlers to South Africa. Originally rooted in the arrival of Dutch settlers in the 1600s, the cultural group now includes the genealogy lines of Khoi-San, Xhosa, British, German and Huguenot. As early as the 1700s there are records of European settlers identifying as “Africaanders”. Afrikaans is a creole language spoken by Afrikaners as well as the Cape Coloured community. The reference to Afrikaner identity in this study is specifically to the white Afrikaner identity and the term ‘Afrikaner’ applies to a group of people that was politically, socially and economically advantaged by the apartheid government. ‘Afrikaner’ has been debated in critical thinking around identity, with alternative terms proposed such as *Afrikaan*, *Afrikaanses*, *Suid-Afrikaan*, *Boer* and *Wit Suid-Afrikaners*.

³⁸ It is important to contextualise the use of this terminology in South Africa in light of the Black Lives Matter movement globally (#BLM) and the terminology, anti-racist, trending alongside the #BLM in 2020. Anti-racists do not only mark an active opposition to racism but a deliberate commitment to supporting BPOC (coupled with public action against racism). Anti-racist is therefore not merely lip service to opposing racism, but a label denoting action and activism. Prior to 2020, this terminology was not used in South Africa. Instead, people who believed themselves to be in opposition to a racist ideology referred to themselves as non-racists or “not racist”, influenced by the liberal/communist supporters of non-racialism in the 1950s in South Africa. In current discourses non-racist/ not racist as a term used in opposition to a history of racism falls short in instigating a level of responsibility, acting more like a half promise. I use the term non-racist as it is contextually appropriate to the writing of this thesis chapter. Had I started this research in a post-BLM context I would have used anti-racist. My enlightenment as to the force of the term anti-racist occurred after my initial engagement with this chapter and performance. The use of the term also speaks to my racist complicity.

haunting historical shame. The labelling of oneself as “not racist” instead positions one to further conceal and push back the haunting spectre of our past. The label conceals years of systemic and embodied relations of racial framing. If you have lived in or were born in South Africa, you were inducted into a social construct of racism that silently shaped and positioned your body in relation to others. This construct of racism, whether we choose to see it or not, has created a system of exclusion, prejudice and a habitus of bodily relational power. For many white South Africans there is consent to racism in their silence. It is the white body that has been granted a greater global currency.

Undeniably, we exist in daily co-movement with other bodies. Through daily gestures and actions some bodies are positioned as *more* than others. Wherever one might stand on the issue of prejudice, there is an undercurrent in South African society that Judith Butler has described in this way: “some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human.”³⁹ Certain bodies are thus liminalised. Returning to *Stumbling Block*, it is interesting to note how the body is positioned in a liminal space. Victor Turner classifies liminal spaces as “neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between”.⁴⁰ The body thus rests in the in-between, in the doorway frame. The positionality of the body draws into question the tension Butler highlights.⁴¹ *Stumbling Block* forces bystanders/witnesses/spectators into a position of negotiation where they are momentarily confronted with the necessity of deciding what to do—Step over? Ignore? Walk around?—thus disallowing their usual defences of denial. In the confinement of the doorframe, the narrowness of the passage and the proximity of two bodies meeting in a confined space, it is the act of transitioning through the liminal that generates an encounter between bodies. Under the pressure of desire for transformation, liminality becomes “a time out of time, a pause in everyday life, in which habitual behaviours, attitudes and beliefs can be examined and transformed”.⁴² Here

³⁹ Judith BUTLER, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 80.

⁴⁰ Victor TURNER, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell UP, 1969), 95.

⁴¹ BUTLER, *Bodies*, 80.

⁴² Stephen LEVINE, “The Philosophy of Expressive Arts Therapy: Poiesis in Response to the World,” in *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Towards a Therapeutic*

the body is a metaphor for hypervisiblising all the socially invisibled thresholds I cross over on a daily basis, working-class/middle-class, university, community hall, mother/academic.

Furthermore, Turner identifies liminal spaces in ritual practices as experiences which initiate feelings of shared humanity that he describes as the experience of “humankindness”.⁴³ The affect associated with the experience of “humankindness” builds a sense of solidarity and comradeship that Turner terms *communitas*.⁴⁴ Those who share a liminal experience feel themselves bound in a *communitas* distinguished from the separation inevitably entailed by social structures.⁴⁵ The liminal placement in *Stumbling Block*, in contrast, made me more aware of the lack of humanness that I afforded people with less, seeing inequality as “natural”. Yet the performativity of the piece raised my consciousness of this, confronting and challenging the dissonance within me, transitioning me into a place of “humankindness”.

Bodies exert and reinforce a power relation. My body’s movement expressed a visible intention and expression in the world. It is this entanglement of bodies in which some are acknowledged and others not, that produces and shapes a relational state of shaming that remains unarticulated or silenced. It is these actions that lead us into a life of dissonance. *Stumbling Block* thus speaks to the ephemeral archive of touch, what touches the body and what might penetrate the body but perhaps remain a sensation that is archived away from cognitive acknowledgment and recognition. It is these moments thought to only exist in the moment in which they occurred that linger like ghosts for years to come. If we are to pursue justice, as Derrida contends, “if he [or she] loves justice, at least the ‘scholar’ of the future and the intellectual of tomorrow should learn it from the ghost.”⁴⁶ We therefore need to summon into consciousness our repressed affects of shame. The effect of shame is to impede empathy, to break our ability to form connections with people. But through performance, predicated on the connection of audience and performer, a possibility for repair lies, a possibility for repair by engaging with what your body is trying to tell you. Because of this work I now try without hesitation to acknowledge, affirm and recognise all bodies. Perhaps undoing years of systemic oppression starts in

Aesthetics, ed. Paolo J. Knill, Ellen G. Levine, and Stephen K. Levine (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005), 45.

⁴³ LEVINE, 42.

⁴⁴ TURNER, *The Ritual Process*, 5.

⁴⁵ LEVINE, “Philosophy,” 44.

⁴⁶ DERRIDA, *Spectres*, 221.

this little act of choosing to acknowledge touching sensation and to see the bodies I have made invisible, and in doing so choose to see what would otherwise have been left “unseen”.

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DIS/CONNECTION: MULTISENSUALITY AND SHAME'S TOUCH IN THE WORK OF GABRIELLE GOLIATH

Summary

This article opens a consideration around what the embodied, immersive and live exchange of live performance might make us feel and in turn how this multisensual engagement awakens the feeling body, specifically around notions of touch and shame. The discussion centralises the work of South African visual artist and performance artist, Gabrielle Goliath with a critical reading of *Stumbling Block* (2011/2017). In Goliath's durational piece the body both of the performer and the audience member are carefully centralised in the production and engagement of the performance. The centralisation of the body in Goliath's works points towards and

facilitates an empathetic engagement during the performance as live event. Some points of departure in the article are how the performance curates relationality between bodies which offer potential affective spaces of touch. Furthermore, this multisensual "unspoken" engagement between bodies reminds us how the body is a communicative instrument. This contemplation therefore critically positions modes of multisensual "felt-seeing" which often fall into the "gaps" of academic spaces and thinking as central bridges in opening humans to new ways of consciously "seeing". I consider the encounter outside of text, the multisensual encounter, and ask what this might possibility necessitate.

Keywords: performance art; Gabrielle Goliath; multisensuality; affect; shame; embodied meaning-making

(ROZ)ŁĄCZNOŚĆ: WIELOZMYŚLOWOŚĆ I ELEMENT WSTYDU W TWÓRCZOŚCI
GABRIELLE GOLIATH

Streszczenie

Autorka artykułu snuje rozważania na temat uczuć wywoływanych u odbiorcy w kontakcie z fizycznym, absorbującym i żywym performansem, a także doznań fizycznych wywoływanych przez takie wielozmysłowe zaangażowanie, szczególnie w odniesieniu do sfery dotyku i uczucia wstydu. Dyskusja koncentruje się na twórczości południowoafrykańskiej artystki i performerki, Gabrielle Goliath, poddając krytycznej analizie pracę *Stumbling Block* (2011/2017), która ma charakter nietrwały, a ciało zarówno performerki i widza stanowią centrum performansu w zakresie wywoływanego efektu i zaangażowania patrzącego. Takie umiejscowienie ludzkiego ciała w pracach artystki wywołuje u odbiorcy empatię sprawiającą, że angażuje się w pokaz na żywo. Artykuł pokazuje także, jak performans kształtuje relacje pomiędzy ciałami, które stanowią potencjalnie dotykana przestrzeń. Dodatkowo taka „niewypowiedziana” interakcja między ciałami przypomina nam, że nasze ciało to narzędzie komunikacji, a w takim ujęciu „widzenie-czucie” wielozmysłowe odgrywa znaczącą rolę, ponieważ często rekompensuje niedoskonałą wiedzę naukową i braki w naszym myśleniu, otwierając nas na nowe sposoby świadomego „widzenia”. Autorka analizuje taki rodzaj postrzegania pozatekstowego i wielozmysłowego, a także pyta, co możemy dzięki niemu zyskać.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka performansu; Gabrielle Goliath; wielozmysłowość; afekt; wstyd; nadawanie fizycznego znaczenia

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