

PARTING GESTURES

A communal studio. Daytime. Several bodies populate a large space divided by freshly painted white walls whose scuffs remind us that they are not the first to have been here. Looking closer, we discover human stains. Blood and, lower, a smudge: unmistakably shit.

What happened here? Signs point to frenzied labour and intense thought, their doodles at the margins endless iterations of procrastination.

It smells like Art.

Sunlight breaks the Lewisham clouds – for a moment we feel hope.

A polyphonic mass of fluid, rainbow and chameleon bodies – charges to the centre.

MUTABLE BODY

What will become of us?

A Brown Woman enters. Late thirties, Technicolor hair to recapture lost youth. She turns to face the group. She is one of many Tutors.

TUTOR

I recall September 2014. The date we checked in. Both new, the degree of separation between us slim, yet nuanced by years of my own institutional journeying.
(a breath)

I have often thought of our roles as overlapping – you performing the artist, and me in turn performing the tutor.

COLLECTIVE BODY

(protesting)

But we didn't sign up to pretend...

TUTOR

That's true. And you're not. We've each had to fit into our respective skins.

TRANSLITERATE BODY

Our skins were only the things we arrived with...

The Tutor nods in agreement.

TUTOR

Yes, and I barely recognise what you've become. Your beings surpassed even your own expectations...

Some of the group breaks away into smaller units, forming precarious Oskar Schlemmer-like structures of pyramids, cubes and cylinders.

TUTOR

I've spent the last three years watching you find the "me" that's distinct from the plural "you". That "I" could only be shaped from mucking along together – it got messy and somewhere in that fug of production you took charge of the things you couldn't leave alone.

The Tutor grabs a marker pen from her back pocket, begins to sketch something out. An island littered with "X"s.

TUTOR

These were small victories over the materials that began to form the land on which you now stand and the place from which you speak.

ABJECT BODY

(reflective)

Sometimes it felt like war...

TUTOR

(musing)

I had more distance from you... You each had a drum to bang. Some might call it obsession. Your message became clearer over time. Instinct became syllables became sentences became convincing. Something untranslatable got translated, became magic from certain angles.

PRECARIOUS BODY

We have our doubts. Dreadful questions. Will anyone listen, let alone see the work? What is its place? What next after we're gone?

The Triadic Ballet in the corner, now a towering column tilting gently, pleads... *Don't say gone!*

TUTOR

Hard to predict. Departure. Beginning. Reinvention? Possibly service...

MULTILATERAL BODY

Service?

TUTOR

(nodding)

A lifelong commitment to art – and to the labour it involves. The endless, sometimes desperate attempt to sate a curiosity through objects that must at all costs agitate and resist. I suppose I'm talking about service not only to your own ideas but also to a wider community...

(gesturing to the group)

to your friends, to the spaces where the work needs to be.

SCREAMING BODY

(a mantra)

Our-production-as-social-ecologies-
resist-at-all-costs
the-lives-not-life-of-our-work
more-than-ever
more-than-ever
there-is-work-to-be-done
work-to-the-bone-
to-the-bone!

A weight of expectation permeates the room.

The column in the corner finally collapses. No one is hurt, perhaps only pride.

TUTOR

Look, all I know is that you are bigger than this place. You can't be contained, nor should you be.

Lying on the floor, the Tutor enters a trance; her body gently vibrates as she begins to recite an anthem, an alphabet of sorts.

Guttural utterings from somewhere deep.

TUTOR

AoAlexandreApryllAnnieAmy-LouieAdamAlyssaAmyAmberAlexAbigailAdam
BenBenBen
ChanelCuanConradChelseaCharlotteCrystalClémentine
DjofrayDougal
EllaEmmanuelEsmeEilidh
FelixFreyaFatmapinar
GarryGiaGeorgeGraceGoncalo
HannahHwaHuijunHollieHannahHyungwoo

Isobellzzy
JakeJoshuaJirehJenniferJoshuaJenniferJackJimena Ji-EunJunjie
JessicaJahanaraJoe
KiahKarumKatieKieranKateKassandraKezia LauraLarissa
Max(Margaret)Miyoko
NaasirahNancyNoeNatasha
OliverOmi
Philip
Q
RhianeRachelReedRosieRufusRoisin
SaskiaSuyeonShiwenSueSuwen
TaijasiThomTrishna
U
VerityVioleta
Weng(Wren)
Xavier
YitingYujin
Zzzzzzzzzzz

The Tutor's brown skin has turned to Violet. She opens her eyes. Concerned, the group gathers around her recumbent figure.

TUTOR

(confused)
Did I say something?

UNCLASSIFIABLE BODY

You spoke in tongues.

TUTOR

That's what I feared.
(changing the subject)
Anyway, Paul Thek claimed that "perhaps one of the functions of art is revival".

QUEER BODIES

To restore? To resuscitate?

TUTOR

(animated)
He related revival to involvement (and I don't think he was just talking about participation), and this has social implications. I have to think of Stuart Hall. Rather than "roots", Hall speaks of Routes. The different journeys you take. He says: "These routes hold us in places, but what they don't do is hold us in the same place." That is why you

must keep moving. We have to reflect on what Hall describes as “trying to make sense of the connections with where we think we were then as compared to where we are now.”¹ Acknowledging this will help form your biographical sense of self.

HYPER-GLOBAL BODIES

We can't deny that something has changed. We want to be involved. We seek a new home.

TUTOR

I can see no other way.

The group now occupy themselves with leaving marks: on the main wall is now a defiant *We Woz Ere 2017* in pink spray paint.

The Tutor dusts herself off.

TUTOR

The thing I like about you all is that you were never blank slates. You came with your cultural, emotional and intellectual ‘baggage’ and you were brave enough to work with it. I think that’s all we can do as artists.

TRANSFORMATIVE BODY

We can only mirror our internal and external worlds.

TUTOR

(smiling wistfully)
Let's reflect on that.

The room slowly empties as the artists disperse, leaving the Tutor behind.

CURTAIN

Michelle Williams Gamaker

1

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