



Sins Invalid's
Annual Performance,
Brava Theater, San
Francisco, 2009.
Photo: Richard
Downing. Courtesy
of Sins Invalid

Against a black background, a thin naked white man is perched in a clawfoot tub, his head thrown back, with beads of water suspended in an arc over him. There are roses beneath the tub.

Up Front

DRAMATURGIES OF THE BODYMIND

Tom Sellar

Theater artists and scholars are trained to emphasize bodies and to interpret their presence on the stage. Whether describing a single actor's gestural performance or the collective power of a group amassed onstage and holding the space, we reflexively make bodies—some kind of body—the subject of all stagings, and in turn they become the object of all audiences' gazes. A figure on a raised platform, after all, serves as an incontrovertible fact of live theater and also shapes its ontological capacities. There is no theater without the human form gracing a presentational space; bodywork might make up the only essential feature of the theatrical event.

But bodies and their many differences have also gone astonishingly unexamined in many crucial respects—not least because the American theater has often excluded, ignored, marginalized, or outright exploited disabled artists. The theater would do well to look forward, embracing the bodymind (overcoming dualistic thinking, which hinders the imagination) along with other concepts from disability studies that might nourish revelatory new dramaturgies.

This edition of *Theater* turns to an idea-rich cadre of disabled practitioners and scholars to ask how strategies of care, long cultivated and practiced by disabled artists and the creative communities around them, might also speak to the present moment. This decade has fast evolved into an era for rethinking core principles of theater in the interest of equity and inclusion, while fundamentals of liveness and presence fall to new circumstance. The 2020s also increasingly look like a time of new aesthetic possibilities, stemming from creative experimentation spurred by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Displaced bodies, as well as bodies newly embodied, reembodied, and radically connected through technologies, have moved to the fore of theatrical imagination, while also becoming more commonplace to spectators. And disabled artists—whose inventiveness, resilience, and grace might serve as a model for the entire field of performance—may be finding new points of entry into a broader American culture now transformed by medical contingency.

Thanks to all our contributors for guiding us and participating in this issue.