

VENICE INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE ART WEEK

CRITICAL BODIES

An Overture

Welcome, and thank you for entering this space.
Which remains relatively safe today,
While an ongoing, unjust war is 1300 km north-east of here,
And an atrocious genocide is 2500 km south-east of here.

This collective experience is titled “**Constellations of Critical Bodies**”,
And already, in those words, we are plunged into clusters of urgencies.
What do we mean by ‘critical bodies’?
Not only bodies under critique, but bodies that *think*, act, and resist.
Bodies that *rupture norms* simply by being present in space, time, and relation.

Not only critical *of* something, but critical *to* something.
Bodies as thresholds, as tense crossings.
Bodies that signal, that disturb, that leak truths through their presence alone.
We do not commence today with a fixed definition, but with a field of attention.
A gathering of questions that hum beneath the skin.

What does it mean to inhabit a critical body?
A body that remembers what the archive forgets.
A body that speaks when no language fits.
A body that trembles under the weight of history and yet continues to appear.
A body that does not fit the frame, but insists on being seen.

Performance has always been a domain where bodies matter—
Not merely as vessels of expression,
But as *sites of power, conflict, vulnerability, memory, and transformation*.

At its core, performance has never been a neutral ground.
It serves as a site of encounter, collision, and exposure as methodology.

Here, the body is not illustrative—it is evidentiary. It bears witness.
And in that witnessing, something is always at stake.

The critical body is not pristine; it is not rendered coherent.
The critical body is not a disembodied concept—
It is *racialised, gendered, disabled, ageing, technologised, and displaced*.
It carries/bears scars, histories, traumas, and desires.
It is shaped by systems of violence, yes—but also by practices of care and imagination.

The critical body does not seek resolution. It remains unfinished.
It trembles, bleeds, pulses, melts, performs, fails, and transcends.

It breathes. It suspends.
It resists the sanitised optics of success and strength,
Because the concept of success has long since been surpassed.
Instead, it opens spaces, attentive and unguarded,
To the point where resistance is a synonym for surrender.

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It is within this openness that criticality takes shape
Not as opposition, but as relational attunement.
To the world. To the others who pass through us.
To the ecological, the political, the more-than-human.

We are gathered here today not merely to study bodies,
But to move through them as sites of reflection, interrogation, disruption, and care.
To ask not only *what the body performs*,
But *what can the body acquire through performance*?

As artists, thinkers, and witnesses to what savagely dies every day before our eyes,
We move in uncertainty.
We invite you to move across the ruins of a crumbling, haemorrhagic reality we have built.

Our research exists in lived time, in action, in contradiction.
We do not come here to master something,
But to unsettle, unfix,
To listen to what emerges when nothing is scripted.

The performances we will think and feel through are not abstractions.
They are *rituals of becoming*—bodily choreographies and choreopolitics
Of protest, survival, desire.

They dismantle the rules of control.
They leak. They rupture. They echo.

In this workshop, we gather not simply to observe or analyse performance,
But to engage, intervene,
And feel through the embodied knowledge that performance enables.

In this workshop, we invite you to be present in ways that are also porous.
To dwell in the space between thinking and sensing,
Between body and site,
Between question and breath.

Let your discomforts speak.
Let your silence be a voice.
Let your own body, in all its fractures and fortitudes.
Be a co-writer of this encounter.
Let us remember: the body is never singular.
It is a network. A gathering. An archive.

And what we do with it—how we inhabit it, offer it, transform it—
Has the power to open the world otherwise.

Over the following days,
We will move between theory and practice,
between the intimate and the political,
The staged and the spontaneous.

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We will ask:

How does a performing body critique the structures that try to contain it?

How do we speak with, through, or beyond the body in times of crisis?

What does it mean to be *exposed*, *porous*, and *fragile*?

What does it mean to act your stances from that place (your body) as a form of agency?

And so, a critical body is not about representation alone.

It is about presence.

And in presence, we are invited to attune,

To nuance and disclose,

To make something possible by unlearning.

During these days, we may find ourselves unsteady.

That is part of the process.

Let this space be one where your body is welcomed in all its differences.

Whether you speak or remain silent, move or stay still,

Whether you arrive with certainty, doubts, or searching that which you feel anew.

Bring your breath.

Bring your questions.

Bring your criticality, and ask, every day:

How can I respond, with the art I create, to the emergencies of our time?

In this shared home,

performance becomes a way to reimagine the world

As it might yet become.

Thank you for your presence.

Let's begin, together, in that otherwise.

So, let's welcome each other.

Welcome one another with openness.

This place of thresholds.

This moment is shaped by what we carry in and what we may leave behind.

This is not a classroom. Not a theatre.

Not even a workshop in the conventional sense.

This is a site—an active one. A field of forces. A cohabited terrain.

And we are here. With our bodies.

Critical bodies.

We gather as if answering a call—perhaps not fully understood, but deeply felt.

A call to presence. To rupture. To relation.

To the fragmented beauty of our violated landscapes.

To the awkward beauty of sharing space in real time.

And already we know, we are not speaking only of bodies under critique—

But of bodies *that critique* by their very existence.

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Bodies that resist erasure.
They remember differently.
They unmake the given just by arriving together.

These bodies—our bodies—are shaped by more than just flesh and bone.
They are carved with language, discipline, climate, and ancestry.
They are places of tension, friction, and deep understanding.

And when we enable them to perform, we do not pretend or do as if. We disclose.

We reveal what thinking feels like.
We allow contradiction to breathe.
We do not perform for the eye but for the edge.
The edge of meaning, of self, of what can be said.

Today, we are not here to perfect a practice.
We are here to complicate it
And see what shifts when bodies touch space with intention.

To let the body seek, fail, and set free, we ask:

How does the body perform critique, not with argument, but with pulse?

How do we find the political not in the gesture, but in the breath that enables it?

How can vulnerability be organised into form, not to expose weakness, but truths?

In this, we are never alone.
We perform, with our critical body—its shadows, drafts, fractures.
With its histories that echo through invisible walls and stones.
With the spectral architectures that condition who moves, who stays, and who is heard.

So today, as we begin, we ask:
Can we be present with each other without needing to define?
Can we let the body speak before we name what it says?
Can we incorporate uncertainty into our methodologies?

The critical body is never closed.
It is permeable. It absorbs, it dissolves, it becomes.
In that becoming, it shifts away from norms
to navigate uncharted routes
Transforming what the heart dislikes, its criticalities and thus critique
Not through argument, but with a creative pulse.

So, first, let your silence speak.
This is where we start: with bodies not as answers, but as questions.
Critical bodies— because they care