

The 2015 Oslo International Festival at Black Box Theatre

The Oslo International Festival, now in its seventh year, has established itself as a vital destination on the experimental performance circuit. The festival and Black Box Theatre, which runs the event, serve a critical function in Norway's performing arts community. While Oslo is home to other prominent theatres, notably the massive National Theatre and the small company-run *Grusomhetens Teater* (Theatre of Cruelty), Black Box is the city's premiere touring and producing venue for international and domestic experimental work. Comparable to Berlin's HAU (Hebbel am Ufer) theatre or New York City's Under the Radar Festival, Black Box introduces Oslo audiences to preeminent global artists like Annie Dorsen, Forced Entertainment, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Showcase Beat Le Mot, and MOTUS, while producing Norwegian groups including Verk Produksjoner, Findlay/Sandsmark/Pettersen, and Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller. Started in 1985 in a former chocolate factory, the theatre and festival has been led by Artistic Director Jon Refsdal Moe since 2009. Commandeering the building's two dedicated theatre spaces, the lobby, and an adjacent dance studio, the nine-day festival featured fifteen productions. This year's events are emblematic of Black Box's role within the country, bringing together established and emerging artists from home and abroad with particular emphasis on works from Europe and Scandinavia.



The Internet created by Mårten Spångberg at Black Box Theatre Oslo. Photo credit: Mårten Spångberg.

The 2015 festival was organized around the question of faith in performance's potential/s. For the festival program, each artist or group was asked, "Do you believe in theatre?" Their replies—ranging from dismissal, critical reflection, to warm embrace—were collected in the brochure. The diversity of responses reflects the heterogeneity of contemporary performance in which conceptual, theoretical, and disciplinary lines are regularly blurred under the collective mantle of "performance." One predominant theme, among the works I attended, was the act of spectatorship. There was little uniformity to approaching audiences, but questioning what artists and audiences do, make, and mean in the act of watching was of continual concern. Mårten Spångberg's *The Internet* continues his interest in making performances that do not attempt to hold the audience's attention. Philippe Quesne's *La Mélancolie des Dragons* celebrates the generosity underlining the mutual construction of fantasy and belief. Dana Michel's *Yellow Towel*, meanwhile, short-circuits spectatorial expectations of how race is performed and thereby consumed. Rabih Mouré's *Riding on a Cloud* erodes the possibility of truth and authenticity in narrative and theatrical representation. Erika Cederqvist and Julie Solberg's *His Own Room* lovingly toys with spectators' assumptions about gender and sexuality. Despite their eclecticism, these works all concern themselves with (re-)thinking how theatrical engagement makes meaning.

The Internet (2015), co-commissioned by Black Box, is a continuation of the Swedish choreographer Mårten Spångberg's exploration of choreography as an "expanded field." As with Spångberg's two previous works, *La Substance, but in English* (2014) and *The Nature* (2013), *The Internet* extends its organization beyond bodily movements (dance) to construct calculated interactions between gestures, sounds, landscape, objects, and spectators. For the show's three-and-a-half hours, the choreographic exchanges unfold at a leisurely pace. Long stretches of time are spent watching the dancers check their phones, change clothes, make small talk amongst themselves, or carry out seemingly inconsequential tasks. Spectators meanwhile sit on the floor engaged (or disengaged) as sonic and gestural motifs emerge, slightly adjusting the atmosphere, pulling focus or setting it adrift. These little arcs suggest narrative—or rather invite us to project it—but the developments are all architecture, albeit one that resonates affectively. At times the performance feels like a loop, at others linear, and again like it is not moving at all. All that misshapen time opens up space to do what one wants with the show: make up a story, marvel at the performers' studious informality, let one's mind wander, or update one's Facebook page. The experience is something like a theatrical bird watching in which enjoying one's time in the environment is equal to seeing anything exotic.

Structured around a series of musical and physical repetitions, *The Internet* creates an atmosphere in which to measure incremental changes. The performance begins with a thirty-minute loop of the melancholy piano refrain of Rihanna's pop-ballad "Stay" (2013). The song's plodding repetition is the show's *leitmotif*, returning in the final hour as an emotional mnemonic that frames the performance as cyclical. The three dancers, Sandra Lolax, Rebecka Stillman, and Marika Troili—all regular collaborators of Spångberg—stroll and stand around at the outset. They form circles and talk in whispers or crouch together on the floor. Their demeanor is unhurried but they are aware of their audience—half-smiles, glances, and shrugs punctuate their unheard conversations. It is hard not to see their behavior as permission or, better yet, instructions on how to nonchalantly watch the show.

The dancers intermittently engage in choreography that reveals a debt to modern dance, ballet, and the pedestrian movements first developed by Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton at Judson Church in the 1960s. Each performer operates on a separate track, occasionally synchronizing only to disassemble into their own patterns: one may adopt a variation of another's movements or shuffle off to read some notes or

watch the other dancers. The fluidity of the performance masks its refinement, which is most noticeable in the performers' discipline hidden beneath layers of sangfroid. The breezy style aspires to create a performance space detached from expectation and consequence, cause and effect. The aim often requires the dancers to work against the other performance elements. As the music switches to Jennifer Lopez's 1999 party-anthem "Let's Get Loud," Lolax, Stillman, and Troili meander around the space or sit unaffected among the piles of props that constitute the stage. At other times the dancers are filled with a playfulness wholly detached from the performance itself. The performers disrupt any sense of causality by oscillating between laxity and commitment that responds or, at times, is impervious to the theatrical environment. Coupled with the musical and physical loops and slow pacing, the production works to circumvent expectations of progress. Allowing one's attention to drift or investing it, frequently produces a heightened awareness, a training of one's senses on minor developments. The audience is periodically alive with diffuse chatter before collectively refocusing itself on the performers. Occasionally, these shifts seem to stem from the dancers and at other times, they mysteriously originate from affective ripples in the larger room.



The Internet created by Mårten Spångberg at Black Box Theatre Oslo. Photo credit: Mårten Spångberg.

The strange, idiosyncratic scenic design features clusters of found and handmade objects—a mainstay of Spångberg's work since 2011—that change from production to production. His previous work, *La Substance*, was a pastebord of sparkles and logos, gooey slime and syrups: the up-chuck of a teen shopping-spree sound-tracked by songs celebrating inhibition. *The Internet* has a more reserved tone.

Here, a pastel rainbow tapestry hangs above a laminate floor of grainy color patterns evoking the warm-color palette of a kindergarten classroom. Objects are strewn across the floor—piles of clothes, soda cans, and Styrofoam sculptures, including an impressively gaudy pink charm bracelet whose bulk suggests the life-sized anchor to Barbie's pink Yacht. These objects are drawn into the action (or ignored) as the dancers use buck-knives to whittle sticks atop a blanket or stand at attention with wooden rifles. Changing outfits, which occurs constantly throughout the show, constitutes one of the performers' main choreographic activities. The dancers' blasé swapping of clothes refreshes the landscape with new fabrics, textures, and colors. The allusions the attire produces are more utilitarian than those of Spångberg's previous works. Whereas the wardrobe for *La Substance* evoked a psychedelic lingerie show, *The Internet* features dancers in overalls, McDonald's uniforms, business suits, airline stewardess dress, and includes a runway crew member in an electric-orange jumpsuit. The costuming evokes dichotomies of labor and leisure, diligence and idleness, but given the show's overall opacity, even these generalizations seem like overstatements.

What one ultimately makes of *The Internet* may come down to what one thinks of its creator. A mercurial polemicist, Spångberg is a machine-gun of theoretical flotsam wrapped in the surfer-cool of a class-clown. He is, after all, always lurking in and around the performance to show us how to watch his productions. He moves through the audience, checking his phone, dragging a microphone to sing along to the show's playlist, snapping photos of the action, and conspicuously bolting to the lobby every thirty minutes or so. His performance is the theatrical equivalent of cracking a beer. It can feel forced at times, as when Spångberg cuddles up to the unsuspecting somebody for a selfie—a form of inclusion that feels at odds with the show's otherwise studious detachment. But his target is clear and his aim is steady: why persist with viewing behaviors drummed up in the nineteenth century when the world outside the theatre has changed so radically? Those who prefer the former path usually leave within the first hour. Those who stay, warm up to it, learning to take what they need and leave the rest. People watch and sleep, talk, take pictures, and spill beer bottles hidden in the tangle of lounging spectators. However you want to watch the performance is alright with Spångberg and soon enough, this permissive vibe permeates the room.

In his program notes, Spångberg cites the influence of monumental sculpture on *The Internet*. Both, for Spångberg, "exceed context, [and are] indifferent or simply material" (Mårten Spångberg, <http://www.blackbox.no/tittel/the-internet>). Visual artist Jason Dodge is a noted influence, whose works consist of displaying objects alongside matter-of-fact descriptions. In Dodge's most recent exhibition at New York's Casey Kaplan Gallery, for example, a yellow pillow is accompanied by only its title: *The Mayor is sleeping; A pillow that has only been slept on by the mayor of Nuremberg* (2014). Dodge and Spångberg share a common concern of not instrumentalizing the images they create. The role of interpretation is for the audience alone. But these are no Rorschach tests. The puzzling ambiguity of Spångberg's works never arises from abstraction, rather from the enjambment of obliquely recognizable images, sounds, and movements. To pull one element free and elevate it to the production's meaning is a dubious task. This is the kind of indivisibility that Spångberg's program notes ascribe to the Internet as well as the universe, the ocean, and nature. The draw of these irreducible objects is their refusal to be rightly interpreted. Without interpretation comes spectatorial egalitarianism, or, for Spångberg, "in front of that kind of stuff, we are equal, unconditionally equal. (Ibid.)

Whether performance can ever be as indivisible as the Internet or nature, and produce an equality of spectating is questionable. But compared to calls to return to a theatre of dutiful, silent

attention—spearheaded by the likes of Patti Lupone and Benedict Cumberbatch—Spångberg's work is filled with the fresh air of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, the extent to which Spångberg and his collaborators need to embody the equality and informality they hope to engender highlights just how resistant audiences are to such changes—save for the group of friends who devoured potato chips and champagne throughout the performance.



Philippe Quesne's *L'Effet de Serge*. Photo credit: Martin Argyroglo Callias Bey.

If Spångberg's performances attempt to circumvent theatrical conventions, Philippe Quesne's work restores wonder to the theatrical experience. Vivarium Studios, the name of Quesne's French theatre company, is a literal description. His productions are small, self-contained eco-systems sealed behind a fourth-wall. What makes his works notable is a recurring idea expressed throughout his productions. In each show the audience is treated to a world that doubles as a microcosm of the theatre experience. One or more of the actors plays an onstage viewer who is led into a world of performance, whose practitioners patiently offer their art to the equally patient spectator. Yet this is largely where Quesne's self-referential theatre ends. In his most widely toured production, *L'Effet De Serge* (2007), the title character Serge hosts a series of one-minute shows in his basement for invited neighbors. Each attendee is treated to a glass of wine and a low-fi light show, dance, or the virtuosity of remote control toys. In a *coup de théâtre*, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" is synched to a car's flickering headlights. The audience slowly grows in number and appreciation throughout the production, forming a small community within and through Serge's basement theatre.

The group's spectacles comprise a modest amusement park. Isabel is shown the simple pleasures of a miniature water fountain, a makeshift library, a fog machine, an acoustic guitar, a projector, wigs dancing on strings, and for the finale, led through a maze of twenty-foot tall black inflatable bags. A different but equally jovial member of the caravan conducts each exhibition while arguably the world's most amiable stage dog naps on the floor of fake snow. The crew demonstrates each element with understated excitement, which Isabel meets with an equally muted enthusiasm. At one point, the detailed artifice of the production is playfully undermined when the technicians roll up the sheets of fake snow to give Isabel the illusion that she is skiing downhill. In each case, the unremarkable objects are transformed through a little ingenuity and a lot of goodwill: if we allowed ourselves to believe the white stuff was snow, why not a mountain too! Through these heartwarming exchanges, Quesne presents an image of the theatre as a ritual predicated on generosity and wonder; that even in 2015 theatre is, at its core, still a game of show and tell. The greater miracle is Quesne's ability to coax an audience into taking an equal pleasure in these tiny stage actions. There is, after all, no real conflict in this universe. Instead we are presented with a dumb show not of the dramatic action, but of the very act of spectating—the more one adjusts their theatrical expectations to those of the unassuming onstage characters, the more magnificent a fog machine becomes.

With its nearly wordless performers, *La Mélancolie*, like Quesne's other works, is indebted to the great silent (or near silent) film clowns. The productions most clearly echo the movies of Jacques Tati (1907-1982), in which the French filmmaker's clown protagonist (Monsieur Hulot) wanders the modern world haplessly engaging its marvels, replacing Charlie Chaplin's bafflement with a calm acceptance of the world. Quesne's expertly deadpan performance likewise resembles the "great stone face" of Buster Keaton, whose placidity thinly disguised a river of melancholy. If Quesne's work has an edge it is only the bittersweet fact that theatrical wonders are produced by anything but magic; they are only the efforts of professionals meeting an audience's willingness to believe.

The performance of Canadian-born choreographer and performer, Dana Michel, conversely, illuminates the failings of theatrical transformation. Her award-winning piece, *Yellow Towel* (2013), making its Norwegian premiere, has toured throughout North America and Europe. The production takes its title from Michel's childhood practice of wrapping her head in a yellow towel to imitate white, blonde children. In her solo performance, Michel cryptically struggles to inhabit a series of stereotypes of black culture. Among the figures she conjures are a hairdresser, a TV chef, a trumpet player, a prophetic meteorologist/philosopher, and a reverend of sorts. Played within a cube of white drapes, Michel is, from the outset, at odds with the task. In a series of jerks and mumbled phrases, she emerges slowly from alongside the sheeting. Shrouded beneath black sweat pants, a hoodie, and baseball cap, Michel performs a constant series of physical ticks that suggest drunkenness and possession, disability and disorientation: awkwardly bent arms, unsteady legs, erratic head turns. Her choreography is both virtuosic and brutal in that every action maximizes the body's inefficiency. Each gesture is a micro lecture in effort. She crumbles and reassembles, wobbles and bends, as if guided by a mad, offstage puppeteer. Her semi-incoherent monologue ranges from Patois to sermonizing, conversational to instructional all the while mumbling half thought sentences to herself—or perhaps the audience.



Yellow Towel created by Dana Michel at Black Box Oslo. Photo by Ian Douglas.

Michel's opening salvo is the fragmented recitation of Chuck Robert's spoken word proclamation on the virtues of House music. Featured in Rhythm Controll's anthem "My House" (1987), the speech has since been sampled on countless dance records. Michel's version, unmoored from Robert's jubilant rhetoric, is introverted and matter of fact. Declarations like, "I'm the creator and this is my house [...] house music is a universal language spoken and understood by all," feel ambiguous given Michel's unsteady physicality and vocalization. It is unclear if the character is referring to herself or the audience, if the text is a pronouncement on the performance or simply a quotation, if the speech is affirmative or ironic. To be sure, universal understanding seems unlikely here, although Michel's invested performance continually bridges towards something like a universal empathy. If nothing else, it is clear that the body is struggling, that subjective coherence is lost.

Michel's schizoid subject works through a series of tasks—giving a lecture, eating and drinking food, washing her face or painting it white, combing the hair of a wig, and playing the trumpet. In each instance, the body and voice coalesce into flashing images of black stereotypes only to physically or logically short-circuit. Michel's attempts to play a dented, canary-yellow trumpet—which she comically retrieves from beneath her sweatshirt—are derailed at first by her ineptitude then by a contorted effort to simultaneously clean her ear. A cooking-show tutorial on making fried chicken becomes a grotesque parody when the words "fried chicken" are replaced with "that thing." The association between blackness and fried chicken is erased linguistically only to display its stubborn refusal to disappear from our cultural

imagination. Other segments are less representational. In one of the piece's more overt sections of dance, Michel performs a duet of club dancing with a stool wearing an identical pair of yellow tights to the gloomy house music of Salem's "Redlight" (2010). This visual idiosyncrasy morphs into the titular action of Michel combing out and affixing a blonde wig to her hair while waving a golden pom-pom to James Cleveland's euphoric church-anthem "Jesus Saves" (1962). As the song fades, Michel slowly releases the pom-pom and false hair in a gesture of exhausted transformation. But the show pushes beyond this would-be affirming resolution to further ambiguities. Michel resets the stage for a final episode in which she adopts a quizzical sequence of personas: a microphone-swinging preacher *cum* meteorologist that advises on weather-appropriate attire. Pacing the stage, wielding scraps of paper maps, she coats her right hand in white marshmallow fluff and slumps beneath a bonnet hair dryer, typically used to straighten black hair. Despite its use of stereotypes, the jumbling of the boilerplate and peculiar lends the performance an unsettling ambiguity.

Michel's maladaptation of the conjured stereotypes produces a calculated frustration. At eighty minutes the production can grind due to its non-linearity, but more importantly, as a result of its refusal to offer proscribed images of blackness. It is an aesthetic power play that reveals its politics through the frustration it builds, forcing one to ask, what would it mean for Michel to seamlessly inhabit the forms she is addressing? *Yellow Towel* slyly destabilizes the relationship between race and representation by undermining the possibility of structural or subjective coherence.



Rabih Mroué's *Riding on a Cloud*. Photo credit: Joe Namy.

Representation's ability to shape politics in both theatre and life is a recurring theme of Rabih Mroué's work. The Lebanese-born, Berlin-based artist staged his newest work at the festival, *Riding on a Cloud* (2014). Prolific in the mediums of theatre, video, photography, film, and installation art, Mroué's work circulates widely throughout Europe and is regularly presented in both theatres and museums. *Riding on a Cloud* continues Mroué's practice of placing documentary evidence within the fictionalizing frame of the theatre to illuminate the ambiguities that attend any supposedly stable divisions between fact and fiction, history and fantasy, autobiography and art. In Mroué's *oeuvre*, these concerns are regularly framed by the events and repercussions of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The theatre work of Mroué and his collaborator and spouse, Lina Saneh, began at the war's end. More recently, Mroué's *Pixelated Revolution* (2012), what he calls a "non-academic lecture," considers the digital images produced by the protestors of the ongoing Syrian revolution. With his hybrid genres and focus on historical construction within the Middle East, Mroué's work shares an affinity with the fictitious art organization "The Atlas Group" helmed by the Walid Raad.

For *Riding on a Cloud*, Mroué's brother, Yasser Mroué, is both the lone performer and subject of the show. The stage is empty but for a massive center stage film screen and a downstage right desk and chair. Yasser emerges from behind the screen and sits at a table dotted with stacks of DVDs and audiocassettes in clear cases and the necessary devices to broadcast their content. Yasser is visibly disabled, the right side of his body partially paralyzed. We are told that our narrator's injuries are the result of an assassin's bullet that shattered his skull and nearly killed him. Yasser's near-death experience is the galvanizing narrative of the production. Amid the street fighting of Lebanon's Civil War, Yasser learns that his grandfather, the Marxist intellectual Hussein Mroué, is assassinated. As Yasser runs into the street in search of more information, he is also shot. What Yasser calls his "injury" becomes the "before and after" moment of his life, and the narration of his life and the adjoining images and texts he shares straddle this precipitous "before" and "after."

Yasser's injury and larger biography are, however, pretext for exploring larger questions about the relationship between representation and reality. Yasser recounts that one of the effects of his injury is a form of what he calls "aphasia" that leaves him unable to distinguish between the actual and representational. Or, more specifically, he can only recognize objects or people when they are physically present. This condition leads him to believe that everything he sees in the theatre is real and, conversely, renders him incapable of identifying less material representations, like his own image in photographs. The pictures and videos Yasser plays for the audience were reportedly created as a form of representational therapy to aid his recovery. Each is an attempt to reeducate himself in the potential split between oneself and one's representation: a problem of appearance, a problem of and for the theatre.

The documents Yasser displays are a mixture of archival, biographical, and therapeutic materials. Elegantly shot short films follow home videos; clinical documents appear alongside images of text, objects, and people. We are shown Yasser's kindergarten report card and images of his wedding and family. In one harrowing sequence, a photograph of the building from which Yasser was shot is increasingly enlarged as he ruminates on the virtues of an assassination over an accidental shooting. A collage of the intellectuals killed on the day of Yasser's shooting—Hussein Mroué, Hassan Hamdan, Nou Toukan—is intercut with the bust of Russian Futurist poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky, which adorned the Mroué household. In Yasser's recollections, Mayakovsky becomes a witness to the violence against Lebanese intellectuals and an inspiration to his desire to write poetry.

These reflections give way to recorded dialogue between Mroué and his brother about their plans to make a performance based on Yasser's life. Both dismiss their own biographies as "banal, and there are many stories like it;" deciding in the end that it is better to "invent it." Near the end of the performance, this conversation casts a suspect glow on all that precedes it. Although the victims of that fateful day in 1987 have accrued the weight of historical fact, the context in which we understand them is, as the brothers discuss, a product of theatrical invention. The point is driven home by Yasser's observation that as the "director" of the show, Mroué selected which videos to include, a process led by either his own interests or what he *thought* were Yasser's interest. Either way, even with Yasser present, his biography is a reconstruction written by Mroué.

Considered retrospectively, this ambiguity is threaded throughout the performance. As Yasser details the events of his injury and recovery, he prefaces each with the recurring phrase: "It has been said that." More than simply addressing Yasser's lack of consciousness during the events, the clause highlights narration's role in producing and obscuring truth within history. In this, we can see Mroué's clever and affecting use of the theatre to capture a concrete version of the fleeting past. *Riding on a Cloud* is as much an aesthetic as it is an ethical rumination on the narrative constructions needed to present oneself to an audience.



His Own Room by Julie Solberg and Erika Cederqvist. Photo credit: Chandra Sen Jakobsson.

The Norwegian/Swedish duo of Julie Solberg and Erika Cederqvist premiered their newest work *His Own Room* (2015) at this year's festival. Performing under the company title of Kiss Me Productions, Solberg and Cederqvist have worked together since 2008, creating performances that lie at the intersection of dance, lecture, and theatre. *His Own Room* is a satirical take on gender inequality, with the premise of creating a safe space for the offended, straight, white man. Dressed in white leotards beneath flowing garments, the two performers exude the warmth of spiritual guides. Scenographer Chandra Sen Jakobsson has covered the floor with circular, mystical representation of the earth, replete with eyes and other quasi-spiritual icons. A trio of purring humidifiers dots the playing space as if purifying the air. As they welcome their audience, Solberg and Cederqvist give halting overtures of what might be possible within the performance. The painting might be a microcosmos of life or the theatrical situation, just as they could be imagined as the mothers, sisters, or lovers of audience members. Their function, they tell us, is to "listen and support," because "tonight is about men." The performers tackle their subject through storytelling, dance, and small talk linked by questions of masculinity.

The non-judgmental attitude towards gender is at once satirical and honest. Solberg and Cederqvist's dry satire, couched in self-help speak ranges from funny to absurd. In one story, the two discuss an imagined room packed tight with 357 men of different sizes and shapes—think an overstuffed Tom-of-Finland drawing. The homoeroticism boils over into comedy as the men discover and investigate a "hairy hole," with an emphatic German bellowing, "*was ist das hole!?!*" Later, the two discuss forms of what might be considered "masculine knowledge": the best practices for escaping a runaway tractor, surviving in the snow, and the wattages of electrical sockets. They reminisce about their fathers and uncles, taking stock of the characteristics that they inherited from them. The lights dim at one point as images of white men giving speeches are projected onto Solberg and Cederqvist's bodies. The performers adjust themselves as screens for the images, at times appearing as if they are giving birth to or being penetrated by the figures. An elderly Charlie Chaplin draws their comic sympathies as someone who had a hard life and reportedly loved his mother.

The performance's finale is a sexually charged "intellectual workout" on gender. In recounting a dream, Cederqvist attempts to seduce members of the audience inverting gendered excuses for her increasingly aggressive behavior, like accusing the men of sending out "signals." As Cederqvist's "desire" reaches a fevered pitch, Solberg must restrain her from "raping" someone in the audience. The cure for this gendered impasse is a workout routine. Disrobing to white leotards, the two enact a campy sequence of over-sexed calisthenics: suggestive stretches, hip thrusts, and lunges. As the pounding house music recedes, and with the sexual tension presumably exorcized, Solberg confesses her desire for an audience member to impregnate her and unceremoniously strips naked. Meanwhile, Cederqvist ponders what she'll name a newly acquired puppy. These switches in subject matter and physicality—clichéd male and female desire and sexuality—are the performance's primary means of shifting gears. Like US precursors in feminist performance, Annie Sprinkle and Ann Liv Young, the use of therapeutic discourse affords a pseudo-empathetic address that disarms the tensions of discussing gendered representation. The joke is, of course, that under the auspices of creating *His Own Room*, Solberg and Cederqvist are really fashioning a room of their own, inviting audiences to ponder and police their own gendered desires.

Given the breadth of approaches and concerns demonstrated by the festival's participants, the conditions of spectating might just be the medium's most stubborn platitude rather than a particular point of focus. Straddling innovation and convention is the crux of experimental performance, a balancing that first and foremost contends with what audiences expect. Just how fraught these expectations can be is nicely

captured in the artist responses to the festival's prompt, "do you believe in theatre?"

Philippe Quesne—"Yes of course!"

Mårten Spångberg—"Not for a second, if I did I would have stopped a long time ago. I could not imagine a more horrible theatre maker than one who believes in theatre. Only an art that doesn't believe carries the power to question itself."

Jon Refsdal Moe—"Any idiot can deconstruct, but it takes a hero to believe."

Whether one replies empathically, skeptically, or idealistically, this year's festival admirably organized performance's broad church not through aesthetics but unresolved questions of faith.

Andrew Friedman is a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Center, CUNY and an adjunct lecturer at NYU's Tisch School of Drama. He has published articles in *Theatre Journal*, *Theater*, *Western European Stages*, *Ibsen News and Comment*, and the edited collection *Baseball and Social Class*. His dissertation examines the influence of modernist aesthetics and ideology on contemporary experimental performance.



MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE CENTER PUBLICATIONS

European Stages, vol. 5, no. 1 (Fall 2015)

Editorial Board:

Marvin Carlson, Senior Editor, Founder

Krystyna Illakowicz, Co-Editor

Dominika Laster, Co-Editor

Editorial Staff:

Elyse Singer, Managing Editor

Clio Unger, Editorial Assistant

Advisory Board:

Joshua Abrams

Christopher Balme

Maria Delgado

Allen Kuharsky

Bryce Lease

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck

Magda Romańska

Laurence Senelick

Daniele Vianello

Phyllis Zatlin

Table of Contents:

1. Avignon the 69th Festival, July 4 to 25, 2015: Discovery Beyond The Classics by Philippa Wehle
2. The 2015 Oslo International Festival at Black Box Theatre by Andrew Friedman
3. The 2015 Theaterreffen by Marvin Carlson
4. A Feminist Tuberculosis Melodrama: *Melek* by Theatre Painted Bird by Emre Erdem
5. *Nachtasyl* at the Berliner Schaubühne: A Radical View of Gorky's *The Lower Depths* by Beate Hein Bennett
6. From Spectacular to Minimalist: Four Plays in Madrid, April 2015 by Phyllis Zatlin
7. European productions at Montreal's Transamériques Festival 2015 by Philippa Wehle
8. Childish or Adult? Recent productions in Germany by Roy Kift
9. Russian Drama in Finland by Pirkko Koski
10. Troubling Cross-Currents in the Budapest National Theatre by Marvin Carlson
11. Spain: Engaging with *la Crisis* Through Theatre by Maria Delgado
12. Life and Death in the Emergency Room: Linus Tunström's *Faust 1* at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden by Bryce Lease

www.EuropeanStages.org

europeanstages@gc.cuny.edu

Global Posts

building CUNY Communities since 2009

<http://tags.common.gc.cuny.edu>

Martin E. Segal Theatre Center:

Frank Hentschker, Executive Director

Marvin Carlson, Director of Publications

Rebecca Sheahan, Managing Director

©2015 by Martin E. Segal Theatre Center

The Graduate Center CUNY Graduate Center

365 Fifth Avenue

New York NY 10016