

SPILL WRITING 2021

The following three texts were made in advance of the SPILL Festival of Performance 2021. These writings sit alongside the festival's live events programme, to help contextualise the festival's theme of 'Memory'. They have been written by long term SPILL Writer Diana Damian Martin, SPILL founder and Artistic Director of the first 10 festivals Robert Pacitti, and SPILL's current Artistic Director Robin Deacon.

SPILL On Memory

Diana Damian Martin

Welcome to this edition of SPILL Festival.

This text here is a speculative offering on memory, reflecting on, with and alongside eight years and more of SPILL Writing – an embedded writing programme, itself shaped by three years of writerly explorations by Mary Paterson and Rachel Lois Clapham and Theron Schmidt – and many more writers, artists and thinkers.

As an entangled collective of writers, we have been spending time with, witnessing, being alongside SPILL for many years. To look back (to think with memory) is also to look forward- so in this text, language is a kind of spirit, witnessing, thinking alongside performance.

A festival is a gathering, a being together in multiple ways ('creating a common life together'). I think of kinship as a mode of gathering with the human and non-human; and as an active attention or noticing of the many things that often get in the way of our ability to be together. In the introduction to emergent strategy - a book about transformation and change, adrienne maree brown says: 'here you are, in the cycle between past and future.' maree brown invites us to breathe for the day thus far, and for the moment that is now.

So let us do that, take a breath.

We know how precious gathering is – and many structures, and oppressions seek to dismantle our being together. A festival is like a breath – and breaths are precious, we know that; they are to be noticed, cared for, held, witnessed, remembered. Repair is memory; being with is memory. Breath is memory.

If performance is a mode of visioning or imagining change, how can we enable ourselves to be compelled by it? How can our bodies be it? What are the ways in which writing is a constant emergence?

Nothing of what I enact here is authored alone, because nothing of what we author is singular.

An etymology, to play with:

In English, *memorie* is an obsolete spelling of *memory*. This is how we say *memory* in my language – *memorie*. A different kind of obsolescence.

Memorie is made through neuron ensembles; when two neurons activate each other, memories are stronger. Our bodies are moved by what we carry; our bodies are moved by what others deny, too.

Memorie is also necessarily of the present; to tend to it, is to resist urgency and extraction.

Sometimes, *memorie* needs to be thrown into the water, to make space for collective acts of multiple temporalities – to make space for incompleteness of a different kind.

Memorie is relational – it is unlearning, and tending to, simultaneously.

Memorie is speculative- a mode of visioning (*memory* is queer).

Memorie is abolitionist, necessarily unbordered.

Memorie is oceanic.

We live in times of ends and beginnings. Incompleteness, as Françoise Vergès tell us, is not about a lack, but is instead, reflective of the dynamics of life.

A list, to move along with:

exhausted bodies

lost bodies; regulated bodies

punished bodies

bodies in revolt

joyful bodies

nonconforming bodies

bodies in repair

healing bodies

overspilled bodies

bodies in silence

bodies of notation

infinite bodies

spirit bodies.

An interlude (a breath)

I tried to make a list of events that have occurred since the last SPILL but they are too entangled, I don't want to involve that energy here, let us dwell in queer time, where violence and change are simultaneous; not falling into linear time.

You might want to

Spend time with the SPILL archive, see what spirits you find there.

Allow me an assembly (spilling memories with SPILL writers)

Anna and I in the Ipswich Town Hall, speaking about poetics and language and how performance stays in our words and bodies. Laura writing with spaciousness, like moving water (bodies of water). Natalia thinking through palimpsests – performance has its own, multiple trajectories of memory. Debbie's thick notations, etching pen marks over paper (duration). Phoebe's live art protest. Lorraine's library as labyrinth. Lewis on tactility and mediation and intimacy and connection. Carolyn on surrender as a collective practice. Jonathan on yielding gravity. John on admitting knowing nothing. Kelly on shadowing a town. Claire, Mark, Michelle, Phoebe, Jackie, Lissie and I on what ifs and murmurings.

An interlude (two memories)

Perhaps the most egregious thing we are taught is that we should just be really good at what's already possible, to leave the impossible alone – adrienne maree brown

An infinite history of traces without an inventory! An endless collection of oneself that is impossible to gather – Julietta Singh

Resonance (a spirit evading capture) – memorising the book On Time

A festival, I said, is a mark in time, of time (how strange, the hauntology of your own making, I need to consult the archive again and again)

I but what of the ground beneath our feet, those sediments of rubbish and rot- what do we know of them? I whisper: the sun rising

I the lucid dreaming ideal / I'm not here, I'm not there. That's very disturbing. It created a weird longing I whisper: what we are fighting against is invisible

I we are born with a specific chart, but what it symbolises is alive, vibrating and revealing infinite possible identities I whisper: tuning in to the energies that are available to us

I slowly and gently, rather than blatantly and suddenly I whisper: political resonances

I a conflict between the skin that acts as a membrane – a felt world made of complex data and a situational osmosis I am not able to fully comprehend I whisper: social spatial practice

I my first skull was someone my age, who had never gotten older I whisper: instead of refusal, a practice of handling

I a radical alteration intervenes with a scene you are already in I whisper: we are eavesdroppers, sonic detectives

I I am inside the mirror. I am in a trance-inducing audio-visual rhythm, a fast changing present moment made up of pieces from the past I whisper: like memories, they [fragments] are discounted from the past

I fires are burning inside me and out there and I will multiply and this will not fall on my back My back is not a bridge and my body is not your limit I whisper: CHOREOGRAPHY is a social indication

I If a sentence always recalls an author, then does a question hallucinate the reader? I whisper: have you ever made time, disappear? And now? And now?

I people dressed as animals, fairy princess and gnomes I whisper: photographs as precursors for interrupted nightmares

I the terrain of reflecting on touch seems in motion, like the thresholds between flesh, skin and air: inner-conduit-outer I whisper: touch is the first sense we develop while in the womb

I to resist the abstraction or mythologising of processes I whisper: aesthetics of subculture

I a declaration of care, witnessed in the presence of an audience who accepted the invitation to be care-givers and care-receivers I whisper: the tree as model - sharing resources for balance

I the skin is the landscape of the body I whisper: a comfortable paradox shrouded in time

Robert, Season, Umama, Madeleine, Bojana, Liana, Susan, Johanna and Rebecca, Tara, Marikiscrycrycry, Mary with Jonathan, Anna and Natalie, Shaun, Alexandrina, Lewis, ria, Jasmine.

On attentions

The pandemic has meant an evasion of capture, and a tending to modes of attention. My body feels heavy, something has accumulated; I feel diffracted, sparse. Joyful moments are collective, dispersed, and political. Nostalgia however, is dangerous, so let us settle instead for change. Tending to attention is a form of change.

Take this space to witness what will come in October: time is always an exercise in collective visioning (invoke your own spirits):

The following are rituals of remembering:

Invoking
Repairing
Healing
Listening
Writing
Speculating
Connecting
Moving with
Moving through
Moving across

A spell to end.

Instead of in memory, perhaps simply: with and alongside (memorie).

Diana Damian Martin is a writer and academic, working at the intersection between writing, politics and performance. She co-edits **Critical Interruptions** with Bojana Jankovic, and co-hosts **Something Other** and the **Department of Feminist Conversations** with Mary Paterson and Maddy Costa. Diana is a Senior Lecturer in Performance Arts at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

A FOOL'S JOURNEY

SPILL's founder Robert Pacitti on the first 10 Festivals (2007 - 2021)

Fool, foolish, foolhardy, reckless, impulsive, rash.

What a Fool I am. To conjure up a festival, and in that same moment not to also look up and really study the path ahead. Not to heed the Magician coming over the hill, or the other characters who would inevitably follow. Not to blink or really see beyond the end of my nose, to begin with.

The Tarot teaches us that when The Fool is drawn in the 'present' position, anything is possible, that even mountains can be moved. But wild ambition can be all consuming. And so only now, 15 years after dreaming up SPILL, do I understand that it would always eventually lead to this point - to the Sun, the Moon, and the World.



Ron Athey as *The Sun*, Carla Esperanza Tommasini as *The Moon*, and Yann Marussich as *The World*
All photographed by Manuel Vason for **The SPILL Tarot**

There are many SPILL moments I will never forget, but as I write, these ones are just behind my eyes -

Raimund Hoghe presented the first event in the first SPILL Festival, back in April 2007, with ***Sacre - The Rite of Spring*** presented at the Barbican. A legendary maker and an exquisite performance, the importance of inaugurating SPILL with Raimund's work remains as significant today as it did at the time. His passing earlier in 2021 is a great loss to many worldwide.

Romeo Castellucci's huge trilogy of ***Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso***, presented in partnership with the Barbican for SPILL 2009, revolutionised what audiences could expect from the festival. With 150 people travelling with the company from Italy, and an additional cast of 50 local performers, plus kids, horses and attack dogs, this giant endeavour was a scale busting act of experimental theatre. This was also the year that Ron Athey and Lee Adams curated a highly charged ***Visions of Excess*** for SPILL - a night of transgressive energies that for many who were present, and also others who weren't, is rightly considered legendary.

Diamanda Galas and Davide Pepe's premiere of ***Schrei 27*** formed the dark heart of SPILL 2011, themed On Infection. A sound and film installation for a single viewer at a time, this confronting, haunting work was impeccably made. Sitting alone in a large auditorium with ***Schrei 27*** remains a standout SPILL moment.

Home Sweet Home presented by Subject_To_Change helped SPILL 2012 land in Ipswich. A large cardboard replica of the town became increasingly hybridised as audience members added their own fantastical buildings and structures, renamed roads and repurposed well known landmarks. A local business leader established an underground trade in toy horses, a porn district was set up in the centre of the town, and an Anarchist Marxist alliance saw a large swathe of dwellings painted in red and black - all surrounded by kids and crayons and glue. A joyful messy reimagining of the town and one I will always cherish.

Amongst the many delights of SPILL 2013, Jamie Lewis Hadley reclining on a sofa, set in the middle of a large concrete space in Hackney, having blood taken to fill a bag, which was then hung up for him to shoot with a gun, was another bold moment.

Analogue To A Blunt Trauma was rather gentle in some ways, and utterly brutal at the same time.

SPILL 2014 saw ***The Poetics of Trespassing*** by Keijaun Thomas presented in the firing range of the former Ipswich Police Station. An immaculately crafted durational performance, this work saw the artist put herself on the line to blend personal and social politics. I think of this piece regularly and the tactics used by the artist to encourage the audience to interrogate itself. It remains ever relevant.

In 2015, Karen Finley's *Written In Sand* broke my heart, fired my rage and allowed space to remember some beautiful friends lost to AIDS. A gift of a work, if a painful one. Also that year, *Inextinguishable Fire* saw Cassils set alight on the stage of the National Theatre - a defining moment for the festival, and for the artist. Such courage and vision. It took a long time to plan, a short time to execute, and will always be a SPILL highlight for me.

Sanctuary Ring created by Martin O'Brien and Sheree Rose for the 2016 festival raised the bar again for what SPILL could and should be showing. Hardcore in nature and impact, this 'sanctuary of sickness' will forever be another legendary SPILL moment for those that were present, and in the telling. Supporting work such as this is the reason I started a festival - presenting it in Ipswich on a Sunday afternoon was the cherry on the cake.

And then there was *Clarion Call*, made by Byron J Scullin, Tom Supple and Hannah Fox. *Clarion Call* placed 488 speakers on the roofs of buildings around Ipswich waterfront to commemorate the centenary of the end of WWI. Starring the voices of local women and girls - and featuring Beth Gibbons of Portishead, and Elizabeth Fraser of Cocteau Twins fame - each dusk performance saw a helicopter fly in with the final set of speakers suspended from it, broadcasting the singing voices for miles. Performed twice a day for 11 days, and reaching 50,000 people each time, this large scale sonic installation shifted SPILL to become an event a whole town could experience. SPILL had moved a long way from its 2007 London origins as a festival of mainly body based performance art. But there has been a curiously obvious logic to the whole journey. However reckless.

Other memorable moments over the years:

planning meetings with artists in obscure locations - a German brothel, a derelict Italian farm - and business meetings with the knickerless. There was the artist who booked a miniature horse to star in their work without telling us (and they only booked a miniature horse as a big one wouldn't fit in the lift). There was the religious zealot on his balcony with a loud hailer, who believed the festival to be satanic. There have been kids and dogs and adults who have pissed and shat and vomited. Egg enemas and cakes you wouldn't want to eat. There has been a lot of blood, and spit and cum.

There was an occasion I genuinely feared for my life through being crushed to death by a distraught horse and simultaneously bitten by a venomous snake - both highly agitated by us all being in the same very small confined space. There have been gifts of rotting fish, and pools of rancid milk. There was the time multiple people fainted in the same audience all at once, way more than we had bargained for. And the time hundreds of shards of smashed china flew in to the audience at speed, despite multiple tests before the event.

Performance art can indeed be high risk.

SPILL stands on the shoulders of three giants - two knowingly and one accidentally, if such a thing exists. The National Review of Live Art (NRLA), run in Glasgow by the inimitable Nikki Milligan across a 30 year period, was my education in what a festival of experimental work could be.

Lois Keidan's time as Director of Live Art at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) taught me what thematic programming could achieve and introduced me to the work of many incredible artists. And there in the background was Groundcourse, a radical arts training led by Roy Ascott.

In 1967, the year I was born, the building which is now the SPILL Think Tank was part of the Ipswich Art School and home to Groundcourse - a radical experiment in alternative learning, communication, interaction and participation. The course was built around challenges - exercises and games which were designed to disrupt expectations and build knowledge for students in ways which defied norms.

Groundcourse proved so controversial that its time in Ipswich was limited, despite laying the foundations for much of what is commonplace in contemporary arts today.

I have always known my time running SPILL at the Think Tank was one of being a temporary custodian, but I have also felt the spirit of Groundcourse still present in the corridors, walls and energy of the space. Innovative Ipswich at its best. A perhaps unlikely location for such energetic frequency, but one which I have found completely inspiring.

They say there is no fool like an old fool. I say make all the mistakes, embrace failure, resist trying to fit in. The attempt is the thing, and holding the nerve to try. And so as I bow out from SPILL, with the festival now its own legal entity and Robin Deacon the new Artistic Director, I can't wait to see what happens for it next. It's been a wild ride across the past 15 years, and now the deck is about to be shuffled anew - the Sun rises, the Moon shines, and a whole World of new possibility awaits.

Reckless, impulsive, rash?

Here's to that.

Robert Pacitti is an artist working with sound, text and ritual. He is one half of **The Rough Band** collaborating with the artist O, and one half of **Two Churches** working remotely with Australian artist Sweeney. Previous projects include **Pacitti Company** (1992 - 2021) and **SPILL Festival** (2007 - 2021). He is a Visiting Professor of the Arts at the University of Suffolk, and Patron of Outreach Youth. robertpacitti.com

TOWARDS ECSTATIC DISCOVERY

Robin Deacon

1.

There are some memories, the tenacity of which stem from the recollection of seeing something for the first time, and having no frame of prior reference to make sense of the experience. In popular culture, an example often cited is the memory some have of watching David Bowie's 1972 performance of his song 'Starman' on the BBC's chart rundown show Top of the Pop's. Or for others, the memory may be of seeing post-punk band Joy Division playing their song 'Transmission' live on the British youth-oriented program Something Else in 1979. Seeing Michael Jackson performing 'Billie Jean' as part of the 1983 Motown twenty-fifth Anniversary concert broadcast (and doing the moonwalk for the first time in public) could be another example.

Admittedly, these examples reflect a hopelessly middle-aged perspective. But at this point in my life, there is something bitter sweet in recalling such moments of adolescent revelation, harking back to a time when one's sense of identity was in a large part formed by developing tastes in music or literature - all consumed on vinyl or paper, of course. It would seem this piecing together of yourself through ever shifting cultural allegiances, (the evolving versions of who you are, or could be) has a tendency to end with adulthood. Before his death in 2017, cultural commentator Mark Fisher asked the question, "Is it possible to reproduce, later in life, the impact that books, records, and films have between the ages of fourteen and seventeen?" If, as Fisher seemed to suggest, the possibility for such powerful impressions decrease as we age – what mechanisms do we have to bypass the diminishing returns of repetition and familiarity?

One reviewer of Fisher's books commented that the most moving parts of his writings stemmed from his attempts to "recover the ecstatic reverie of discovery." As I take up my new role as Artistic Director of SPILL, I have frequently found myself musing on this notion, but in the context of my own early interactions with art as performance, performance as art. I have been revisiting my memories of festival attendance in years past – first, as a young, bewildered audience member, and later on as a presenting, 'professional' artist (sometimes still bewildered), and using my own experiences of ecstatic discovery to inform what I would like to create as I embark on this new journey with SPILL.

2.

My first performance festival was experienced when I was a fine art student in my early twenties. The festival was called 'Cardiff Art in Time', and was organised by the Time Based Studies Department of the now defunct University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. This festival ran in various iterations during my studies and beyond, a period that has populated my memories with a series of distinct and unforgettable images. It was in 1995 that I saw artist André Stitt performing 'The Crow' at Chapter Arts Centre as part of the festival. I recently managed to track down a document of this work, transferred from a video tape and uploaded to YouTube. As I watch the footage, I am acutely aware that my younger self is somewhere in this fuzzy, degraded recording. I cannot see myself, but know that I was in the audience, and remember the exhilaration as I looked on with incredulity as André Stitt started a fire inside the building. The burning plastic hoop he had suspended from the ceiling began melting and smoking as the audience disquiet grew. I remember that as a student volunteer assigned to assist Stitt in sourcing his materials, and setting up the space, I was terrified that it would be me who would be held responsible for the venue's fire alarm being triggered, and the resulting evacuation of the building. The nature of this memory is clear, stemming as it did from the feeling that I had never seen anything like this before.

But this would not be the only time. One year prior, at the same festival, I had watched US artist Stuart Sherman present his 'Spaghetti Spectacle'. Again, in watching digitised footage taken from the Hi-8 format videotape I still possess of this performance, I am acutely aware that I am present, but again, unseen in the video. But tape or no tape, the memory remains of my mind being blown by the dry, deadpan humour of Sherman's performance the effect of which I had, as yet, no language to describe. I was laughing, but had no understanding as to why. This first contact with Stuart Sherman at this festival had an incalculable effect on me as a young artist, coming to fruition nineteen years after seeing his work at Cardiff Art in Time, when as a 'grown up' artist filmmaker, I completed a full-length documentary on Sherman's life and work. This was fourteen years after his death.

In 1998, I returned to Cardiff Art in Time as a recent graduate to watch Chicago performance collective Goat Island perform 'The Sea and Poison'. Goat Island was a company I had become completely obsessed with since first seeing their unique brand of intensely physical dance, sampled dialogue and ingenious usage of props at the same festival two years prior. Thirteen years later, all core members of Goat Island became my colleagues within the performance department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I taught for nearly a decade before relocating back to the UK to make Ipswich my new home, and SPILL the centre of my new artistic adventures.

3.

These words are in memoriam of three festival experiences that were life changing for me. I share these accounts as I now imagine what might be the experience of a first-time visitor to SPILL 2021, be they young or old or somewhere in-between. Perhaps this is your first visit to a festival of this kind. What memories will be created? What possibility is there for SPILL to replicate for you the sort of profound experiences I had at the Cardiff Art in Time Festival? How might your own outcomes be experienced not only in the moment, but as ripples and echoes that may inform, provoke, niggle or haunt years after the initial encounter? Will you even recognise the significance of these experiences at the moment they happen, or will they unfold, bloom or explode at some inopportune, random moment in the future? Perhaps something you will see at SPILL 2021 will make you want to be an artist, a maker, an organiser – the memories you gather here may be the starting point of these future possibilities.

I am also thinking of those who may have ‘seen it all before’ – those of us who may have attended most, if not every SPILL festival since its inception in 2007. Whatever stage you are at in life, whatever familiarity you may have with performance at its most experimental, my hope is that ecstatic discoveries may still be possible for you. I write this without knowing whether the world will continue to be quite as strange and incomprehensible by the time you come to read these words. But if we are all now seeing the world with unfamiliar eyes, my hope is for a form of ecstatic discovery that is shared by all, and for the creation of memories that are as collective as they are profound.

Robin Deacon was born in Eastbourne in 1973. His career as an artist, writer, filmmaker and educator spans 25 years, with his work being seen in festivals, conferences, theatres and galleries all over Europe, Asia and the USA. Robin has also presented his work at three SPILL Festivals, in 2009, 2015 and now in 2021. In 2011 he moved to the United States to take up a Professorship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was also Chair of the Performance Department. In 2021, Robin returned to the UK to become the new Artistic Director and CEO of SPILL Festival, Ipswich. He is happy to be home again.