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Chapter 6: Bodies as Profit Centres: Susie Orbach's work in the context of performance and activism

Roanna Mitchell

In Brett Kahr (Ed.). *Susie Orbach: Expanding Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge / Taylor and Francis Group. [In Press].

I first met Susie Orbach at an Open Space event at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London in 2009. Focusing on the theme of 'The Actor's Body: Identity and Image', this event brought together actors, directors, casting agents, costume designers and actor-trainers, along with Orbach as chair and to offer insights from a psychoanalytic perspective. It provided space for one of the first public discussions in the UK — if not worldwide — to acknowledge body anxiety in the context of the acting profession as a legitimate and important concern. The intersection between the insights that Orbach's work is able to offer and my own work with actors would go on to provide a rich space of discovery over the next nine years, during which I have worked closely with Orbach as a fellow body-activist and mentor.

My profession, as a pedagogue and performance-maker who specialises in actor-movement, entails close and often sustained encounters with actor's bodies. It is from this vantage point that I explore and attempt to untangle the politics of the body in the acting profession, and the anxieties and strategies to manage these that they entail. As Deborah Dean eloquently argues in relation to female performers' access to work, the way bodies are treated and employed in the performance industries is 'a manifestation of [the actors'] position as formal and informal proxies for women's experience in wider society' (2008: 161). In other words, the microcosm of body politics in the acting profession can tell us much about the role and status of bodies in the broader social context, and vice versa.

These politics are deeply enmeshed with the personal, as the actor's work is fundamentally embodied. The actor's transformation into other worlds and

other characters is in constant dialogue — and often in tension — with the demands and expectations their everyday life places on their bodies (Mitchell, 2014). My research over the past seven years has been concerned with how this tension affects the actor's work, and wellbeing. It examines the way actors are able to engage with the labour of care necessary to preserve themselves and their craft in the face of competition, individualism and the labour of production which, as Orbach sees it, now includes the production of the body itself (2009: 6).

In the following I will trace through the various ways in which I perceive Orbach's work to be in dialogue with the world of performance and performers' bodies. I will begin by drawing a link between performance as a space predicated on the ability to act and Orbach's central impulse towards action, which will allow me to share and document the role of body activism in her work.¹ I will then discuss aspects of Orbach's work in relation to actors' bodies specifically, and finally will bring both strands together to reflect on the future, examining key challenges presented by the notion of self-care as it is currently traded in performance and activism.

Creative activism:

Orbach's approach to the anxiety, discomfort and shame that many of us experience in relation to our bodies, is two-fold. On the one hand she offers astute observations, reflections and approaches for how each of us as individuals might work through this discomfort, and does so by encouraging greater trust in our bodies and listening to the signals of our appetites and needs — whether these be emotional or physical (Orbach, 2006; 2002). On the other hand, she has always, from *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978) onward, situated our discomfort with our bodies in a social context, knowing that a neoliberal narrative of individual self-improvement will not resolve the inequalities and exploitations that feed so fundamentally into body anxiety.

This situating of personal experience within socio-political contexts provides the activist impulse within Orbach's work. Never content with identifying and

discussing structural inequalities, those of us who have worked with her are familiar with her inevitable question: ‘So what is the action?’. How can we shift, nudge, shove and gnaw at the binds of complex industry and policy networks that have learnt to exploit body anxiety for all the money and docility it is worth?

In this search for action Orbach has consistently joined forces with artists and creatives. Indeed, insisting on the question of what the action is in some ways already aligns Orbach with the world of performance, which is predicated on ‘doing’, or more specifically, ‘showing-doing’ — ‘pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing’ — which in an activist context can provide vital opportunity for critical reflection and to creatively imagine change (Schechner, 2013: 28).

Performance and activism have long gone hand in hand, and feminist activism in particular has a well-documented history of using performance as part of its strategies of resistance. In the Anglophone context this history spans the realist suffrage plays of the early twentieth century, used to promote pro-suffrage messages in private homes and local theatres (Finnegan, 1999; Holledge, 1981), as well as the feminist performance practices emerging from the 1960s onward, in which the body and lived experience were used to disrupt or refract the male gaze and as ways to articulate things that cannot be put into words (Mulvey, 1975; Phelan, 1993; Diamond, 1997). But this dialogue is of course not simply history — performance and activism are in an ongoing, living exchange, constantly evolving to include new technologies and engage with new feminist challenges (Bissell, 2011).

Orbach’s work in activism shows that she has a real sense of this dialogue and its powerful potential to engage and to articulate. The centralizing of body and lived experience in feminist performance practice arose out of the consciousness-raising work of the late 1960s and 1970s, a time during which Orbach herself was working intensively to raise women’s consciousness about their bodies, their relationships, appetites and needs. It was during this time that she founded the Women’s Therapy Centre with Luise Eichenbaum, and published *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978), the volume that would define a key trajectory of her work for the next forty years. It is perhaps unsurprising, considering the context from which her work first sprang, that in her activism Orbach continues to seek out

the views and perspectives of artists to help convey a sense of what is wrong with the world; to interrogate and imagine differently; and to, as director Eugenio Barba puts it, 'caress a wound in that part within [us] which lived in exile' (2010: 185).

ENDANGERED bodies @BodyKind

OCCUPY your BODY WORKSHOP & DISCUSSION

BOGAN HOUSE HIGH STREET, TOTNES 15 OCTOBER '17

SESSION BREAKDOWN

- Life Pie exercise
- What don't we do?
- What is handed down?
- Enemies + champions of our self-worth
- Five other lives

Perhaps we can find ways to be kinder to ourselves and our bodies by looking at our lives.

Can we step away from ENDLESSLY circling the body?

Life Pie Exercise

• Draw a circle

• Divide into 8

• Label each segment

• Put a dot in each segment. The closer to the edge the more time you spend on each of the elements.

Romance
Adventure
Work
Play
Exercise
Family
Spirituality
Friends

Is the resulting shape balanced? Or lopsided? What does that mean for your body?

Including the word PLAY is a useful contrast.

It feels like another list of demands.

I AM SO TENSE

We ignore our bodies so much.

It's easier to have a bag of crisps + a pint than an adventure.

I'm at my laptop I feel like I am ALL EYES.

BREAK OUT DISCUSSION

What don't we do because of our bodies?

SEX
CLOTHES SHOPPING
GYM
YOGA

Must go for a run... to compensate for a big meal

Running from unhealthiness

“meal times are family times”
So, most arguments happened around food achievements discussed.

Our dad paid us compliments for SLIMNESS

Even parents who are aware and TRY so hard can find their children suffer body distress.

What things have been HANDED DOWN to us?

Mum I'm on a diet. Being on a DIET seemed to be an adult activity.

a separate meal

My dad did the Jane Fonda workout every morning in very small shorts. He was always on a DIET.

Who are the enemies of your self-worth?
And who are the champions of your self-worth?

LIST 3 OF EACH

We can surround ourselves with the people who lift us + comfort us and limit the time we spend with those who bring us down.

Five alternative Lives...
What might you have enjoyed to be instead?
How might you find ways to "be" one or more of them?
GO HAVE AN ADVENTURE!

[Image 1. Caption: AnyBody UK workshop at BodyKind festival, Totness 2017. Graphic recording by Jo Harrison.]

Raising awareness — Making change

I began work with Susie Orbach in 2010, preparing for a summit that was titled 'Endangered Species', following the premise that the woman who loves her body, and is able to live from it freely and without fear, is an endangered species.

The idea for the summit was born out of Orbach's and Eichenbaum's decision to 'have a great big meeting to draw attention to the hurt that is done to women's bodies' (Mitchell, 2011).

A multi-locational event, with live-streamed gatherings in London, New York, Buenos Aires, Melbourne and Sao Paulo, the 2011 summit was designed with the aim of both creating networks of mutual support among grassroots activists, and to engage as many as possible of the stakeholders that have interest in, duty of care for, critique, and influence, our bodies and through them our identities. To encourage the latter, representatives from advertising, education, healthcare, media, film-and performance industry and government were invited to speak. Their contributions responded to, and were placed against the context of, the voices of grassroots activists, the great majority of whom used artistic expression to provide an embodied understanding of the issues at stake. As Sara Ahmed writes, 'Feminism involves a process of finding another way to live in your body' (Ahmed, 2017: 30), and thus performance, videos and artwork framed and underlined the message of the summit, centralizing the body not only as theme, but also as a visceral, living presence.



[Image 2. Caption: Emilia Telese, *Perfect 10* 2006 – 2010, performance installation, dimensions variable. Photograph: Marcus Haydockⁱⁱ]

At the London Summit, individuals and groups from the UK, Peru, Mexico, Argentina and New York were joined by representatives from initiatives across Europe to showcase their ongoing work with and about young women – from projects in schools, colleges and communities to web-based groups and campaigning organisations (See Mitchell, 2011 for a full report on the summit). In this moment of coming together the event fulfilled the task of communal consciousness-raising, creating a ‘feminist catalog’ to reveal ‘that this or that incident is not isolated but part of a series of events: a series as a structure’ (Ahmed, 2017: 30), and illuminating the structural complexities of the issues at stake. As Orbach noted in her opening speech: ‘Our aims are not modest. They are ambitious. We want every girl to grow up feeling a matter-of-fact right to her body. Without attack. Without self-criticism. Without being watchful’ (Mitchell, 2011).

While these events in themselves were deeply hopeful, creative and imaginative, in retrospect they can be seen to mark a sea-change in the degree to which body activism would go on to form a part of mainstream debate. I argue that they contributed as a significant catalyst to magnify, and propel forward, the work that had been done for decades by committed feminists, including Orbach, Jean

Kilbourne (1979), Naomi Klein (1991), Susan Bordo (2003) and many others. Many topics raised at this event — such as the sexualisation of girls and women in media and advertising, the hierarchies of value placed on bodies in regards to race, ability and shape, or the pernicious exploitation of health-discourse and associated morals by the diet- and pharmaceutical industries — are now more present in popular consciousness than ever before, and have undergone significant change in the way they are responded to, as the following examples will show.

Satisfactory solutions for the extensive structural inequalities that attack womens' bodies — and, increasingly, all bodies — are far from being achieved. Nevertheless, clear lines can be drawn from the work surrounding the Endangered Species summit to events we see occurring seven years later. One example of this is the announcement of new rules by the British Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in 2017, which will ban advertising that perpetuates sexist stereotypes (Sweney, 2017). Viewed against the context of the preceding decade, this is an announcement which reflects the tireless work and activist voices of many. I touch here on only a few instances which I believe led, eventually, to the ASA's new rules, to illustrate the potential impact of bringing various groups into dialogue.

In 2009, Liberal Democrat MP Jo Swinson and fellow delegates called for a ban on airbrushed images 'which create "overly perfected and unrealistic images" of women in adverts targeted at children', and formed policy 'calling for cigarette-style health warnings by advertisers for the adult market which "tell the truth" about the use of digital retouching technology' (Mulholland, 2009). As a consequence of promoting this agenda, Swinson and the then Equalities Minister of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Lynne Featherstone, both co-founders of a government-backed 'Campaign for Body Confidence'ⁱⁱⁱ, were invited to attend the Endangered Species summit. In their speeches, both emphasized the government's recognition of the problem and their dedication in supporting the groups who are making active change, a significant endorsement for the grass roots. At the same time, ASA representatives were also present at the summit, and raised awareness of the ASA's system for reporting false or damaging advertising.

Body activists who had attended the summit then proceeded to amplify this awareness-raising in subsequent campaigns, promoting the mechanism of reporting false or damaging advertising as one possible action that any individual might take to push back against images that they find damaging or misleading. Returning to the present day, the ASA's new ruling not only responds to these complaints, but also shows a developed understanding of the issues, recognizing that not only 'unrealistic images' are damaging, but also those that sexualize and objectify. The ASA's statement on their new standards highlights the role that the voices of many have played in forming this decision:

The ASA receives many complaints about the depiction of women in a sexual or objectifying way in advertising, and in recent years the ASA has also received a number of complaints about ads that sexualise men, or portray men as objects, though these remain in the minority (ASA, 2018).

The voices of many are also more and more frequently heard in response to the aims and strategies of the weight-loss industry, such as Weight Watchers' announcement of a new program to include membership for individuals as young as 13, with the aim to develop 'healthy habits at a critical life-stage' (Weight Watchers, 2018).



[Image 3. Caption: Ditching Dieting campaign-logo. Design: Jo Harrison]

The giant corporation's new program was met with a remarkable wave of resistance, including the Twitter campaign #WakeUpWeightWatchers. In this campaign members of the public highlighted the damaging nature of Weight Watchers' programmes in tweets such as this: 'Dieting is not a rite of passage into adulthood. It's a set up for a lifetime of anxiety, confusion, and body dissatisfaction. #WakeUpWeightWatchers' Toler, 2018).^{iv} Here we see the long-standing argument for a stance against the diet industry — put forth by Orbach, by the Association for Size Diversity and Health's 'Health At Every Size' movement, and others — gone mainstream. This is further illustrated in Teen Vogue's reporting on the events. Its headline 'Weight Watchers is offering Teens free membership and People Aren't Happy' is followed by the subtitle quote "This is certainly not the time to then put the body on a diet" (Weiss, 2018). While the work that contributed towards this shift in consciousness is that of many dedicated health professionals and activists, and too large a topic to cover here in full, in the context of this Festschrift it is worth noting that it is a gratifying result for Orbach — who in 2012 gave evidence against Weight Watchers and Slimming World in a UK All Party Parliamentary Inquiry on Body Image — and fellow activists (APPG Report, 2012). Orbach's testimony inside the Houses of Parliament was characteristically accompanied by performative grassroots action, in this case a Ditching Dieting protest in Parliament square in which large yellow bins, marked with toxic waste signs composed of images of scales, invited individuals to 'bin' their diet books, magazines, and other diet paraphernalia. The report that finally emerged from this inquiry included a recommendation to 'Reframe health messages from a focus on weight-loss to health-enhancing behaviours and adopt weight-neutral language', and to review 'the evidence-base to support the long term efficacy and safety of diets' (APPG Report, 2012).



[Image 4. Caption: Ditching Dieting protest in London, January 2012.

Image: Ruth Johnston]

The activists standing in the cold around those yellow bins did not know what impact these and various online actions might eventually have on public consciousness, but they did have hope. As Rebecca Solnit reminds us ‘To sustain [resistance], people have to believe that the myriad small, incremental actions matter. That they matter even when the consequences aren’t immediate or obvious’ (Solnit, 2017). Solnit goes on to describe what I perceive to be Orbach’s main gift to fellow activists: The belief that, in persisting, ‘you may change the story or the rules, give tools, templates or encouragement to future activists, and make it possible for those around you to persist in their efforts’ (Solnit, 2017).

Orbach’s talent to gather and to galvanize has played no small part in the growth of Endangered Species into the local-global activist organization Endangered Bodies. The organization now has chapters in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand, the United States and the UK.^v Maintained by volunteers with little to no funding, it runs on hope, good will and determination, as well as substantial organizational skills.^{vi} Campaigns are run both globally,

and locally in response to country-specific needs, and continue in the vein of the 2011 summit by harnessing the artistic skills of members into creative activism. While provision of details about each campaign lies beyond the scope of this chapter, a summary of the areas tackled by Endangered Bodies campaigns underlines Orbach's statement that 'Our aims are not modest' (Mitchell, 2011).



[Image 5. Caption: Susie Orbach opening the 2011 Endangered Species summit in London. Image: Eilidh Mcleod]

Areas that have been covered by Orbach and her colleagues, while by no means exhaustive, include:

- The fashion industry: Using Stephanie Ifill's *Model Meter* installation to underline the narrow physical parameters by which the clothes we wear are imagined and designed. The installation was used extensively between 2012 and 2018 as part of AnyBody Argentina's campaign make a greater range of clothes sizes available in Argentine stores (Endangered Bodies, 2012a).
- The beauty industry: In co-creating the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, Orbach — some say contentiously — harnessed Dove's economic clout to

- encourage diversity of bodies in advertising. The campaign went on to provide support for parents navigating body anxiety in their daughters in the form of resources and school workshops (Orbach, 2005; Dove, 2016).
- The diet industry: Organizing the Ditching Dieting campaign and associated online and live actions (Endangered Bodies, 2012b).
 - The cosmetic surgery industry: Giving evidence as part of a Review of the Regulation of Cosmetic Interventions (Keogh, 2013). The consequent report recommended that government establish a clear regulatory framework to ensure high quality care, comprehensive public information, and accessible resolution and redress in the event of complications. It also asked that ‘existing advertising recommendations and restrictions should be updated and better enforced’ (Keogh, 2013). These recommendations have since been taken forward by Health Education England (Bruce, C. and Jollie, C., 2014).
 - Education: Running the *Shape Your Culture* programme in UK schools, universities and community groups to raise awareness and facilitate a sense of agency in the face of body anxiety (Shape Your Culture, 2012-14).
 - Mums and babies: Conducting training for midwives and health visitors under the auspices of the ‘Two for the Price of One’ project (Orbach and Rubin, 2014).
 - Social media: Conducting the successful ‘Fat is not a Feeling’ campaign, which convinced Facebook to remove the ‘I feel fat’ emoticon from its options and positioned EB as an expert resource for Facebook with regard to body image and eating disorder prevention. (Endangered Bodies, 2015).
 - Gaming: A global campaign demanding more effective rules from Apple, iTunes and Google to make plastic surgery games aimed at children unavailable. At the time of writing this campaign is ongoing, having gleaned over 100,000 signatures in a supporting petition (Endangered Bodies, 2017-18) and been endorsed by the Nuffield Council of Bioethics in their 2017 report on cosmetic procedures (Edwards, 2017).

Actors' Bodies

I want to now shift the focus of this discussion to examine aspects of Orbach's work in relation to the actor's body specifically. As highlighted by her presence at the abovementioned Open Space on *The Actor's Body: Identity and Image*, Orbach has played an important part in legitimizing the discourse around body anxiety in this field among many others. Bringing into focus the risk which body anxiety poses for the actor's wellbeing continues, however, to be a challenging process. The acting profession has long been concerned with actors' appearance as a primary ingredient of their popularity. In 1750, John Hill writes in *The Actor: Treatise on the Art of Playing*:

Tell people that there is a new actress to appear upon the stage such a night, the first question they ask is, Is she handsome? And 'tis ten to one, but they forget to enquire at all whether she has any merit in the profession'. (Hill in Cohen and Calleri 2009, 22)

Athene Seyler, one of the first pupils of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, tells how when she initially applied, around 1909, she was told that she had 'no qualifications for the stage' because she was 'very plain' (Hollege, 1981: 12). In 2010 meanwhile, an online response to Richard Schechner's proposal for 'casting without limits' states:

Why is it so hard to accept that acting is one of the few professions in which one's physical appearance is central to the job? If that seems unfair, it is. You are also free to choose another profession. (Lbendavid commenting on Schechner, 2010)

These narratives indicate that the actor's body has long been their 'calling card' (Orbach, 2009: 5). However, where a century ago a certain appearance might have proven the end of an actor's career, today's actor lives in a world where technologies to modify the body proliferate: failure to produce a body that is marketable then becomes the fault of the individual, implying lack of commitment to their profession as is typical of a neoliberal context. As Orbach notes, assessing the status of the body in the 21st century, 'Whatever the means, our body is... vested with showing the results of our hard work and watchfulness, or, alternatively, our failure and sloth' (Orbach, 2009: 5).

The watchfulness required here, and the sense of individual failing, are, I would argue, exacerbated for the actor by the fact that aesthetic modification and improvement has increasingly been normalized as an inevitable aspect of their profession. The voice of business is then generally accepted to be the voice of reason, where 'by not making the changes that would be possible (losing weight, getting a blepharoplasty, being better groomed) I am being irresponsible. I know what the business requires and it's up to me to make myself as castable as possible' (Female Actor in Mitchell, 2014: 61). This occurs despite compelling arguments that a constantly watchful relationship with one's body is destabilizing and reduces the actor's capacity for creative transformation (Mitchell, 2014). As the body has become 'a series of visual images and a labour process in itself' (Orbach, 2009:75), entangled with narratives that equate 'health' with moral superiority (Shilling, 2010), it is often felt to be unreliable and a source of anxiety, rather than 'generative and animated, as well as alive to ordinary discontents and longings' (Orbach, 2009: 76).

The actor, for whom the demands of business and art compete with the demands of the body, is thus caught in the paradox between defining themselves as a marketable product, fixed in an image, and being capable of transformation through their craft. The first often requires banning appetites and needs of the self, whereby listening to the body's voice is suppressed; whereas the second demands this very listening to the body — 'being in touch with, and able to reflect on, somatic experiences and wider emotional meaning (Park et al 2012:91) — as a precondition for imagination to radiate out through the body, thereby to transform it for the eye of the audience. As actor-movement pedagogues Ewan and Green note, 'Living in the now is an essential skill for the actor... For the actor to experience total transformation, the work must be both internal and external' (2015: 128-19).

The transformation of the actor's body through their craft also involves the spectator, who completes the act through their own imagination. Umberto Eco argues that it is when the creative work is left open, when there are gaps left for the spectator's imagination to build into, that the spectator can become a creative partner (Eco, 1989). All too often, however, actors' bodies are hired and

their surfaces moulded in a different kind of transformation than that which they are capable of through their craft:

‘I know there have been people who have been told by agents and casting directors that they should try to lose weight, or should not put on any more weight... people have their teeth, their nose or their boobs done’ (Female Actor in Mitchell, 2013: 167).

The aim of such surface transformations is to present a visual image that is a closed system, and this has an impact not only on the actor’s own relationship to their body, but also on all of us who watch them. Eradicating signs of the socially abject — of age, poverty, appetite, — from the visual landscape of the stories we tell, means that we are creating a smooth surface in which there are no gaps for the spectator’s imagination to insert itself. How can we do the work of making theatre ‘for that part of [us] that live[s] in exile’ (Barba, 2010: 185), when we simultaneously insist on a ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Ranciere, 2004) that bans the very flesh which speaks of those parts?

The aesthetic-emotional labour required of the actor^{vii} is of course a precondition for this closed system, in which existing images are reflected against one another. It mirrors the aesthetic labour required of all of us in relation to the post-industrial body that Orbach describes, and in turn returns the image of its product back to us as an achievement to be celebrated and a reality to be believed.

The message underlying this experience is that, in order to regulate one’s being-in-the-world, judgment from those around us is more reliable than inner sensation. In the context of actor training this message is something akin to Frank Camilleri’s notion of ‘ideological’ training systems for actors: These are defined as structures in which the responsibility to make rules and define boundaries — whether these pertain to the body or other aspects of labour — is handed over to the training institution (2009: 28). It is not far-fetched to compare this notion to the way in which rules and boundaries pertaining to the body are defined by, for example, diet plans and fashion trends.

The opposite to this is what Camilleri calls an ‘ethical’ training approach (2009: 27), where such responsibilities are worked out in a relational manner by listening to the embodied self in dialogue with others — comparable to Orbach’s

notion of ‘intuitive eating’ (Orbach, 2002). As Camilleri notes, such an ‘ethical’ approach often stands in conflict with economic imperatives and the desire to benefit from the swing of market forces (2009: 31), reinforcing the paradox of the actors’ body as caught between the responsibilities toward business, art, and self (Mitchell, 2014). The question of whether an actor would agree to body modifications such as weight-loss in exchange for a desirable part is an example that clearly illuminates this paradox:

I don’t think it would necessarily be a healthy thing, because I think the shape that I am now is probably the shape I’m supposed to be, but... that kind of goes to show, for something like that, if it was plausible to do, then I would probably try. (Female Actor in Mitchell, 2013: 153).

There are of course, and have been for years, performers and performances that seek to disrupt the closed system of reproducing idealized images — although, significantly, this most frequently occurs on the fringes of the industry, where fewer financial stakeholders are involved. Feminist theatre’s acts of ‘active vanishing’, where expectations are intentionally subverted in order to disrupt the male gaze (Phelan, 1993: 19) are one example of this (See Solga, 2016, for an excellent overview); as are performances that explicitly take the complexities of body anxiety as their subject matter. In Amy Godfrey’s *The Biscuit Chronicles* for instance (2014), a one-woman show intelligently explores the body’s inevitable failing in the push-and-pull between personal experience and neoliberal narratives.



[Image 6. Caption: Amy Godfrey, *The Biscuit Chronicles*, 2014. Image: Penny Dixie.]

Increasingly frequent forays into both experimenting with casting against type and across gender are further examples. In 2016, theatre critic Lynne Gardner remarks that *The Tempest* (Directed by Phyllida Lloyd), the final production of the all-female Shakespeare trilogy at London's Donmar warehouse, gives 'a glorious reminder that genuine diversity on stage offers astonishing creative benefits' (Gardner, 2016). Gardner argues that it is evidence that 'there is a growing critical mass of gender-blind casting', when only in 2012 'cross-gender casting was still perceived by some as a novelty' (2016). The productions she lists to emphasize this are in mainstream houses: 'Glenda Jackson is playing King Lear at the Old Vic and Anna Francolini is Captain Hook at the National Theatre, where Tamsin Greig will soon play Malvolio' (2016).

This growth in performance opportunities across the gender, race and age spectrum is certainly an important step to alleviate actors' anxiety about the need to change their body — and it is a slow one, which has been long in the making and relies on continuous campaigning by artists and activists.^{viii} However, as Jessa Crispin reminds us, doing well within an oppressive system — 'one that values consumerism and competition, that devalues compassion and community' — risks still maintaining that system (Crispin, 2017: 85-87). Including a greater diversity of bodies and voices in the stories we tell will not, in itself, resolve the fact that the performance industry continues to thrive on the self-exploitation of its participants, and values the labour of production — and the self-sacrifice this entails — far higher than the labour of care. Further, it does not necessarily do so overtly: in fact, the labour of care, and especially narratives of self-care, are increasingly promoted by the same frameworks that also rely on self-exploitation. It is by examining the complexity at play here that I want to conclude this chapter.

Actors, Activists and the next Action

In searching for solutions for systemic change, both the field of body activism and that of the acting profession are faced with the challenge of circumventing the neoliberal appropriation of what it means to practice self-care — to find ways of looking after ourselves in the face of debilitating body anxiety, and to simultaneously look after others by continuing to challenge the structures that exacerbate and exploit this anxiety.

Once upon a time, the invitation to dare to be confident in the body that you are living in was in itself a radical and empowering proposal, and seemed a positive first step toward change. It was on the basis of this principle that Endangered Bodies launched its 2011 guerrilla campaign disseminating stickers in public spaces which read: 'Join the resistance: Love your body'. It is also on the basis of this principle that actors are enjoined to strive for confidence as a goal, grounded in the assumption that being "confident communicators, who say "this is me, this is what I look like, this is who I am, here I am and I am fit for purpose"" (Casting

Director at RCSSD Open Space, in Mitchell, 2013: 138) will make them more resilient in dealing with body anxiety.

However, while the call to 'love your body' has become a staple of what is now often called the 'body positivity' movement, it has also been swiftly appropriated back into the systems that seek to exploit body anxiety. As illustrated in Gill and Elias' (2014) critique of 'Love your Body' discourse, the notion of self-care has become ever more comprehensively commodified, flattened and diluted. The neoliberal logic of self-care put forth by media and advertising industries has shifted all focus away from communal action and systemic critique, instead suggesting that discomfort with their bodies is something that women — and men — do to themselves, and that therefore the power to *stop* doing so is in their hands (ideally by spending money on tools that can help them love themselves more). Failure to achieve body confidence has then become just that — another thing for the individual to fail at^{ix}.

Thus, even though Britain has a government-backed 'Campaign for Body Confidence' and although a large proportion of resources available for dealing with body image in young people is funded by the Dove 'Self-Esteem Project', encouraging body confidence as a goal in itself is problematic, and insufficient. Where troubled relationships with the embodied self have become 'dislocated from their structural determinants in patriarchal capitalism and shorn of their psychosocial complexity' (Gill and Elias, 2014: 188), the encouragement to 'love your body' is at best an 'ameliorative sticking plaster on the wounds of injustice' (Ledwith, 2007). At worst, it leads to further insidious self-exploitation, as it is often assumed that any practices that will give the individual a feeling of confidence are by default caring practices, and therefore benign.

Psychologists Crocker and Park make the case that threats to achieving self-esteem can in fact lead to behaviours that are destructive or self-destructive, and conclude that 'The pursuit of self-esteem interferes with relatedness, learning, autonomy, self-regulation, and mental and physical health' (2004: 407). While *having* self-esteem has many benefits, there is thus a high cost to *aiming for* self-esteem as a goal — a cost which becomes apparent when we examine 'what people do to achieve boosts to self-esteem and avoid drops in self-esteem in their daily lives' (2004: 393). As this student actor notes:

If I knew I had to be on stage in underwear, I would go and lose weight and tone up, so that I could be confident in my performance. (Female Acting Student in Mitchell, 2013: 96).

Resilience certainly plays an important part in being able to survive, resist, and create change — however, the great social justice movements around the world have taught us that nothing builds resilience more than being part of a community that is working towards change. While we do live in a world where accepting our bodies' appetites and needs is radical, it is through dialogue with others that we learn to distinguish between 'the ordinary discontents and longings' of life and work (Orbach, 2008; 2009: 76) and the structural inequalities that are making it impossible for many of us to fully live in and from our bodies. It is through the supportive presence of others that our feelings of guilt or failure can be contextualized and accepted as part of the messy, unruly process of self-actualizing in the face of ongoing discriminations and exclusions:

I do believe that the work of loving our selves and our bodies also requires the work of other people showing us that this is possible through loving us and our bodies. It isn't always work we can do alone, the way that "Love Your Body" rhetoric suggests. (Luna, 2016)

Importantly, being part of such a community should not mean uncritically surrounding oneself with people whose opinions and beliefs support our own. As Orbach and Eichenbaum discuss in *Between Women*, finding ways to productively disagree and navigate the feelings that disagreement raises is a crucial ingredient for collectively re-imagining more just and equitable structures: 'Creating the balance between autonomy and connectedness is becoming ever more critical, both socially and psychologically' (2012: 178).^x

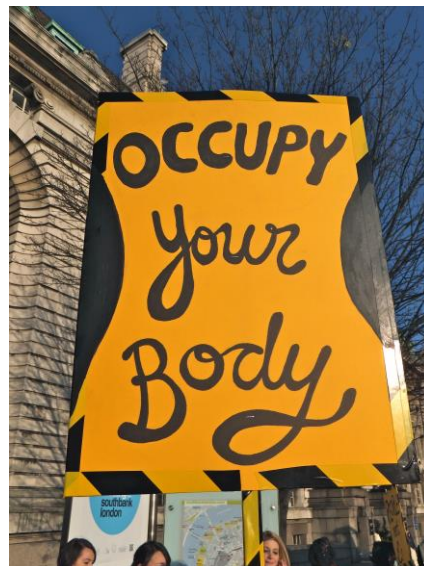
Finally, as Margaret Ledwith argues in her call for 'reclaiming the radical agenda' in community development, activists must 'be vigilant and stay critical if we are to prevent our practice getting distracted.... We need to reclaim our radical agenda from attempts to hijack and dilute it into a rhetoric of self help' (Ledwith,

2007). A focus on practical considerations can be both illuminating and helpful to carry this agenda forward. In the context of the acting profession, we might begin by interrogating whether the ecologies in which self-care is being promoted to actors actually provide opportunities to practice that self-care: Where training institutions promote a nutritious, varied diet, is such food available?^{xi} Where relaxation and mindfulness are encouraged, is this taken into account when planning actors' working hours? Where emotional risk-taking is encouraged, are strategies to re-gain emotional equilibrium disseminated and given time and space to be enacted? Where greater diversity in casting is celebrated, is this extended beyond colour-blind and cross-gender casting, to include fat bodies, disabled bodies, bodies that don't conform to gender- or class expectations — and is this paired with greater diversity among those who write, direct, design, produce and review the stories we tell? Are the significant institutions and bodies of the performance industry providing space in which to critically reflect on the industry's glamorizing of self-sacrifice for business and art? Are stakeholders who claim concern for actors committing, through action, to being part of a community of change regarding actors' bodies?

The #MeToo movement is one example of activism that has forced the performance industries to begin to engage with some of these questions practically. Started by Tarana Burke in Harlem in 2006 to 'spread awareness and understanding about sexual assault in underprivileged communities of colour' (Shugerman, 2016), 'Me Too' turned into a global movement in 2016 in response to the public airing of thousands of cases of sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation in the theatre and film world and beyond^{xii}. The body was by default centralized in these discussions, and practices that had for decades been normalized are now questioned and critiqued, and countered with alternatives. The rise of a new profession, that of Intimacy Director, is one example of this, providing a professionally guided approach to creatively choreographing scenes of sex and intimacy — as fight directors have long done with scenes of violence — rather than leaving the actor and their body vulnerable to in-the-moment improvisation and the risks this entails (Sanderson, 2017; Talbot, 2017).

Much has thus happened through collective movements to defend our bodies as a place to live from, even though arguably, still, ‘our time and place are dire for bodies’ (Orbach, 2017). This project is not one that offers quick gratification, it requires time and the realization that lasting change may not be achieved within our life-time. It is a huge piece of work to dismantle what was long thought inevitable: It means a profound re-thinking of everything, and even those of us who very consciously experience the oppressions that come with the markets of physical capital struggle to imagine what a different version of the world might look like. In 2011, when asked whether she thinks we will see real change in the way future generations relate to their bodies, Orbach answers ‘I am deeply pessimistic’ (2011). But she also shows that for her, as for all of us, the strength to continue comes from working together with, and in relation to, others: ‘What choice do we have but to challenge the hurt and the vicious attacks on bodies? What gives me hope are the number of body activists out there – young, old, across cultures and class, who are insisting on something more humane in relation to our bodies’ (2011).

It is in the spirit of this collective persistence that the question must be asked, and then asked again: ‘What is the action?’



[Image 7. Caption: Image: Sharon Haywood]

ⁱ It should be noted that in both Orbach’s work and the work of the performer the ability to act also requires the ability to ‘listen’, and that listening should be understood as an integral aspect of action. Orbach’s description of this vital aspect of her therapeutic work resonates with considerations of relational

dynamics in performance: ‘The therapist makes patterns and theorises, but they are also reflecting on the words that are spoken, how they are delivered – in a staccato fashion, or flatly, or stop and start – and how the words, once spoken, affect the speaker and the therapist themselves... just as words reveal so, too, can they obscure, and this gets us to the listening and feeling part of the therapy’ (Orbach, 2018).

ii *Perfect 10* was a site specific performance and installation by Emilia Telese exhibited at Leeds City Art Gallery in 2006, Rochester Gallery in 2010 and subsequently shown as a video documentary piece at the Endangered Species Summit, Royal Festival Hall, London and Buenos Aires, Argentina. In it, the artist made use of over 1500 items of make up and grooming implements collected by her between 1990 and 2006. The work deals with body image obsession and the concept of ‘fitting in’ by trying to achieve unattainable ideals of beauty perpetrated by contemporary media.

iii Following changes in government, this campaign continues to exist under the name ‘Be Real’, although its partnership with cosmetics company Dove, and brief dalliance with ‘life-style’ programme Slimming World, are testimony of the troubled relationship between activism gone main-stream and the profit-focused aims of stakeholder industries.

iv The campaign was initiated by the BALANCE Eating Disorders Treatment Centre in NYC.

v The UK chapter of Endangered Bodies, convened by Orbach until 2017, is called AnyBody UK. The confusing proliferation of names bears testament to the organic growth of a movement: AnyBody was first founded by Orbach and colleagues Jo Harrison, Karishma Chugani, Althea Greenan, Mary Jayne Rust, Natasha Harvey and others in 2002, as a lobbying group and blog site (now archived by the British Library). As other groups across the globe joined, the name AnyBody became problematic as it is also used by American pro-life activists, and so while the UK group retains the name locally, the global organization is now titled Endangered Bodies.

vi The work of writer, editor and body activist Sharon Haywood, based in Argentina, merits particular mention here, as a galvanizer and particular inspiration for the continuing work of the organization.

vii Entwistle and Wissinger argue that ‘the effort required to keep up appearances is very much emotional and feelingful *as well as* physical and aesthetic’ (2006: 786, emphasis in original). For the actor this includes all manner of practices that will help them achieve an appearance likely to yield commercial success: ‘These might range from changes in hair-style and -colour or use of make-up through to more intrusive practices, such as diets that induce weight-loss or weight-gain, fitness regimes to build muscle which may be accompanied by protein-shakes or steroids, plastic surgery, Botox injections, skin-whitening or tanning, and re-shaping of the teeth’ (Mitchell, 2014: 65)

viii An example of such activism is the UK organization Tonic Theatre, which ‘supports the arts, theatre and creative industries to achieve greater gender equality and diversity in their work and workforces’ (Tonic Theatre, 2011).

ix As Jordan Kisner points out, in the United States narratives of self-care can be traced back to ‘puritanical values of self-improvement and self-examination’ and their use to justify who is or is not an ‘unfit citizen’ (2017). In the twentieth century this was countered by a reclaiming of the term by the oppressed, as in Audre Lorde’s statement that ‘Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare’ (1988). These two narratives continue to co-exist in constant tension with one another.

x Although their discussion focuses on the particular historical moment of the women’s movement in the 1970s, many aspects raised continue to be relevant today.

xi The consensus on what constitutes a ‘healthy’ diet is of course in itself contested, and is entangled with issues of attainability and class. As Orbach writes in 2018, ‘When you grow up absorbing the idea that food is quasi dangerous it is hard to know how to handle it. And there are no end of experts selling their wares whose books and products end up generating enormous profits’ (Orbach, 2018).

xii The movement involved individuals who have experienced sexual assault or harassment responding with the hashtag or phrase ‘Me Too’ as a sign of solidarity and to highlight the endemic nature of such experiences. The discourse and activism evolving from this has led to a number of activist developments, including the Time’s Up movement (Time’s Up, 2017).

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