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Swimming in Histories of Gender Oppression: Grupo XIX de Teatro's *Hysteria*

Hysteria, first performed in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2001, was assembled from oral histories, medical cases, records, and remnants documenting the lives of Brazilian women from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were incarcerated in Rio de Janeiro's Pedro II Institute. Its UK premiere in 2008, performed by the all-female cast of the Brazilian Grupo XIX de Teatro, included a setting of the show in the old Victoria Baths in Manchester. In this article Elaine Aston identifies ways in which *Hysteria* keeps open or re-opens the question of feminist liberation. Exploring the show's critique of Western feminism's claims to independence and liberation, her analysis moves towards a mode of *interdependent* feminist thinking through which liberation might be realized. Elaine Aston is Professor of Contemporary Performance at Lancaster University and editor of *Theatre Research International*. Her most recent publications include *Feminist Views on the English Stage* (2003); *Feminist Futures: Theatre, Performance, Theory* (edited with Geraldine Harris, 2006); *Staging International Feminisms* (edited with Sue-Ellen Case, 2007); and *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary (Women) Practitioners* (with Geraldine Harris, 2008).

PICTURE THIS. An indoor, public bathing pool dating back to 1906 stands empty. Semi-decayed, semi-restored, the pool is breathtakingly awesome. Clinical, cream, ceramic tiles that are stained with age and disuse line the sides of the empty pool. Grass-green striped tile insets draw the eye downwards from the shallow to the deep end. The ceiling is high and vaulted, lets in light through glass panels, and distorts voices into echoes and after-word babbles of sound. A stained glass window to one apex suggests a church, but instead of pews there are viewing balconies, and, at ground level, two ranks of individual, blue changing cubicles.

It is by the side of this empty pool, one of three pools housed in the Victoria Baths in Manchester (North-West England), that the audience gathered for the UK premiere of *Hysteria* in June 2008 by the Brazilian theatre company Grupo XIX de Teatro from São Paulo.¹ The Victoria Baths was one of two performance sites for the company's visit,² and for some local audience members gaining access to the baths (restricted during the

current restoration works to the building) was arguably a huge attraction. In my own case, I was interested in seeing how a performance drawn from women's oppression in Brazil, where sex and race discrimination have been the focus of feminist and other social protest groups,³ would play in a UK context where feminism can no longer claim to be a high-profile movement and where feminist theatre is, as one *Guardian* article and theatre blog headlined around the time of *Hysteria*'s UK visit, a 'scarce commodity'.⁴

In the early 1990s, Janelle Reinelt suggested how a 'feminist critique' is a 'second skin, which goes everywhere' and is, therefore, something that 'cannot be put on and taken off again like a critical coat every time the scholar goes calling on a new topic'.⁵ However, as a 'second skin, which goes everywhere' feminism arguably needs to shed and grow new layers – most especially, perhaps, in the current climate of a post-feminism backlash which threatens to skin feminism of its political bite;⁶ makes it difficult to re-create attachments to feminism as a political

movement; and renders feminist theatre 'a scarce commodity'.

Given all this, the purpose of this article is to examine in what ways and on what terms *Hysteria*, sourced as it is from histories of Brazilian women's oppression, intersects with contemporary women's (and men's) lives in an English performance context and is able to reignite a community of feminist ideas and interests.

Methodologically, this involves a return to a style of 'feminist critique' that was instrumental in shaping the first wave of feminism and theatre scholarship, where theatre and performance were looked to as a means of 'doing' or 'creating' feminist ideas and ideas about feminism. At the same time, this mode of enquiry is renewed and reinvigorated through *Hysteria's* border crossings between the show's Brazilian origins and English staging. Ultimately it serves to critique Western feminism's claims to independence and liber-

ation, and to advocate feminisms of *interdependence* as the 'skins' of differently located women's experiences, lived and imagined, past and present, touch, affect, and interact with each other.

Hysteria in its Manchester Setting

Back at the poolside it is explained to the assembling audience that the performance will take place further into the building complex. In its day the Victoria Baths was a huge public facility, housing not just the three pools but also wash baths (very few ordinary homes had their own baths in the early 1900s), Turkish baths, and laundry amenities. Looking through the windows off this first pool, which afforded glimpses of other parts of the building, combined with reading up on the baths and checking out their website, I was able to clarify that the pool by which we entered was the gala/first-

Setting in the Victoria Baths, Manchester, for Grupo XIX de Teatro's production of *Hysteria*. Photo: Adalberto Lima.





Photos: Adalberto Lima.

class pool for men, and the performance site, lying beyond this, was in what was originally the men's second-class pool, floored over in the 1980s, and far less lavish than the first-class pool. Each pool had a separate entrance so at the point of entry swimmers were segregated by sex and, in the case of the men, also by class. Women, as it were, were classed as one 'race'. Mixed bathing was only introduced in 1914 and 'with great caution'.⁷

Waiting at the poolside before the show begins, the space works its own magic – its own *punctum*. Empty of water, the baths evoke a pool of emotions and memories; imaginings of what it must have been like to be there or, for some, memories of having

been there.⁸ Public (museum) memories of the baths are also on display, making visible the gendered histories of the building. For example, the grand staircase to the first-class pool for men is visible through a viewing panel, while collected in one corner of the baths are memorabilia from the wash house that was run by women.⁹

This sex-segregated public bathing history is evoked in the opening ritual of *Hysteria* in which the audience, much like earlier generations of bathers, are divided into men-only and women-only groups (to the visible consternation of some mixed couples). Taking charge of the audience, a nurse ushers the men into the performance space before the women. When the women get to enter, the men are already seated together and are separated off from the main performance area in a conventional, end-on viewing arrangement.

Four performers, playing the female inmates of a nineteenth-century asylum, are in position, 'locked up' in the space, and help the nurse to cajole and manoeuvre the women into a circular arrangement around the main acting area in the centre of the floored-over pool. The performance then proceeds to unfold in an interactive mode as fragments from the lives of the female 'hysterics' are shared with responses, experiences, and stories drawn from the women, but never the men, in the audience.

Silencing the men and empowering women to give voice to inequalities arguably originated in the company working out of Brazilian histories of sex discrimination that would speak to their audiences in São Paulo. Performing *Hysteria* outside of Brazil, however, assumes that a hierarchical gender divide of male supremacy and female subordination will be effective and affective in other national contexts. *Hysteria's* style of interaction (to which I shall return in some detail later on) is crucial to dialoguing with women who are *local* to the performance, wherever it is sited. This allows them, their lives and experiences, to become a part of show, rather than risk a colonizing set-up in which the performance is perceived to be about the suffering of some distant, 'primitive', 'others'. At the

same time, siphoning archival traces of female suffering into the figure of the hysteric is a strategy that points to the hierarchical, male–female divide as a widely occurring, *global* phenomenon.

Iconography of the Hysteric

A familiar figure in women’s theatre in the West,¹⁰ the hysteric functions as a universalizing container for the repressed, silenced histories of female suffering. The body of the hysteric is a repository of trauma, a ‘foreign body’ that medical male others have sought to read and to colonize.¹¹ As part of their devising process, Grupo XIX researched material on *la grande hystérie* of Charcot’s Salpêtrière clinic in nineteenth-century Paris, where female hysterics re-presented the symptoms of what Elaine Showalter has termed their ‘female malady’.¹² Drawing on Charcot’s treatment of the ‘female malady’ as a point of reference for their work, the company developed a performance register rooted in the iconography of *la grande hystérie*: a corporeal language of female suffering that affords a visual translation of gender oppression.¹³

While the corporeal iconography of hysteria also translates or ‘speaks’ across cultural contexts, performing the female hysteric can, then, run the risk of re-presenting the hysteric as a universalizing stand-in for all wrongs or harms done to women, or of re-creating the hysteric as a spectacularized and fetishized object of curiosity. As feminist and post-colonial theorist Sara Ahmed cautions, to transform a hurt or ‘wound into an identity is problematic’ on account of the ways in which this risks cutting ‘the wound off from a history of “getting hurt” or injured’, or of sensationalizing stories of pain into a ‘media spectacle’.¹⁴

Countering this risk in *Hysteria* was the group’s shift away from the focus on a single figure of a named ‘star’ hysteric and their creation of an ensemble performance of hysteria histories.¹⁵ Further, locked up in the show’s grand narrative of ‘female malady’ were the histories of hysterics *local* to the Brazilian context of the show’s making; the

sourcing of the performance from oral histories, medical cases, records, and remnants documenting the lives of Brazilian women from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries incarcerated in Rio de Janeiro’s Pedro II Institute.¹⁶

De-fetishizing the body of the hysteric from its ‘treatment’ within the male medical gaze, presenting hysteria across multiple bodies rather than contained within one, famous case-study-body, *Hysteria* recovers, remembers the histories of ‘wounding’ done to the Brazilian asylum community; it creates the possibility for these stories to be heard. The show’s spectrum of collective hysterical suffering is wide-ranging, encompassing the lives of those oppressed by domestication, those who suffered from a lack of education, or those women classed as ‘deviant’ on



account of their desires to live social, cultural, and sexual lives outside the terms which men dictated to them. Trawled from history, these life stories speak to a contemporary *machismo* that in turn resonates beyond a South American context.

Opening up these hysteria-histories of 'getting hurt' creates, in sum, a politicizing space in the performance for making connections to the symptoms or 'wounds' of gender. As previously explained, substituting the Manchester Baths for the original site of incarceration in Brazil means that the performance also swims in local histories of class and gender. And standing empty and disused, the baths atmospherically conjure a heightened sense of clinical incarceration.

A Pre-Feminist Space

All of this works to foster the idea of a non-liberated or pre-feminist space. The nineteenth-century Brazilian asylum setting and the space of the baths both strip its women's audience of privilege, freedom, or liberation. As female spectators join with the female performers, all women are locked in together and colonized as the abject other, subjected and subjugated to male systems of power and surveillance. No woman can leave. No woman is liberated.

As the feminist ground slips away beneath my feet, I am forced to reflect on just how far Western feminism has succeeded in liberating women from the systems of male privilege and power it set out to transform. If 'feminism begins with a keen awareness of exclusion from male cultural, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse', as Jill Dolan argues, 'and ends', as Janelle Reinelt adds, 'with a resolve to radically change those circumstances', just how far has feminism succeeded in its critique, challenge, and transformation of 'those circumstances' of male privilege?¹⁷ Just how liberated are 'we'?

If I ask this question of young women in my theatre classes today they are generally in very little doubt that they are truly liberated from the past oppressions of male privilege. More often than not their initial response to feminism tends to be: 'We are

past, post, all that. That was your time, not ours; your struggle, not ours. Feminism will not get under this skin. We are beyond all that.'¹⁸ What this kind of response endorses is a buying into the idea that feminism is no longer needed. As Ahmed explains:

the feminist hope for a gender-free world has been cruelly translated into a post-feminist vision of a present in which gender has been overcome, a neo-liberal vision in which it is assumed that gender, as with other forms of power, no longer makes a difference. In this vision of the present, women are not oppressed; feminism is no longer necessary; and so on.¹⁹

However, the declaration of 'independence' – in Ahmed's words of a 'post-feminist vision of a present in which gender has been overcome' – is one that *Hysteria* contests. Inviting us to think otherwise, it finds performance strategies designed to keep open the question of women's liberation in and for the contemporary moment.

In this regard *Hysteria's* situating of the men in the audience as an absent-present viewing body serves to mark the socio-symbolic sight/site of privileged male looking in which the female is relegated to abject, objectified other. As men have no choice but to take up this viewing position, with whatever discomfort or disquiet this creates, just as the female spectators have no choice but to be 'locked up', they are forced to occupy the position of male privilege.

Here, too, the baths play a part. For while the baths provided a public facility of benefit to working-class households, at the same time, as an opulent, lavish 'water palace', it stood as a monument to civic pride, national prosperity, and empire-building.²⁰ For the semi-detached, on-looking men in the audience to feel the effects of the historical power of class and sex privilege pressing on the show's critique of male supremacy, is to open up the space for critical reflection on past-present gender oppression. As one male reviewer described, 'We men are not really present, we are spectators on sufferance.' The experience 'for the watching males' involves a 'questioning' of men's 'attitudes today'.²¹

As there are no male oppressors in the show itself – no Augustine's Charcot, no Dora's Dr Freud²² – the male viewers are stand-ins for the patriarchal regulation of women's lives. However, also standing in for or occupying the site of male authority is the figure of the nurse. The performance strategy of having a female figure occupy and attempt to uphold the regime of male power ('attempt', because the nurse often fails to keep the women under control and is also pushed towards a self-critical interrogation of the role she occupies) warns of the oppressive roles women may play in upholding systems of male power and privilege.

This point is forcefully made in a one-to-one moment of performance contact. The nurse, circling the women in the audience, checks for head lice. As she works around the outer circle of women where I am seated, I know that she is coming to me, and years of those regular primary school head checks for dreaded infestations have left their mark. The nit nurse is a personal childhood terror. My turn comes and it is an intimate moment of contact as my skin, my head, is touched.

The hands on my scalp surprise me by a touch that caresses rather than castigates. Whispered into my ear is the news that I am clean, not infected. I have been touched by what feels like affection but my body has also been surveyed and judged in that act of touching. It is a visceral moment of reckoning in which I am made to feel the damaging effects of women's complicity in upholding the discourses of male privilege and of how this, in turn, negates the contact women might find through or with each other.

Moreover the performers' mix of skin colours – those playing the hysterics appear to be lighter skinned than the nurse, a reminder of the complex histories of racial discrimination and categorization in Brazil – also suggests how working through the differences between women in the interests of breaking the hegemonic hold on male supremacy represents a challenge.²³ Attention to this comes in another one-on-one moment of contact as one of the hysterics chooses a woman from the audience to be her special friend. This is an improvised 'act' of friend-

ship where similarities and differences are an unknown quantity and are mutually explored in the moment of befriending performed to the onlooking audience of women and men.

To be liberated from oppressive gender regimes requires, then, the negotiation of differences between women and the participation of both sexes.²⁴ Further, in the interests of what Sue-Ellen Case describes as feminist theatre's capacity to create a 'subject who is liberated from the repressions of the past and capable of signalling a new age for both women and men', it is necessary, *Hysteria* suggests, to keep open the histories of gender oppression as a means of exploring the contemporary conditions of women's social, sexual, cultural, and political marginalization, and of interrogating the idea that Western feminism has fulfilled, rather than has yet to fulfil, its promise of women's liberation.²⁵

Evidencing this claim was an article published a week after the Manchester performances of *Hysteria* in which Kira Cochrane, women's editor for the *Guardian*, chimes with *Hysteria's* contestation of liberation, writing 'that [feminist] arguments we thought were long-won have been reopened, rights we thought were settled are suddenly under threat'. Backing up Cochrane's article are numerous statistics and reports that variously testify to male acts of violence against women in the UK, including, for instance, the fact that 'three of the most important women's charities in the UK' dedicated to the support of female victims of violence 'have a combined income considerably lower than that of the Donkey Sanctuary'.²⁶

From Independence to Interdependence

Absorbing the fact that I would be better cared for as a donkey (presumably of either sex) than if I were a woman in urgent need of protection from male violence in the UK, I return to *Hysteria's* strategies for critiquing post-feminism's claim to oppressive gender regimes as already undone or overcome. As the show performs an idea of gender wrongs as yet to be righted, it moves to explore what

kinds of feminist attachments are needed to bring about an end to gender oppression.

Eschewing the 'de-gendering' politics of 1970s and 1980s feminism, which Ahmed describes as 'at best naive',²⁷ and sidestepping the liberal, liberationist style of Western feminism, exposing its failure to fulfil the promise of liberation, *Hysteria* gestures towards the idea that feminist liberation, previously declared as a state of 'independence' (from oppressive gender regimes), might instead be (re)conceived as an interdependent move towards others (against oppressive gender regimes). Here too Ahmed's explanations of the conditions under which a 'feminist "we" becomes affective' is helpful:

Through the work of listening to others, of hearing the force of their pain and the energy of their anger, of learning to be surprised by all that one feels oneself to be against; through all of this, a 'we' is formed, and an attachment is made. This is a feminist attachment and an attachment to feminism. . . . One moves towards others, others who are attached to feminism, as a movement away from that which we are against. Such movements create the surface of a feminist community.²⁸

The feminist community that *Hysteria* might similarly be said to create in the space of the performance is arrived at by the 'moves towards others' as moves away from gender oppression, presented as that which is yet to be undone.

Although 'moves towards others' can of course be claimed for the 'de-gendering' activities of second-wave feminism (and feminist theatre), what was not then significantly addressed was the way in which Western feminism moved towards some women more than others; established its own apartheid of 'first' and 'third' world feminisms; created its own centre and periphery in which, as Ahmed explains in *Strange Encounters*, 'third-world women come to define not simply what Western women are not (and hence what they are), but also *what they once were*, before feminism allowed Western women to be emancipated'.²⁹

In its evocation of a pre-emancipated state in which all women are required to inhabit the asylum space of the colonized female other, *Hysteria* removes the Western feminist

'sight' of privilege from which it is possible to look down on as-yet-to-be-liberated female others; it refuses the idea of 'primitive' states as yet-to-become feminist. Moving away from the colonizing impulse of an 'us and them who might become us' sort of feminism, *Hysteria* instead proposes a mode of non-hierarchical, improvised participation between women as performers and as spectators that figures the way in which feminism needs to be an open rather than a closed 'text' created by all others, rather than being predetermined, pre-scripted in its Western form or image.

Susan Leigh Foster, in her article 'Improvising/History', explains how the practice of improvisation

draws viewers into what Roland Barthes has called a 'writerly' relationship to the performance text. No longer the passive consumers of what is presented as performance, they become engaged, along with the performers in developing the form of the event.³⁰

In the moment of improvisation, Foster elaborates, 'the fact that performers don't know what they are going to do next draws the viewers' attention to *their decision-making process*. It encourages viewers as well as performers to reflect on, at the same time that they attend to, *what they are doing*'. 'Viewers' along with the performers are 'open to the flow of events and also *critically engage* with that going'.³¹

A Writerly Relationship

By analogy, *Hysteria's* interactive, semi-improvisatory mode is one that takes up a 'writerly' relationship to questions of gender oppression, and encourages performers and spectators 'in developing the form' future feminisms might take. Feminism is not then pre-scripted; it lies in the domain of the yet to be 'written', or perhaps, more accurately, in the collaborative task of the yet to be 're-written'.

Given that *Hysteria* is constructed to allow for women spectators to take an active part in the performance – for instance, to be interrogated (nicely) about their personal lives by



From Grupo XIX de Teatro's production of *Hysteria*. Photo: Adalberto Lima.

the performers – this means that each interacts with and observes the stories of the other. The conventional theatre-viewing arrangement in which the actor performs for the spectator is rearranged (between women) so that the female spectator who views is encouraged to become a participant (to speak), while, at other times, the female performer switches to the role of observer (of listener). The boundaries, so clearly demarcated in the theatre of hysteria between physician and patient, are blurred, at the same time as this undoes Western feminism's tendency to give voice to one, universalizing feminist subject empowered to speak for all non-liberated, female 'others'. 'One' does not presume to speak for the 'other': each listens and each speaks.

Although the hierarchy of performer and spectator is not strictly undone, given the need for the performers to stay in control of the show which is partly scripted, nevertheless, the performed mutuality of participation and observation, of speaking and listening, between women performers and spectators

suggests a collaborative, interactive mode in which self-discovery is not independent of the other, but is interdependently explored with and through others.

As *Hysteria* draws its female spectators into acts of improvisation, it encourages rebellious behaviour – acts of breaking out of the male rules and regulations governing the space. For example, the nurse's authority is challenged as her diary (asylum notebook) gets stolen by one performer and is passed to a spectator who, complicit in the rebellion, keeps the book hidden. Other moments of disobedience are characterized by a more celebratory mode as women spectators are caught up with the performers in moments of forbidden laughter or dance.

In This Together

Such moments are not only markers of the utopian – 'What if we were free, liberated from systems of the governance of male power and privilege?' – but also reminders of an idea of liberation premised not on indi-

vidual self-empowerment, but as a collective feminist politics and praxis of being in and getting out of this together.

As the show locks the lives of the women from its contemporary Manchester audience into the Brazilian stories of oppression, it underlines the idea that 'we' are all in this together. A crucial question which Ahmed asks, however, is what kind of encounter it takes to build a feminist community that is not a 'new "community of strangers"' – one in which some women are still marked as stranger than others?³² For Ahmed the answer lies in the necessity of working to get closer to others, even while 'pure proximity' is unattainable:

It is through getting closer, rather than remaining at a distance, that the impossibility of pure proximity can be put to work, or made to work.³³

In this respect, *Hysteria's* practice of politicizing the act of translation is one that can be argued as embodying the labour of a feminist community-in-the-making. The lived realities of nineteenth-century Brazilian women out of which the performers shape their characters are delivered in English which is not the native language of the performers. Portuguese-speaking, the company spent a year learning English for their UK performances; and before the performance begins we are instructed that if we know some Portuguese we are not to help the performers out by using this to assist them in a moment when they may not fully understand a response from the audience. The effect of this is to emphasize the labour involved in working to get closer to others, whilst allowing for the idea that a complete understanding is an impossibility.

The Portuguese-speaking performer speaking in English importantly marks her racial difference from the hegemonic hold of the English language – the language in which she must speak to be heard outside her national context. Speaking English, she 'foreignizes', makes strange, the anglophone-dominated systems of international communication by marking her different relationship to it. In turn this demands an act of careful listening.

English reviewers of the show, however, frequently complained of an inability to understand the accented English of the 'other'. However, this imperialist criticism of 'incredibly thick accents', which judges the performers' ability to speak 'proper' English, is deaf to the way in which the act of translation sets up important, ideological markers of difference.³⁴ This kind of response belies the politicizing affects of a careful listening in which otherwise it is possible to hear, feel, and be moved by the accented voice which speaks: 'I cannot become you; "we" are not "one". There can be no "pure proximity"'. The distance between you and me cannot be completely removed. In your language, culture, I cannot be fully understood by you. But as I move closer to you and you listen, labour carefully towards understanding me, we may not be so very far apart.' Or to put this in Ahmed's terms, this figures a transnational feminist encounter in which, importantly, it is not about confirming community or commonality, but of 'remaking *what it is that we may yet have in common*'.³⁵

To 'Perform with Love'

Exploring gender oppression in the spirit of friendly enquiry, seeking to know rather than presuming to know others, *Hysteria* works to avoid the dangers of creating a new community of strangers and moves towards a community of renewed feminist interests.

There is one further tactic in this renewal of feminist attachments and attachments to feminism that deserves a final comment. Promoting the company's visit to the UK, Paul Heritage, director of the People's Palace Projects at Queen Mary, University of London and responsible for initiating the UK premiere of *Hysteria*, explains how the company 'perform with love'.³⁶ He makes this observation as a corrective to the idea that 'didactic or divisive' might inform expectations of the performance, given the show's subject matter, the all-female cast, and the much publicized male/female audience divide.³⁷

But to 'perform with love' also signals affection as important to the feminist attachment-making process. It would be naive to

interpret this as love being, in the words of the Beatles song, 'all you need' to overcome the gender inequalities and social injustices which *Hysteria* marks as in need of radical transformation. However, while contesting love as 'the foundation for political action', Ahmed admits that 'love might come to matter as a way of describing the very affect of solidarity with others in the work that is done to create a different world'.³⁸

In the case of *Hysteria*, the 'affect of solidarity' resides in the show's affectionate, attachment-making labour that is intimately tied to the vision of a less gender 'divisive' future. As the show keeps open, or reopens, the histories of past oppressions, it persuades of the need for both sexes to love the vision of a 'different [less oppressive] world', and challenges the post-feminist vision of 'independence' as it gestures towards an interdependent mode of feminist politics through which such a vision might be realized. It is then, and only then, *Hysteria* suggests, that feminism's promise of liberation may yet be fulfilled.

Notes and References

With thanks to Carl Lavery for sharing thoughts on *Hysteria*, to Mark O'Thomas for assisting with the script and with Portuguese, and to Paul Heritage for negotiating the photographs.

1. *Hysteria* was first performed in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2001. Since then it has been regularly revived in Brazil and in other countries, including Portugal, France, and Africa (Cape Verde). The theatre company grew out of the Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of São Paulo.

2. The other venue was the Great Hall at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

3. For an overview, see, for example, Peggy A. Lovell, 'Gender, Race, and the Struggle for Social Justice in Brazil', *Latin American Perspectives*, XXVII, No. 6 (November 2000), p. 85–103.

4. See <www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/jun/04/feministtheatreisascarce>.

5. Janelle Reinelt, in Reinelt and J. R. Roach, ed., *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 227.

6. The decline of feminism as a movement and the post-feminist backlash is widely rehearsed in a range of critical literatures. For an overview in a feminist theatre context see Janelle Reinelt, 'Navigating Postfeminism: Writing Out of the Box', in Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, ed., *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 17–33.

7. See <www.victoriabaths.org.uk/history.htm>. The Victoria Baths website offers an illustrated history of the baths and panoramic images of the baths as they are today.

8. On open days, when it is possible to visit the Baths during the restoration works, visitors are invited to leave a note of their memories for archival purposes.

9. Originally the wash house was designed for laundering the towels at the Baths but later served as a public laundry for local working-class women.

10. See Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma, and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

11. See Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), Chapter 4, 'Jean-Martin Charcot's Vampires', p. 191.

12. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Virago Press, 1985).

13. See Showalter, *The Female Malady*, Chapter 6, 'Feminism and Hysteria', for illustrations and discussion of *la grande hystérie*.

14. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 32.

15. Several of Charcot's female patients became celebrity figures, including, for example, Blanche Wittmann, 'Queen of the Hysterics', or the 'most frequently photographed' Augustine (see Showalter, p. 148, p. 152). In turn, these and other famous female hysterics have been chosen as subjects in feminist theatre such as *Portrait of Dora* (Hélène Cixous, 1979); *Dr Charcot's Hysteria Shows* (Lenora Champagne, 1987–9); *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* (Anna Furse, 1991).

16. Of the four female hysterics, Maria Tourino (played by Sara Antunes) and 'M J' (played by Juliana Sanches), are characters based on the lives of two women documented in the archives from the asylum. Further, Grupo XIX's policy is to make shows that detail the lives of ordinary women and men from different historical periods.

17. Janelle Reinelt, *Critical Theory and Performance*, p. 225. Dolan is quoted by Reinelt at the same point of reference.

18. On younger women's negative responses to feminism see also Janelle Reinelt 'Navigating Feminism: Writing Out of the Box', in Aston and Harris, *Feminist Futures?*, p. 17–33 (p. 20), and in the same collection, Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, 'Curious Feminists', p. 56–70 (p. 57).

19. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 186.

20. In 1906, the year in which the Victoria Baths were opened, for example, details of the 1901 census of the British Empire were published showing that Britain ruled approximately one-fifth of the world.

21. Howard Loxton, *Hysteria* review, *The British Theatre Guide* <www.britishtheatreinfo.info/reviews/hysteriaHL-rev.htm>.

22. A juxtaposition of the famous print of Charcot presenting and lecturing on the female hysteric to an audience of men with production photographs of *Hysteria* which capture the female audience's gaze on the actress-hysterics makes for an insightful point of comparison, marking the male, medical gaze as an absent presence critiqued by the presence of watching women.

23. See Lovell, 'Gender, Race, and the Struggle for Social Justice in Brazil', p. 90, on how *branco* (white), *pardo* (brown), and *preto* (black) are used to construct

'social definitions of skin colour', and her overview of how the protests against sexism and racism that emerged in Brazil in the late 1970s sought to find common cause (p. 87).

24. The show's concern to involve both sexes in a resistance to women's oppression may arguably have a bearing on the way in which *Hysteria*, while an all-women performance, has a male director, Luis Fernando Marques. In the UK context of second-wave feminist theatre and performance this would have been widely regarded as an inconceivable directorial choice.

25. Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988, reissued edition 2008), p. 132.

26. Kira Cochrane, *Guardian*, 1 July 2008 <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/01/gender.women>.

27. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 186.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

29. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others and Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 165.

30. Susan Leigh Foster, 'Improvising/History', in W. B. Worthen and P. Holland, ed., *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 196–212 (p. 196).

31. *Ibid.* My emphases.

32. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 6.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

34. See Andrew Haydon's review at <www.culturewars.org.uk/2008-06/hysteria.htm>.

35. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 181. Emphasis in the original.

36. Quoted in Nigel Wrench, 'Brazil. Theatre. A Hospital', <www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/pm/2008/06/brazil_theatre_a_hospital.shtml>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 140.