

Jeremy Wade
in conversation with Mary Love Hodges

Mary Love Hodges: Hi Jeremy. Let's get started... your new work, *there is no end to more*, focuses on Japanese "cute" culture and its underlying grotesque elements.

Jeremy Wade: Correct.

Mary: It was commissioned by Japan Society—how did that relationship come about?

Jeremy: Yoko [Shioya] asked if I was interested in Japanese culture and my first thought was, I'm interested in *manga* and *kawaii* aesthetics or cute aesthetics.... I think Yoko chose me because of the relationship between my work and possibly butoh. I think there's a similarity there in terms of a ecstatic body, grotesque body—a kind of detailed, extreme physicality. And I mean, I think she pretty much knows that I never actually studied butoh. She just made some connections and had been following my work.

Mary: So the concept for the piece was all yours?

Jeremy: Of course. The commission was specific in that it somehow has to deal with Japanese culture, and it included support for one month of research in Japan. So we really began this piece with the idea of *kawaii* and *manga*, and the piece is now really a television show for children. But it's not for children. It's really kind of a sad and fucked up television show for children.

Mary: I noticed that there's no choreographer credit for the work—could you talk about the role of movement in the piece?

Jeremy: Sure. The movement. I guess I have put choreographer in the background in the credits. First and foremost it's a collaboration with my friend Jared Gradinger. I am directing, but I really tried to empower him and allow him to make his own material, and then put it through the filter of all the scores that I use in my work. The material was originally conceived through a very loooong string of Authentic Movement sessions, and because of the nature of the piece, because there is one hour of text, there is one hour of video, there's one hour of sound—and movement—and we're dealing with this kind of endless, infinite more, we're dealing with the relationship to the body and the untenable, we're dealing with man as he's kind of traveling through his life. We ended up really working and surrounding this idea of unrecognizable singularities. That became really important for us with the movement, and as a result the whole piece is created through Authentic Movement, but through these singular positions.

Now, you can't necessarily see that in the choreography as some of the positions have turned into a more flowing subjectivity, or some of them are very static. I had been working previously with a technique that I call "dropping." And dropping is basically, how can the subject, object, and context of the body change with the most minimal effort. I work very much on this plane of the body as emotional, behavioral, and physical, and I often try to shift this awareness. So at one point, you have this kind of gaseous, emotional body, and the next moment you have this very objective "claw" [*makes a lobster hand*] which resonates different things, and then you have a purely physical moment. So, it is within these singularities, this long, long chain of singularities, that we choreographed the piece. I think that the biggest reason for that is that the piece is loaded with text—and the text is very poetic, very associative. So it's starting with one idea, and then it's really pulling apart the threads until there's nothing left, or making these dream-like digressions. I didn't want to narrate this at *all* with the body, but at the same time, I wanted to create a relationship with text and movement that was generative. And so we did this via making a kind of free-floating phrase, and then free-floating text. And then as a result, what you see onstage is a kind of third space, in which the body is not illustrating the text, it's autonomous; and the mind [is] making or fitting the pieces together.

Mary: As in a kind of Cunningham/Cage relationship?

Jeremy: Not a Cunningham-Cage system. Slightly, in the fact that they don't go together, but it's incredibly chosen. It's not random at all, so it's done so quite specifically, but it doesn't illustrate the text.

Mary: You mentioned using scores as filters, and in your workshops you've been using "queer scores" as tools. What is a "queer score" and how do you use it in your work?

Jeremy: I think "otherness" is a big generative source for me. And I guess in theory, otherness helps us to pinpoint, possibly, who it is we are by who it is that we are not. As a result, for me, "queer scores" tap into what we inhibit—our antithesis—what we *don't* represent, and thus create infinite possibilities for the body. One example, in my workshops for instance, is traveling through various filters placed on top of Authentic Movement. So these filters might be moving from the impulse, inhibiting the impulse, moving from other impulses.

This whole idea of queer scores really came about to me via Yvonne Meier. She's a really big influence to me. And I think one of the biggest influences to queer scores might be this famous score of hers called the no-no list. And the no-no list is everything that you inhibit. So, it is messy, it is drunken, it is poorly done, it is effeminate, it is hysterical, it is sloppy. And those I relate to queer scores, because for a dancer, sloppy/messy/drunken—stuttering for an actor—that *is* "other." You know, modernism wants us to be clean, efficient, productive, virtuosic, perfect, so I get a lot of inspiration from going in the other direction.

Mary: Great.

Jeremy: Oh yeah, and you know, just one story that I often tell my students—I don't even know if it's true or not anymore, I heard it such a long time ago—that Kazuo Ohno used to work with his dancers and give them a jazz phrase. And he'd say, "Do it to the absolute best of your ability." And then he would say, "Do it badly." And I find this balance so important for a performer. And also so important for myself in order to heighten the awareness of the audience, to bring them through layers of aesthetics. For instance, in this new piece we're dealing with *kawaii*, and *kawaii* is interesting to me because it is a real grotesque bodily concept. If you make something a little bit too sweet it becomes grotesque: you eat one piece of candy and it's sweet, you eat a hundred pieces of candy and it's disgusting. So playing with these queer scores, playing with these aesthetics, helps us to kind of mutate what might seem normative, all the sudden becomes monstrous—the kind of "what lies beneath" the surface of this media we're in.

Mary: Can you talk about the collaborative relationship you had with the visual and video artists in this show?

Jeremy: Yeah, that's huge. This is the first time that I've worked with so much video and so much text, and the whole team is nine people. I mean, where to begin? The whole piece is basically storyboarded from beginning to end. That's one thing that I have never, ever done before. And the reason [for the storyboarding] is because it's so technical, and there's a serious timeline. We had to figure out how to communicate with each other via email, via uploading and downloading images from overseas— and the storyboarding is a result of that. It's actually a result of how to communicate the structure and the result to each other.

But as a contemporary dancer/choreographer, I think you're... yeah. You don't work with storyboards. [*laughs*] I work with index cards, and I work with video, but I've never *written* a piece from beginning to end. So, in one sense that was really terrifying, but in another, once you dive into the structure of the storyboard, and how the text is layered with the movement and with the sound, and you get very detailed, it is really exhilarating and inspiring.

So yeah, we had lots of ideas in the beginning, and of course, like 75% of it gets thrown out until you hone in on what the video is actually going to be, and who the characters are. All of the voices are spoken through Jared. And there are five character voices throughout the entire piece. And yeah, we honed in on like, what this thing sounds like, what it says, what image corresponds to this voice, and what's Jared doing onstage. So it's a lot.

Mary: Speaking of voices, you and Brendan Dougherty, who is doing the music for the new piece, are in a band.

Jeremy: Mm! Yes.

Mary: How's that going?

Jeremy: That's fantastic when we have time to be in a band. So we're not making a piece next year, partly due to the fact that I just want to take a break. And hopefully we'll be able to take a break. But especially after this piece, I'm really excited to take some writing classes, really explore more writing. My role in the band is that I sing and I write lyrics, and this makes me very happy.

Mary: Awesome. So, just to jump back a little here, I wanted to ask you about the *Politics of Ecstasy Festival* this past February. There's a clip on your website of you and Meg Stuart improvising at the festival, and it's also part of a longer film called *Urban Ballet* that will be screened at the *Dance On Camera Festival* in New York in early 2010... I'm just really interested in the whole communal environment, with people from so many disciplines involved, and how that really worked—what kind of experience people came away with?

Jeremy: Well, *Politics of Ecstasy* was a festival that I directed together with Meg Stuart, Eike Wittrock, and Pirkko Husemann, who is now the Director of Dance at the Hebble. I think for us, it was an opportunity to explore ecstasy on several different realms: the kind of ecstatic phenomenon of community, the phenomenon of dealing with a cultural construct, and how that can often shatter to pieces and create ecstatic moments. Spiritual ecstasy, literally club/drug ecstasy, shamanic trance religions, and also, I think most important for us was to investigate this idea of extreme presence, versus absence. And the two are kind of inseparable; one needs to have absence in order to have presence. But we just wanted to explore a kind of extreme presence in space.

Meg and I share a lot of similarities in terms of the bodies that we work with. We very much deal with ecstatic, grotesque, and maybe neoexpressionist bodies. So that was the purpose of the festival. And as far as inviting so many people from diverse backgrounds, they were all different manifestations of the ecstatic to us. For instance, DD Dorvillier's piece is highly conceptual, but really dealt with, to me, the phenomenology of ecstasy, the ecstasy of presence. That you could have kind of minute and delicate heightening of space, in relationship to, you know, Joel Ryan, who is basically like, a thunderous, if I can say, a thunderous contemporary composer. And Evan Parther.

We tried to create an interesting mix, and I think that one of the most successful aspects of the festival was this idea of creating a temporary community: how to nurture the ecstatic experience through food, through the kind of *satiation* of the audience, so to speak. And these were ideas and concepts that I was exposed to in New York nightclubs, but also really became important to me when working in Chez Bushwick. Because it was all about this really comfortable environment [in which] to then perceive this raw power—in our living room.

So, you know, we had big dinners, and we had durational performances.... I think Miguel's performance, *Freedom of Information*, this 24-hour durational piece, was, in a way, the most successful thing at the festival. Because, through time, he really—he shattered space. He really

affected people. And you know, people still come up to me and say, that was the most powerful thing in the whole festival.

Mary: Thanks. And then for your audiences, just to wrap it all together, do you think about a specific effect you want your work to create? These practices of extreme presence—can the audience walk away with a piece of that?

Jeremy: I hope that they're hijacked in a way that they don't necessarily have a choice. *[laughs]* You know? Like, I think there's a kind of obliteration that can occur through the theater. And that happens through sound and light; it happens through the chemical, energetic body onstage. And yeah, I definitely believe in this kind of reciprocal exchange within the theater. That through the surrender of the performer, through a kind of abandonment, the audience might open up to other realms of sensation, kind of heightened presence—or also can be just a heightened absence, you know, the emptiness in the black after the body is being kind of torn apart in front of their eyes. I mean, my work always deals with how to take the body apart. And I think that also is the same for the audience, is the same for the experience of the audience. That through dismemberment, through a kind of un-doing, they might be able to perceive different layers, shatter their own constructs, their own solid ideas. You know, I often say this, but the theater is the Church for presence. We arrive from our busy days, and the lights turn off. And we are exposed to one artist's or, in a collaboration, nine artists' vision of what presence is to them at that time in their life. And for me, it's always a combination of taking it apart in order to find it again, and then putting it back together and taking it apart.