

## The Staged Body

### Andrew Clarke @ INKA-Theatre, January

Andrew Clarke is a professional actor and theatre-maker from New Zealand who recently arrived in Berlin. He worked and trained for several years with New Zealand's longest running producer of experimental theatre, The Free Theatre of Christchurch. As part of the ensemble he helped develop several productions and offered socially-engaged and critical theatre to help rebuild some of the cultural life of Christchurch post-earthquake. From January 10th he will offer a weekly course in physical theatre entitled »The Staged Body« with INKA-Theatre Berlin.



*Claudia Lamas Cornejo: Hey Andrew, good to meet you again! Let's talk about the 10-weeks course you will offer, starting January 10, The Staged Body. What will participants gain or learn in this course?*

Andrew Clarke:

A lot of fun, and perhaps some new outlooks on theatre. The course is based on the ensemble-training of the Free Theatre. As exercises, we keep them quite diverse, so they develop organically with the ensemble, in response to the needs of the production at hand, or the performers. That said, at ground, they have unity. We want exercises that help us find a sense of group presence, as well as physical presence. We go to the body to find the life and sense of the work. So, we act a bit magpie-like and borrow ideas and exercises from people like Laban, Boal, Grotowski and Meyerhold. If it helps, we explore it. We don't keep any exercises for an ideological or theoretical purity. Better we remain curious, imaginative, asking questions.

*CLC: What is interesting to you about the methods of Meyerhold for example? Why did you choose them?*

AC: I'd say Meyerhold interests me because he really tried to bring theatre back to the theatre, to explore what was special about theatre. He had

trained with Stanislavsky, and had firsthand experience of the »System« and it's application to Realism, but felt both had drawbacks. And while it might seem deliberate contrariness to also explore Grotowski, who might seem to disagree on a few points with Meyerhold, Grotowski was also enamored with Stanislavsky, and like Meyerhold credited him with being a great influence, but nonetheless kept searching. They both began searching to find where the theatre began, and what the actor needed, or didn't need, to be able to perform. They both, in seemingly different ways, sought to cultivate presence and life.

*CLC: Who can attend or apply for your course?*

AC: ... anyone who is interested! It's about exploring body and voice, and text through the body, but really you only need attention to what is happening, and resting open to offers, to your partner's presence. To be democratic. It's not a course on virtuoso technique. Everybody and every body is different, and what is easy for some is hard for others and vice versa. But it's not about accomplishing a »difficult« thing. It's possibly more about trying to accomplish what for you yourself is difficult. What we work on, we don't work on for an »effect«, we try not to »affect« results, to perform

them »well«. We work on exercises actively to explore what they unlock, in us, in each other, in the process of doing them. I say exercises a lot but they can be seen as games too. It's not entirely a bad way to look at them. And the first day of the course, January 10th, is, of course, an open day, so please feel free to drop in and see where we start from, see how the course feels, what it's like working with each other. And hopefully, you will join in and search too.

*CLC: How did you find your way into physical theatre anyway?*

AC: Growing up, I wasn't exposed to much theatre beyond the idea of »talking heads behind the fourth wall«. I imagine, it's because film acting is what a lot of actors aspire towards, or, at least, see most often. The close up and mid shot sort of truncates, cuts up the actor. I mean, how often do you see a film actors feet? And film acting is »prestigious«. Film actors are 'successful'. So, »physical theatre« to me seemed even a little »cheap.« almost low-brow. But then, you have to ask: physical theatre as opposed to what? The Free Theatre of Christchurch as an ensemble showed me what else theatre can be. And what shocked me was, the performers were really there. They were present. From head to foot. The production stood



and held. There was no proscenium arch; all the usual decoration of theatre was lacking, but nonetheless it held my attention. I wanted to know what drew my attention. Why, even when they were still, I still wanted to watch. Asking, what next? What now? As the actors of the Free Theatre also made up the Theatre & Film faculty of Canterbury University, where I studied, I was exposed to an ideal combination of theory and practice. In my final year of study, I was invited to join the ensemble. With them, I began to think not of ›physical theatre‹ but simply theatre. I mean, you know, what else is there? Mental theatre? Literary theatre? Radioplays and audiobooks? The physical body, the physical voice, the physical word, in their training was the set-out point, the point of departure for productions.

*CLC: What is the most important thing for you in doing physical theatre?*

AC: Physical theatre – to get out of my head. Theatre: I'm still unsure about that, which isn't a bad thing I think. I think it's about something being

›extra-daily‹ or ›being the nail in the tyre‹. There's as many ways to say it as there are people. A different mode of thought, perhaps. And so leading, although not necessarily directly perhaps, to different outcomes, new ideas.. Living something here and concrete. Not a mentally abstracted idea of life (something that I fall into sometimes) but a tangible existential lived life. Something that can be shared. Theatre is about the presence of performer and the presence of the audience meeting, discussing, debating, wondering, dancing. Being there. When the performers are alive, it's a great offer to the audience to be alive too, and engage each other in this other mode of considering things. And, really, it's joyful. I get serious when I talk with words, words, words about it all, but in practice, whilst still serious, it's fun, serious fun. When it lives, everyone soars.

*Claudia Lamas Cornejo: Thank you for the interview!*

**The Staged Body**  
January 10th – March 14th  
Tuesdays, 8 – 10.15 pm

**Familienzentrum Mehringdamm**  
Mehringdamm 114  
Berlin-Kreuzberg

**Fee sliding scale:**  
140€ - 180€  
max. participants: 12

**Registration:**  
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