

One For One (2005)

I began working on *One For One* with an interest in America as a concept. There were several qualities about the way in which I could understand contemporary America and how it functions which interested me- I was interested first in the idea of the *State of Emergency* as a characterization of a dominant mode of American life. The sense of constant, immanent threat in which 'the enemy' becomes a vague, yet ever-present figure was an interest, and at the same time a problem in the sense of how to represent this. I worked through several possibilities- first with materials of emergency procedures, first-aid and life-saving practices, the idea being how could I approach this concept of America in an indirect way which wouldn't be didactic, but which could at the same time convey this sense of a hypochondriac body- one which is always already in a state of injury and threat, in need of saving and being saved, but for whom the injury is located topographically *nowhere*. At this point the piece was still conceived as a solo piece for another performer. But I chose after some weeks of working in this way on my own, to shift perspectives. The question was, how is it that rather than being restrictive and negative, that this characterization of the *State of Emergency* could be productive and ideologically positive- so not one in which a body is in a constant threat whose signs of distress are so multiple, so confused, and so shifting or super-imposed, that they become absurdly contradicting; and not a matter of an individual body and the conflicting signs which it produces as all-authentic (as in my solo *White Out*) but an environment whose neurosis seems more virtuosic than limiting; more hyper-productive than immobilizing.

In this stage of the process, I began to think of America's *State of Emergency* as the constant emergency to defend, and rather what would this mean when it would be the state of emergency as the constant emergency to *produce*. So how, rather than a negative could this concept be used productively, and how was it in the virtuosic body of America. This led me to thinking about competition and how this American body is also a body of constant competition-fear everywhere, but competition and production everywhere too - where it isn't just the enemy, but the competitor who is everywhere. Everywhere and at the same time nowhere- and this began to interest me very much, what it means when competition becomes more total and the sense of what it really for becomes more abstract.

I put myself into the project and asked a third performer to join. We began with questions like how to make a game where it would be clear that we were competing, but where it would be completely de-formalized, how to make scores of competition where the cause/effect relationship could be dismantled, where the winners could seem more and more arbitrary, and a sense that the game would speed up to convey more the sense of constant preoccupation and distraction, arbitrary yet constant measurements, continual multi-tasking, and eventually corruption. Although the first two weeks of our four-week research process we worked mostly in abstract languages, we eventually found that we needed a recognizable context in order to make the departure of these concepts clear.

Olympics became the context through which to necessitate this competitive activity, and to establish this community of freelance competitors who come together in to compete in every and anything. It became more interesting as we continued to create a space where we were teammates competing against each other, rather than characters naming Nations. It was really a question of what we could in fact speak of America, what there is left to be said of that environment to a liberal, theater-going public, and how much even implicating America in terms of international politics was of interest. We could name corruption proper in terms of 'jumping the gun' as a sort of metaphor for pre-emptive strike, with a sort of cheaters- always-win moral, and Olympics as the stand-in for symbolic global warfare where the ordering of international hierarchies (such as 1st, 2nd and 3rd World) are perhaps always pre-determined, implicit, and unjust. I think these are all accurately and implicitly related to this America question, but maybe more or less what we already know.

The question therefore became what is the sense of this environment beyond naming the *state of it*, in other words rather than naming the space as ‘unjust’ or ‘corrupt’ we began to ask what is the sense of corruption, how does it work on bodies, how does it become productive- because, after all it is incredibly productive- how does the behavior change as a space becomes corrupt.

What I became interested in later in the process is how competition subsumes its subjects, so how a competitive environment corrupts not because the rules were always arbitrary and therefore able to be broken or abused, or even because the players ceremoniously stride to the anthems of a Totalitarian State whether it be Nazi Germany or in this case North Korea, but hopefully more relevant to our own lives- because the competition is increasingly internalized- this means from distinctly other competition (against other nation, race etc.) to self-same (between increasingly homogenizing corporations which compete in the sale of self-similar products, to within professional contexts where colleagues are each others’ competitors, to individual practices in the so-called ‘society of control’ in which the individual becomes his own internalized competitor.) It has been interesting to explore this idea in the more recent developments of the piece in terms of how to express this external competition as becoming increasingly internalized, and this means as well the violence of competition, and how to convey these “Modern Games” (as they are declared in the opening of the Olympics) as a place where competition against other and self become virtually indistinguishable. If competition is the form through which human relations are now primarily operated, then the sense where the competitive body joins, finds its relation, its other via competition becomes the flip side of, however somehow related to the romantic ideal. In this case we desire, seek, and join a competitor. Of course competition is as well a binding relation; but what interests me about contemporary forms of competition is that the ideal of liberal-individualism becomes completely subsumed by the competitive ethic. Identity differences are, as we had hoped to achieve in identity politics, post-colonial studies, queer theory et al- erased, but only to be replaced by an identity-less competitive body.

Corruption then is not the state of one identity overcoming another by unjust means, but of identity as a mechanism of differencing, collapsing in on itself. Corruption is ultimately the blurring of what’s what, who’s who, who the enemy is, what really occurred, what were the causes and what are the effects.

In the final stage of the piece, the figure of law, determination, identification- the referee- continues his activity in a way in which the signs of ‘making the call’ multiply, while the actual competition becomes more impossible to read. The ‘report’ supercedes the ‘event’ and in the end it is a news report about an event which we can no longer know, it is a legal ruling whose evidence has been erased, it is an over-saturation of information and a simultaneous disappearance of meaning. This all gets culled into one of the most brilliant techniques of contemporary media- spin- in which the mass of information is so overproduced, so accelerated that its meaninglessness can be completely reformulated. This is what we see as the proliferation of meaningless reports/ referee calls start to turn into cheers from a cheerleader amongst the environment of blasts that could be celebratory fireworks or deadly explosions. In the end we don’t really care which it is or what it all should mean, because of course its hyper artificiality only makes us look for one thing- the big lights, big sounds, exciting movement: entertainment.

Written by Andros Zins-Browne, March, 2005