



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

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## WHAT ARE PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY PROBLEMS?

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Performance Philosophy Problems are problems that call to be addressed by and as performance philosophy. But even such a simple definition already names acts that could be considered problems of performance philosophy: problems of *calling*, problems of what it means to *address*, and the fundamental philosophical performance of the problem itself. How is a problem constituted, by whom, and under what circumstances? How do problems emerge, and what conditions of legibility are required? What are the stakes of calling problems into visibility? Do all problems require solutions, or might a problem be addressed differently?

This issue has its origins in such a call: a call for proposals for the organization's 2022 biennial conference, hosted by the Helsinki Theatre Academy. Deliberately broad, the call asked a wide field of artists and scholars of various disciplines (and *undisciplines*) to 'articulate the range of *performance philosophy problems*, whose treatment calls for dialogue and collaboration between philosophy and the performing arts' (Performance Philosophy 2021). Again, such a call names still other problems: problems of *articulation*, problems of *dialogue* and *collaboration*, which were shared in the conference, and further developed in this issue, in ways that ask us to think not only about *what* we articulate but *how*.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of form, including the forms used within an academic conference. Over several iterations, Performance Philosophy biennials have invited contributors to experiment with form, including lecture-performances, "no paper" presentations, workshops, and hybrid panels. These formats, and especially those introduced at the Helsinki

biennial, are discussed more fully in Caroline Wilkins' ReView in this issue. Of particular note at Helsinki was the introduction in the call for "key groups" rather than traditional conference keynotes, foregrounding collaborative and interdisciplinary creativity in naming and addressing problems over singular expertise. Performance Philosophy Problems Key Groups (PPPKGs) were solicited by open call in the years leading up to the conference, asking existing groups or new groups to collaboratively imagine the work they would take on, and to develop this work not only in the months before the conference but also at the conference itself: 'Through the PPPKGs, the conference itself wants to provide its participants with an occasion to witness *actual research in-the-making* in a critical and supportive collective setting' (Performance Philosophy 2021).

Problems of form for a conference are reflected in problems of form for a publication: how do we represent the dynamics of collaboration, of "*actual research in-the-making*", in the static form of the PDF or even in the more dynamic form of HTML? The articles here take various approaches. "Laguna de fracasos", by the key group Lagunaries, presents a territory for readers to navigate, guided by a map, moving both between languages (Spanish and English) and between ways of speaking and reading: for Lagunaries, reading is collaborative work. In "The Problem of Hybridity", the design research laboratory Speculative Space restage for the page their film/live presentation in Helsinki, necessarily placing the text between description of the past and summoning into present relation: 'Are you still receiving? Can you still read?' they ask. Similarly, Annette Arlander, Bruce Barton, Johanna Householder, and Michelle Man explore the question of how to share artistic practice—and indeed, how sharing might itself be a form of creative research. The videos and accompanying texts represent the 'Perform-Respond-Extend' model they have developed as a form of 'enactive research', and which they demonstrated in Helsinki. Whereas in 'Poetics of Friction', by Nadja Ben Khelifa, Étienne Allaix, and Jörg Sternagel, the webpage enables superpositions that are not possible in the linear time of conference presentation; here (in the HTML form anyway), the various elements of their contribution are ordered differently each time the page loads, creating new juxtapositions—and new 'frictions'—between the chapters.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of collaboration, articulated and explored through formal possibilities, and enacted in those very activities of articulation and exploration. Diana Damian Martin, Daniela Perazzo, and Nik Wakefield, prefer the term 'co-labouring' to 'collaboration' as more honestly acknowledging the entanglement of academic work with neoliberal governance; 'autofiction' models a tactic for mapping this complicity, and also a possible escape route from individual ownership. They write from and through a historical event of labor disputes in the UK, and of Covid restrictions and regulations, which themselves delayed the Helsinki conference (originally planned for 2021). As in many fields, the Helsinki conference carries the influence of this moment in the problem of hybridity: how to make an assembly out of in-person and virtual participation; how to manifest the possibilities of telematic and/or asynchronous togetherness. Performance Philosophy Problems are temporary problems: problems that are passing by, or that we are passing through, problems of a historical moment, of temporal lag, of trying to speak 'in the present', even if, as I suggest in my contribution to this volume, "by the time you read this it is already too late".

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems between performance and philosophy. This is the space, as Anthony Gritten puts it here, of the “philosomer”, residing in ‘the emptiness between the “e” ending Performance and the “P” beginning Philosophy.’ They are perhaps like so-called ‘wicked’ problems (Rittel and Webber 1973) in their interdisciplinary entanglements; but unlike wicked problems, Performance Philosophy Problems do not have their ontology shaped by the problem as negative, as undesirable, as something we would wish ‘solved’. Performance Philosophy Problems are instead events, convergences, and formations: a space of common ground, of emergence, where the problem of ‘ground’ and ‘emergence’ are indeed exemplary problems for philosophy and for theatre (see Puchner 2014). They are not problems we would wish away, as in Esa Kirkkopelto’s writing here on the problem of the mutability of language. Nor in the case of the problem of ‘the human’ at the centre of all other problems, where instead, Annalaura Alifuoco argues here, we might look instead at how this problem might be *exhausted*; but also to the ways in which exhaustion itself is constituted as a collective, cross-species problem.

Performance Philosophy Problems are problems of appearance and acknowledgement: how do we recognize a problem as a problem? Who is called upon to describe it, and in what terms? In Helsinki, one PPKG session featured a recorded presentation from Different Light Theatre Company, a learning disabled theatre company based in Christchurch, New Zealand/Aotearoa. ‘What are Performance Philosophy Problems?’ asks Matthew Phelan, one of the company members. ‘We are Performance Philosophy Problems,’ answers Josie Noble (emphasis added). Her response gives the title to the contribution to this issue assembled by Janet Gibson, Kate Maguire-Rosier, and Tony McCaffrey, which engages creatively and sensitively with questions of inclusivity, reciprocity, and agency in disability theatre, research, and activism.

Performance Philosophy Problems might be problems that ‘trouble’, then, as in ‘gender trouble’ (Butler 1990), ‘race trouble’ (Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown 2011), ‘ability trouble’ (McRuer 2006), ‘affect trouble’ (Forrest 2020), and so on. They appear where there is hierarchization of knowledge, of subjects, of who speaks on whose behalf. They call for new forms of collaboration, which the Helsinki conference generously supported, and new forms of articulation, to which this journal hopes to make a modest contribution.

And Performance Philosophy Problems are also problems of “Performance Philosophy” itself—that is, of the network of real people finding ways to live their lives, support their loved ones, advocate for their students and their research, and volunteering their time to act as facilitators, conveners, authors, peer-reviewers, editors, and organizers for this network. So I close with my great thanks to Esa Kirkkopelto and the team at Theatre Arts Helsinki, to Tero Nauha who offered his support, to Diana Damian Martin who helped me to finally bring this issue to fruition, to those authors who have been waiting for some time for their work to appear, and to you readers, for caring about our problems.

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## Biography

Theron Schmidt is an assistant professor at Utrecht University and works internationally as an artist, writer, and teacher. He is one of the editors of *Performance Philosophy*.

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