

Performance Research

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# **WITH THE MATERNAL: ENCOUNTERING PERFORMANCE THROUGH NATALITY**

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# ABSTRACT

What can birth tell us about performance in the twenty first century? Specifically, what does rethinking performance through the natal alongside the maternal reveal? This article asks what natality - the overlooked other of performance's well-theorised relationship to mortality – can offer performance from the perspective of a maternal subject. It does so through an autobiographical account of the birth of the author's second child and three thematic gestures closely tied to natality: care, responsibility and appearance.

The article privileges these natal and maternal themes as provocations for performance's unanticipated future, particularly in a post-Brexit, post-Trump context. It offers no solutions but instead asks: How can we make careful and responsible work, whilst acknowledging the ethical ambiguities inherent in this motivation? Birth is, therefore, more than a metaphor for performance here. Instead, birth is intimately tied to the maternal and the natal subjects who experience it and so it has the potential to encourage us - as makers, theorists and spectators - to recognise and mobilise the generative potential of the embodied, relational, co-created experience of performance.

Rather than using natality to regulate who has the capacity to participate in the political realm (Arendt 1958), the article suggests that we acknowledge the unknown that the newborn brings in birth. In situating natality in the physical act of birth, we can look forward to a natal politics of performance that is still consistent with Arendtian ideals of civic responsibility and action, but that welcomes those othered by her version of natality - newborns, children, mothers and those who literally cannot speak.

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