

# Florentina Holzinger & Co: Performing Pleasure, Risk and Rapture

## Guest Editors

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## Special Issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* Call for Papers

Over the past decade, Austrian performance maker Florentina Holzinger (b. 1986) has risen rapidly to international prominence, garnering critical acclaim for her astonishing, genre-defying work. Born in Vienna and trained at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam, Holzinger has developed one of the most internationally visible and influential bodies of interdisciplinary choreographic work of her generation. Yet no single category or artistic genre can contain her practice. Her work spans formal interrogations of and experiments with ballet, opera, circus, the musical, and site-responsive installation. After early duos with Vincent Riebeek and the prize-winning graduation solo *Silk* (2011), Holzinger developed *Recovery* (2014), *Apollon* (2017) and *TANZ* (2019), followed by *A Divine Comedy* (2021), *Ophelia's Got Talent* (2022), *Sancta* (2024) and *A Year Without Summer* (2025). Alongside these stage productions, since 2020 she has developed different versions of *Études* – an ongoing series of site-specific performances in public space – which has informed her representation of the Austrian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale with *SEAWORLD VENICE*, and her creation of *Pfingstspiel* for the Wiener Festwochen, both in 2026. Her work has toured major European festival and opera-house circuits, as well further afield, most recently in Australia.

Her work has not been without its controversies. In October 2024, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reviewed Holzinger's *Sancta* at the Staatsoper Stuttgart with the headline 'In der Oper gewesen, gekotzt' ('Went to the opera, threw up'). Within days, news that some audience members had required first-aid was recycled across the international press as a story about an opera of live sex, lesbian nuns and blood. The Staatsoper increased security; Holzinger received threats; her trigger warnings circulated as screen-shots, legible as either prudent audience care or as further evidence of artistic provocation. The slogan itself – 'Went to the opera, threw up' – meanwhile, was promptly reclaimed as merchandise: it is now printed on a t-shirt worn by fans, and on occasion by Holzinger herself. Predictably, the news media reception of *SEAWORLD VENICE* – a performance-based installation conceived as a half-flooded pavilion theme park meets sewage plant meets sacred site – has been dominated by attention-grabbing headlines such as 'What does a woman swimming in urine tell us about the state of the world? Lots!' (*The Guardian*) and 'These Toilets in Venice Have the Art World Aflush' (*The New York Times*).

Controversies aside, the international resonance of her work signals a surging zeitgeist that traverses national and cultural borders, a phenomenon this Special Issue seeks to probe with a level of scholarly and critical depth too often short-circuited by media headlines. The *Sancta*

scandal is a useful pivot for thinking about Holzinger's work in this way, precisely because it is also a distortion. The press coverage rehearses a familiar grammar of the singular provocateur, and obscures almost everything that makes Holzinger's practice distinctive: the collectively built rehearsal processes; the cross-disciplinary expertise of stunt performers, opera singers, riggers, BDSM practitioners, magicians, freedivers and body modification artists; the infrastructures of consent, training and care that make extreme stage actions possible without endangering performers; as well as the intergenerational, female and gender-diverse, mixed ability ensemble she works with, including long-term collaborations with figures such as the late octogenarian ballerina Beatrice 'Trixie' Cordua (1943-2025).

While there is a rich seam of theatre and performance studies that focuses on 'Director's Theatre', there has also been a shift away from the singular figure of the directorial auteur to an emphasis on theatre directing as collaboration. Holzinger is a particularly telling case for this conversation. Her name dominates the marketing, festival programs and press scandals, and yet the work itself is built by a long-term and evolving ensemble whose specialist skills are inseparable from what audiences see on stage. To write about Holzinger '& Co.', then, is not just to add a list of collaborators to her name; it is to read the work itself through the distributed labour and the specialist knowledges that produce it, as well as the institutions and funding flows that support it.

With the aim to bring voices from performance studies, dance studies, opera studies, queer feminist theory and theatre criticism into dialogue, this Special Issue seeks to focus on the collective dimension of Holzinger's performances, reading her practice in relation to the divergent cultural contexts that contribute to the reception – and at times, censorship – of her work.

From this starting point, a different set of questions becomes thinkable: How are the boundaries between dance, theatre, opera, performance art, circus, magic, sex work, and stunt being renegotiated by artists working at this scale? What does 'risk' mean when the actions on stage are real, but where elaborate infrastructures of training, consent and aftercare are designed precisely to protect performer health? How do trigger warnings, content advisories and audience-care protocols sit alongside the spectacular economies of provocation and the press cycle that has become attached to Holzinger's work? What queer feminist, anti-religious and decolonial genealogies and politics does the work activate, and how do they sit with the reception of nudity and bodily display in different national publics? This Special Issue seeks responses to these questions, treating Holzinger & Co. as both a singular case and a paradigmatic one. We are particularly interested in reflections on the Australasian reception of her work as well as Europe and North America.

**Contributions to the Special Issue might address, among other topics:**

- **The collective making of the work:** the assemblage of specialist knowledges that produces the work, and how the rehearsal room and on-stage presences make this collective process visible.
- **Risk, consent and care:** how live piercing, suspension, freediving, sex acts, and other extreme practices are made possible by infrastructures of training, medical, pastoral and intimacy direction support vs. audience care, trigger warnings, and the politics of provocation;
- **Reworking the dance-historical canon:** Holzinger's work expands, questions and deconstructs received repertoires by moving across – and dissolving the boundaries between – various genres. Topics here include queer feminist adaptation of the Romantic repertoire, intergenerational casting, the figure of the monstrous and grotesque body, and the politics and inversion of bodily ‘virtuosity’.
- **Spectacle, institution and market:** Holzinger & Co. between biennale, festival, opera house and attention economy; press scandals, moral panic and the cycles of mediated reception across national publics.
- **Genealogies of performance art and historical avant-gardes in the digital age:** Holzinger’s relation to body art and the legacy of *Wiener Aktionismus* – what a Viennese choreographer takes and refuses from these inheritances; how the ubiquity of digital porn, AI companions and the mediated gaze impact audiences encounters with explicit bodily performance and nudity in Holzinger’s works, and how this may compare with the earlier reception of feminist performance lineages.
- **Post-cyberfeminist readings of the technobody:** the body-machine assemblages that Holzinger's productions stage – motorcycles, jet skis, rigging, live cameras, robotics – and the strategies of hacking, glitching and reclaiming that (re)organise both gender and technology in her performances.

For [Interventions](#) we seek contributions to the special issue’s focus through the form of performance reviews, as well as practice-led responses to the themes of Holzinger’s work that may include sound, video, performance scores, poetry, photographic essays, and other creative modes of expression.

The timeline for submissions is as follows:

Proposals due: August 14 2026

Authors notified: September 2026

Articles due for peer review: March 2027

Revisions post-peer review: December 2027

Publication: Mid-late 2028

Please submit 300-word proposals in English by **Friday 14 August 2026** to the guest editors [charlotte.farrell@unsw.edu.au](mailto:charlotte.farrell@unsw.edu.au) and [anna\\_laura.wieczorek@moz.ac.at](mailto:anna_laura.wieczorek@moz.ac.at). If successful, full articles of 6000-8000 words as well as pieces for Interventions will be due in March 2027.