

A Response to Double Goer

By Amit Noy

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What do you call it when the force of love, or desire, or kinship—or another thing altogether—drives you towards another body in a manner that subsumes you: so that all you want is to meld your skin to theirs; for their body to become your body; to live inside the exhilaration of inseparability. There is a violence to how total this force is; it's incompatible with the decorum of language. For who needs a connecting clause when you can't tell each other apart?

Sarah Foster-Sproull's *Double Goer*, a duet with and for Rose Philpott and Tamsyn Russell, takes this obsession as conceptual ground. The English transliteration of “doppelgänger”, *Double Goer* is a duet for two women that descends mesmerically into a choreographic subterranea of feeling and relation. Throughout the month of August, the work played daily at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in a long-awaited debut stalled by illness, global tumult, and government mandated shutdowns.

Double Goer continues the careful investigation of embodied imagery that distinguishes Foster-Sproull's body of work. An image can be a revelation—especially one that breathes, coughs, and sweats. Foster-Sproull's work unfolds with a painterly devotion to the contours of form. She works with images as embodied situations that register as bursts of meaning: familiar enough to conjure memory, strange enough to lead you into wonderment. In *Double Goer*, Philpott and Russell first appear as a singular sculpture of flesh. They wrap their legs around the others' head with their bodies outstretched, like a scissoring contraption. They waltz with a waterfall of hair covering their faces. Frequently, their legs invert—in an embodied archetype of abject femininity that can be found in both 2010s queer-femme Tumblr and the posturing of young girls on the reality television show *Dance Moms*. At other times, the choreography dovetails towards the baroque, rendering canonical aesthetics newly strange. To watch two women take ownership of beauty's historical imaginary is to realise how often it has been linked to captivity.

The experience of watching these two particular women is often mesmeric. Philpott and Russell arrive at performance with the fullness of their experience. They don't attempt to eliminate

complexity, contradiction, or ambiguity from the fundamental ambivalence of seeing and being seen. Russell has a remarkable solidity and self-knowing to her dancing. You can feel the psycho-emotional weight of her work. In contrast, Philpott's performance is richly irrepressible—out of her body tumbles an excess of feeling it seems unable to contain. Supported by lighting and sound design from Andrew Foster, they move through an Odyssean ritual of magnetisation and repulsion. At times, it seems unclear if they know where one ends and the other begins.

Aperitifs of self-reflexivity are interspersed throughout *Double Goer*. Like the shock of an ice bath, they force us to acknowledge how immaculate aesthetics are often disavowals of reality (which, more often than not, takes the form of a problem). Russell waits impatiently for Philpott to pin her hair back; both women scream whilst moving continuously for one or two minutes. Foster-Sproull knows that humour is a tonic that can complicate your experience. Laughter is never straightforward: who is laughing at who, and why?

To watch a Foster-Sproull dance is to swim through a pool of association, and one indelibly linked to questions of beauty, history, and power. The work references classicism only to destabilise it, and stages a sophisticated investigation of the relationship between historical and contemporaneous aesthetics. In witnessing the work, you wade through centuries of cultural memory. Crouched over, Philpott and Russell braid their gushing hair into one long rope. They group the millions of strands with methodical tenacity: driven, once more, towards the total urge to become the same person. In the dark, my body recognised that feeling in a way that language could never provide. Perhaps to watch *Double Goer* is to become one: to feel your self inside the choreography, to be unable, briefly, to distinguish between the performer's experience and your own. Some call this kinaesthetic empathy.