

A Response to *Gazed At: Stories of a Mortal Body* by Dr. Julie-Ann Scott-Pollock

Peter Joseph Gloviczki

Dr. Julie-Ann Scott-Pollock delivers a thought-provoking performance to help us understand the role of the body in communication research. Dr. Scott-Pollock, Full Professor at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, braids lived experiences into extensive knowledge about performance and/in/as communication.

Dr. Scott-Pollock's work explores the gaze(s) of other(s). Her one woman show, *Gazed At*, recognizes the gaze as participatory interaction at the core of the embodied experience. We are all always looking: at ourselves, at each other, at the world around us. Dr. Scott-Pollock sheds needed light on these intersections.

Steeped in narrative research, *Gazed At* effectively centers the story of self and others. Dr. Scott-Pollock knows well that the human experience is comprised of moments, which time, space and place splice together into a movie rather than a series of snapshots. I admire the content and the context of Dr. Scott-Pollock's work.

The human experience is rightly positioned as dialogue; often messy and necessarily incomplete. *Gazed At* runs toward these spaces with a sense of forthright urgency. Dr. Scott-Pollock not only wants to share with us about her body,

Peter Joseph Gloviczki (Ph.D., University of Minnesota, Mass Communication, 2012) examines representation in the digital age. He is particularly interested in the ways that memorialization and mediated narration either hold space for or obscure voices that are most often othered or excluded in mediated discourses. He works as Professor and Chairperson in the Department of Broadcasting and Journalism at Western Illinois University. He also serves as an assistant editor of the *Journal of Loss and Trauma* (Taylor & Francis). Gloviczki is active in both the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the Carolinas Communication Association (CCA). His first book is *Journalism and Memorialization in the Age of Social Media* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and his second book is *Mediated Narration in a Digital Age: Storying the Media World* (University of Nebraska Press, 2021).

she also wants to teach us, all the while inviting the audience into the conversation. Her storytelling throughout is vivid and disarming. There is a place for us at her table, and we have been invited to take a seat.

The landscape of *Gazed At* is, in many ways, the familiar landscape of post-World War II American life. Dr. Scott-Pollock's work is at home in the domain of the everyday: the schools, department stores, hospitals and family rooms, where we complete the necessary work of each calendar day as we live out our deeper callings. These familiar surroundings do well to invite the audience to imagine themselves in similar situations. Both inward seeking and aspirational, *Gazed At* is not so much about life, as it is about what happens while we are living it.

Dr. Scott-Pollock lives with Cerebral Palsy, a physical disability. She recognizes her disability throughout *Gazed At*, in ways that resonate well with anyone who has ever felt othered for any reason. Dr. Scott-Pollock's work is firmly rooted in its narratives: with her family, her teachers, her classmates and with strangers. Indeed, strangers' questions, curiosities and sometimes unpleasant invasiveness about her body and its perceived limitations reveal that our communities collectively have a long way to go toward equity. As a fellow academic with Cerebral Palsy, I especially connected with these moments in the performance: strangers' questions-as-abrasions felt recognizable. In the way that others' words can wound us, *Gazed At* reminds us to keep going. It is this sense of earnest persistence, to always find a way forward, that is a hallmark of the work.

I admire how central place and its resultant geographic communities are to the work. *Gazed At* travels from Maine to North Carolina in ways that recognize the complicated histories of both places, while also retaining their American uniformity. We in the audience come to know Maine as the place of Dr. Scott-Pollock's upbringing and schooling, while North Carolina is central to the work as her present-day home. Each State feels alive to the audience in this work. Watching the performance, I felt that Maine has a particular (peculiar?) sort of independence to it, while North Carolina is rooted in certain legal traditions that can sometimes make basic tasks (like redeeming a handicapped parking placard) more difficult than they ever needed to be. Complications, others' unreasonable expectations into/onto the body, and bureaucratic nonsense are justly critiqued in the performance.

The stories that comprise this work are tender, touching and candid. Dr. Scott-Pollock makes evident her manifold supporters across life and work, emphasizing the love that guides the core relationships and bonds in her lives. *Gazed At* understands life as a shared, collective pursuit as well as any performance in recent memory. Whether examining individuals or institutions, *Gazed At* does a wonderful job of helping each of its locales feel like home. Throughout the work, I wondered how others' experiences of various U.S. states might converse with or alongside those recounted in this performance. How might each State leave its imprint on any of us? What does it mean to live embodied in America?

Gazed At is noteworthy for the way the individual becomes cultural. Dr. Scott-Pollock's work is both indelibly American and seemingly universal. I was reminded, reflecting on the performance, of poet Jim Cihlar's "A Map of the Stars," where the speaker says: "A map should be a reason. Like a transcript / of an argument, there should be some logic to it," (2020, p. 59). *Gazed At*'s driving force seems to be to emphasize how we are all living in beautiful, flawed, aspirational bodies. Bodies that want and need and struggle and labor. This show is a story circle within which each of us can hopefully recognize ourselves.

Reference

Cihlar, J. (2020). *Shadowgraph*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.



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