

## Afterword/Forward

Terry Galloway

Let me give you a brief history of how the video *Just the Funny Bits* came into being. I had been touring my show *Out All Night and Lost My Shoes* both in its entirety and in twenty minute excerpts, the excerpts as part of P.S. 122 Field Trips. I had just finished a run of the longer version of the show at the Tampa Bay Arts Center where I'd gotten great reviews from the local papers. A guy who books acts for the Aspen Comedy Festival read one of the reviews, emailed me and asked if I did the kind of stand-up comedy that would play in Aspen. As a matter of fact I didn't; but I've always thought you can't lose by trying (although often I have) so I was cagey in my response. Actually I lied and said, "Sure!"

After lying to him, I went running to my trusty dramaturge and director Donna Nudd and did a whole mini performance of angst and worry, wringing my hands and letting her stop me from banging my head against the wall. I was sure Aspen would be my ticket, if I could pull it off, to the fame and moola that had so far managed to elude me. She gave me a beer to calm me down and then we went to work culling all the funny bits out of the longer performance. The next morning we took what we had culled over to Diane Wilkins, our partner in video crime. The three of us worked up an approach that afternoon and shot it later that evening.

I wasn't happy with the results. Donna and Diane would say I never am. But in this case I had good reasons for my unhappiness. The video performance of just the funnier, easier humor reminded me too much of a particular live performance of mine when I was on tour with the P.S. 122 Field Trips. I was then touring with some

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spectacular representatives of the performance art scene and I (deafie) was the only one who spoke. One danced (loudly, I'm told) in the dark. The others painted themselves blue and beat drums while eating Captain Crunch.

They had no trouble transcending language barriers. I did. Especially when my twenty minutes of P.S. 122 fame featured the angst and absurdities of disability, which in the early 90's didn't translate much at all anywhere. The audiences on that tour liked every performer better than they liked me. My feelings got hurt. I wasn't likeable, translatable, or just plain fun enough to appeal to the wide, wide world. Nor was I edgy, self-involved, cutting edge or naked enough to appeal to the hipper intellectuals. So one night I thought, "Fuck this. I'm sick of being a talking bore." I tossed out every serious word of my script and just did the comedy. And instantly became much more popular. Although not popular enough to become a worldwide franchise.

The video version of *Just the Funny Bits* reminded me of that live cop-out of a performance and of what were then my limitations as an artist. I have a whole new set of limitations now, but at that time my biggest limitation was that I just couldn't get over myself—I worried that I wasn't funny enough or I didn't translate well or that the things that obsessed and fascinated me didn't obsess and fascinate huge swaths of the world's population. And that same worry and hesitation and need to please show up enough on that video to keep my performance from tearing through the medium, which is what, in my heart, I wanted it to do.

What that tape really documents is a crossroads in a career. I was feeling as ambivalent when I made that video as I had felt when I was doing just the funny bits for the P.S. 122 Field Trips. The performance on video shows that ambivalence, that failure of nerve. It should've and could've been really scary—the kind of vintage in-your-face, messy and demanding Bad Cripple Art that fools once did, as Joanne Gilbert notes, and that Carrie Sandahl claims I do when I come terrorize her classes. And it wasn't. Jill Taft-Kaufman saw the same failing in my performance that I did—that it wasn't done "with decorum thrown to the winds." It was done to get a job (which, for the pruriently curious, I didn't get).

I'm indebted to Jill and Carrie and Joanne for their insights and criticism about this video. By reminding me of the contexts—historical, political and personal—in which my work can be read, they remind me of the strengths and failures of the work I was doing then. I only wish I could have had these kinds of thoughtful and informed critiques when this video was first made. I would have used their suggestions and observations to revisit that video performance and transform it into the art I actually wanted it to be. What happened though is that the video sat on the shelf awaiting the proper forum for discussion—that is to say it was waiting for *Liminalities* to come into existence. In the meantime, Donna, Diane, Faust Films and I stopped documenting live disability-themed theater and concentrated on creating disability-themed videos, beginning with *Annie Dearest* and (with Carrie Sandahl) *The Scary Lewis Yell-a-thon*.

As I re-read what Carrie, Joanne and Jill have written I'm heartened by what they saw and what they didn't see in that early stab at a disability-themed performance. They saw an attempt to make a video performance about disability that hoped to “relentlessly expose” and “be many things simultaneously” including “fresh, off-kilter, hilarious and critical” as well as “in defiance of every university policy.” That is exhilarating language. And when Joanne puts me in the company of the historical fool, when Jill puts me in the company of her husband and herself, when Carrie puts me side by side with her in our own contemporary history, it strengthens my always wavering resolve as an artist by reminding me that my own goals for the art I make are grounded in a shared history and aesthetic.

I will keep that history and aesthetic in mind as I begin work with Donna, Diane, Carrie and Faust on our next three disability-themed videos. We'll use those comments, criticisms and observations to make our work even more emboldened. We'll skip the apologies and toss decorum on its butt as we try to engender what Jill calls, “a shift in audience perception, aesthetic distance and social critique.” Work a change, that is. Be art.