

NO FIXED POSITIONS: A Dialogue on *Yellow Towel*

Dana Michel & Michael Nardone

During the performance writing residency *So So Silky Silky Silk* at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montréal, choreographer and live artist Dana Michel joined poet and editor Michael Nardone in order to create a score of Michel's iterative, improvisational choreographic work *Yellow Towel*. This solo piece – which Michel has performed over the past seven years and which was awarded the Silver Lion for innovation in dance at the 2017 Venice Biennale – is exceptional for its excavation of a range of subjectivities and embodiments.

“I am always trying to run away from any pinning down of what I am trying to do or say,” Michel states of the work. In scoring *Yellow Towel*, Michel and Nardone began with a series of questions to address the itinerant and obscure aspects of the work: What is legible in the moment of performance? What are the techniques and technologies that mediate performance? How might a score function as a vital element of a work without fixing in place its desired fugitivity?

The following dialogue took place during the first days of their residency at SBC Gallery – in the midst of an array of documents, objects, and materials used in the research and performance phases of *Yellow Towel*, including Michel's personal diaries, documentary videos, and iterations of her original score – as Michel and Nardone began to imagine how they might translate the performance into the shape of a book.

Michael Nardone I thought I might begin by asking some basic questions about *Yellow Towel*. I saw one performance of it here in Montréal and immediately had this sense of how exciting it could be as a textual work. Yet there is so much I don't know about the piece. When did you begin to compose it?

Dana Michel I can think of several points at once. My nephew had a big afro. My brother is, um, a black person. [*Laughs*] And his wife is a blonde person. Their two children are fair-skinned and have various degrees of curly hair. And this nephew had an afro on top of this skin, this history. So, I became curious about how he was finding his way in the world and how he identified, and I wondered: What's it like when you don't have such clear indicators? Obviously, we have words like mixed race to describe this situation, but what does it feel like? That question was one starting point. And then, somewhere around that time, I was still working at the hospital...

MN Here in Montréal?

DM Yeah, I was at the Royal Victoria Hospital in the maternity ward. It was my solid "I'm not letting go of this job" job, but I started thinking I needed to let go of the job. So, I was wondering what I was going to do if I let go of this job. My thought was: I am going to make a kids' show. I thought I could make a good one, and one that made money, and I like kids, so I was going to make a kids' show. My first concept for this show was that it would focus on the experience of being mixed race.

MN It's interesting because I can absolutely imagine a universe where *Yellow Towel* is a performance for children, while at the same time I know it is anything but that.

DM Yes, it is at the roots of work, and I let the idea sort of spin out.

MN Can you describe your initial sense of it? Was it a character that you had in mind? What kind of performance did you imagine?

DM I wanted to make a one-hour-long, multimedia, fancy pants but very simple easy-to-eat kids' show kind of thingy that I would perform live. I pictured myself with a very large afro in front of a stark black and white graphic novel-like scenario coming to life in performance. So, the kids' show remained an idea for a while. Then, for the Festival Trans-Amériques edition of *Short & Sweet* one year—have you ever been to one of those?

MN Yes! They're the short format performances that Sasha Kleinplatz and Andrew Tay curate. I love them.

DM They are my favourite things to do. As I was preparing to do it, I was like, Oh, I'm going to test out this idea. I got my hands on a big, reddish-brownish afro, and I wore this long, colourful overcoat and had a giant umbrella I found at Village des Valeurs. The coat somehow spun me into this Jean-Michel Basquiat train of thought—I had been watching all of these interviews with Basquiat and began to think I would do something in conversation with those.

At another point I thought I'd try out some kind of Butoh-esque white powder on my face, and I ended up getting this cheap compact from the Dollar Store—it was foundation or pressed powder—and it was absolutely *not* for black people. So, I was playing around with that. Around that same time, there had been a spread with Beyoncé in *Vanity Fair* or *Vogue* where the stylist got criticized for doing blackface because they darkened her complexion with foundation and kinked up her hair in some of the photos. I was thinking about this, too—playing around with it inside the Basquiat interviews and the coat and the umbrella.

Anyway, I ended up doing a piece where I gyrated for three minutes, with my tits out, in my underwear, wearing a pair of creepers and the overcoat. In that instant, I was like: This is not going to be a kids' show!

MN This would have been when?

DM 2011. Things were really shifting in my life at that time. I left my job and I was wandering a lot more, doing what I like to do, spending a lot of time in grocery stores and pharmacies and any store actually, allowing myself the time to think about all of the possibilities of all the different objects and textures and colours I would see there. I had taken a huge leap and I didn't necessarily know I was going to make a big piece. I went from this kids' show to the *Short & Sweet* piece to getting a scholarship that brought me to Vienna for five weeks.

MN I believe this was for a residency at ImPulsTanz?

DM That's right. I honestly never would have considered applying to do it because I just didn't think I was fancy enough. A friend convinced me to do it. And I had discovered an artist who was teaching there, Ivo Dimchev, who was doing things that I hadn't realized existed in my desires to do. When I saw the works he was making, I was like: Oh, exactly! That is exactly what I care about—what he is doing, it's possible.

MN What was it about his work that spoke to you, to the works you imagined making?

DM Oh, Ivo ... He is doing comedy and it's clearly some next-level schtick—a bit of “I'm doing whatever the fuck I want.” Yet it has this incredible abstraction to it, this deep conceptualization and awareness. It's very pointed, while also being meandering, open.

MN That is something that attracted me absolutely to *Yellow Towel* when I saw it, its clarity and abstraction. The way these various, semi-obscure yet exceptionally particular acts are taking place, and in their accumulation over time create this abstract ambiance that is so enthralling to be in with you.

DM With Ivo, it's super rigorous, and it's total jackass too. It's both, and it is beautiful.

MN So, you went from abandoning this kids' piece to being in residence in Vienna ...

DM And during that time, I had my brains blown. I saw fifty shows in the span of five weeks. All of this information, all of these ways of thinking. It was a big thing. It's when I officially started working on *Yellow Towel*, or, perhaps I should say it's when the words “Yellow Towel” first appeared to me.

MN And did you do a performance there?

DM I did a thing, yes. I took a workshop with Ivo and he had us make solos over a week. On the first day of the workshop, Ivo had us do a writing exercise. We had to make a list of ten things we were thinking about, then narrow it down to five, then choose one from that five and write a poem about it, and this poem would be a starting point for the solo. The word that made the cut was “hair,” and I called the solo “Yellow Towel” because I would play this game when I was a kid—it seems like everything I do leads back to childhood games—I would drape a towel on my head and pretend like I had flowy, bouncy hair à la 1980s Head & Shoulders commercials. This was the first official nugget of *Yellow Towel*. It had morphed from the kids' show idea to a performance about my hair.

MN How did the piece evolve from that point?

DM When I left Vienna, Ivo said: “You should keep working on this. It's great what you are doing. You should keep going.” At that point, I think I applied for a grant to work on it some more. Now, I realize I'm saying a lot of things at once but



Dana Michel **Yellow Towel** 2013 performance
Image credit: Maya Fuhr

they are all tied together. What I was trying to say earlier was that this was really the first time I was wandering about without a specific direction in mind. In fact, what I did know is what I *didn't* want to do: I didn't want to tour, I didn't want to court producers, I didn't want to have to sell a thing. Honestly, I just wanted to fuck around and work on this thing.

MN It's interesting to hear you cite wandering through grocery stores and pharmacies and engaging with the things in these kinds of places as you were starting to compose the work. Yesterday, I realized—as I watched you organize all the performance materials—that just about everything you use is a banal object from such quotidian commercial spaces—a roll of paper towels, a container of cream cheese, vacuum cleaner attachments, hair care products ... It struck me because in *Yellow Towel* all of these things are charged with a wild oddness, with a kind of supernatural power. I also noticed that maybe you were a bit shy or hesitant about bringing them out of their suitcases—

DM For sure.

MN Why was that?

DM Well, I've spent five years being so particular about how these things are seen. I've been keeping the secret of these things. Like this, for instance! [*Picks up a felt hat that has the face of a frog*] I have this frog in my pockets, holding all of the rubber bands, throughout the show. And nobody knows! [*Laughs*] Does everyone get this kind of pleasure? I know it's always been there for me for as long as I've been alive. When I was a kid, I would hide two of my McDonald's fries under a napkin and, when everyone thought I was done, I'd be like, Nope! And I'd sneak those two little fries back out. [*Laughs*] I can't believe how satisfying that was. I don't know why. Perhaps it gives you something extra to bend around in the tedium of living? Anyway, I take so much pleasure in objects, in organizing them and thinking about them and dealing with them. Especially this set of objects. I've been allowed to fully express my desire to hide them and care for them over these years.

MN This hiding you speak of relates to the choreography of *Yellow Towel* in an interesting way. There's this thing where you hide your own virtuosity in the piece. Or, to put it in perhaps a better way: you hide your capability to do stunning and incredible bodily movements throughout the work. And then, in the moment it explodes out into the piece, you often cover it again, hide it.

DM I am often faced with this question from other people: Is it dance or is it not dance? Or: Is she an amazing performer or is she crazy? While I am hiding this and hiding that, I can't say the same for my person. I perform well under pressure, and my intuition is sharp—I know that much. I know I can react well to a thing. And I know that I like jokes. It's embarrassing to say it, but listen, I like to be funny. I like it a lot. It's very important to me.

MN I mean, *Yellow Towel* is absolutely hilarious at moments!

DM I know those things are there for me and that I can rely on them. What happens with my body comes as a shock to me too.

MN How do you mean?

DM I think of it through the frame of raves and Caribana. They are places where my body moves and does things, and I don't know how it does them. I realize: Cool, so I have some kind of natural ability thing happening but it's not to a point where I'm like, "Oh, I am an amazing dancer." In performance, I don't often know what my body is doing. When I look at documentation after a show, I may realize that a certain turn, for instance, makes a good photo—and I'm not talking about this ego-wise, I'm talking about my choreographic analysis of what my body is doing in the work—but it's not a situation where I'm doing all these moves and I've written them for my skill to appear at specific moments, no.

People can talk about it from the outside however they want to talk about it. All I can say from the inside is that I am working in a joke space and in a what's-happening-with-my-body space. If something hurts, for instance, that's going to affect the way I am going to do something. I don't shut that down. I let that talk to the work. I let all of the things talk to the work and it produces something. People seem to express to me that it works. More importantly, though, I register from the inside that something intuitively makes sense about this manner of writing movement.

MN What struck me so deeply in seeing your work is the fact that it's as if every movement and every utterance is constructed from layers and layers of history, histories. They are always partially obscured or in the process of becoming legible, and they are charged with new valences of meaning as you embody and intone them. How do you do that?

DM For me, it's a matter of putting the body in at the very last second. When I was preparing the work, I was giving it lots of time, doing all kinds of thinking, and, as I said, spending a lot of time wandering. And when I'm doing research, I'm cloaked in an invisible velcro suit. Or a magnet suit. I'm in constant osmosis mode.

MN Osmosis and velcro!

DM You see where I'm going. I'm soaking everything up like a goddamn Christmas fruitcake. Soaking it all up. I'm touching materials, talking, thinking, getting super swollen with all the information. Then the emergency of the performance wrings out from me what is necessary. I set up very specific tasks for myself, paths, timings based on music. I know I work well under pressure—it's when I have the most clarity.

What came out of *Yellow Towel*, out of my body, was exciting to discover because I knew I was increasingly interested in what came out of improvisation. But "improvisation" is still not good enough of a word. I knew I was most interested in how a body reacted in the time of performance after having worn this soaked fruitcake suit.

MN How does this differ from the way you thought about composing choreography prior to *Yellow Towel*?

DM The way I was working before—I would go into the studio and I would improvise, and then I would watch videos of it. I would find interesting things, but, overall, it was boring. It's now embarrassing to me this conception of dance where I work my moves and find cooler ways of doing them. It has nothing to do with anything I care about anymore. I don't mind seeing certain people do it, but there was definitely a moment when I recognized it didn't fit with what I wanted to do.

MN There is a productive problem here that's interesting to think about as we begin to arrange the score for the work. On one hand, you're saying that the way that you like to work is by absorbing things—absorbing and having lots of information enter you, pass through you—and then using this to respond in some kind of way in performance. On the other hand, at some point you have to organize the information and all that you've absorbed and some aspect of your response to it. How does structuring come into play? I'm curious if there has been a shift in how you think of the way *Yellow Towel* is organized and the way that you have composed your solo works after it?

DM I feel like I found a kind of organizing principle with *Yellow Towel* and I'm feeling it. It's still there in *Mercurial George*, but what has shifted is time. I've become more reckless. The soaking period is the same, but that moment when I initiate running the mop through the squeezer is happening later and later. That's what I've noticed. I'm constantly upping the ante. And then sometimes I find out, Wow, okay, yep, the ante was too high! That was way too close!

MN Does that shut you down or does that intrigue you?

DM It never shuts me down. I'll keep taking the joke further and further. What I've found out is that I have a great time in this space, but in terms of a research practice, I realize, um, I could be a little less ridiculous. I could be a little more productive if I was a little less ridiculous.

MN I imagine that you have to push through some far-flung boundaries in performance to realize perhaps you need to take it back a step or two.

DM Exactly! As you're talking about choreography, I'm picturing now a pinball machine. Maybe my work is a pinball machine. (And maybe a pinball machine is not like this at all. I am often confounded by contraptions.) The machine is the text score, the objects, the music choices, the light, and I'm the ball. But my ball is a thick sponge ball sloshing through the system. Whereas for most choreographers I talk to the choreography applies only to the sponge passing through the pinball machine, for me, the whole pinball machine is choreography, and the machine is for me more important than the sponge, or, it's where I spend the most time.

MN In the work, there is an array of embodiments and accents that come through you. I'm curious if, in developing the work, you saw these various embodiments as characters?

DM I don't think of them as characters. I think about it as me reacting to different circumstances. In the most basic way that is what's happening. What's happening is that I'm embodying a mental state that is mine. I'm letting it communicate to the rest of me. I am physicalizing what is actually fucking happening, and normally we need to contain these things. I've allowed performance to be a place where I don't have to contain these things. I think the reason why it looks real is because it is real. It's not mimicry. It's been difficult. I've had some hard questions come up when I've performed it.



Dana Michel ***Yellow Towel*** 2017 performance

Image courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia

Image credit: Andrea Avezù

[*While talking, they drift over to a screen playing various years' performances of Yellow Towel*]

As time went on, I realized I had to be more careful about the language I used around the work. The kind of casual way that I could talk about what I was doing to myself or to people who know me was and could and did get used as weaponry in the mouths of other people when they deployed the language. It shaped the work in a way that I didn't anticipate, and once those words were out there, it was immediately too late. I still don't know how to handle what I triggered and where to place it, because I also find it all very fascinating. In a way, I'm content with the language that was used because it ricocheted the work exactly where I was trying to get away from, and that was interesting to watch happen.

MN Can you give an example?

DM For instance, my big thing was: This is my "black piece." This is very true for me, but when I say it, I know exactly what I mean.

MN And that's a huge space for other people to infer into—

DM And that's exactly what happened. In a way, it's good that I left it that way. I opened the door, and it was wide open for exactly the opposite of what I meant... For instance, this situation right here. [*Refers to a video of a Yellow Towel performance that is playing on a screen in the gallery*] I can tell you exactly what's happening from the inside, where the clothing came from, what I'm doing. But this person, this shape, this character thing, when people talk about it, it's a crack addict. It's a homeless person on crack. I opened the door for that by calling it my "black piece," apparently.

MN I'm curious, though, as to whether you mean for that to be one of the valences—or do you not have that in mind at all? And by valence, I mean the different resonations that echo out of the work, as in this being one of the embodiments that is intoned, but just one of them.

DM Well, yes, that's why I still have a confusing time with all of this—because of what we discussed earlier regarding the sponge suit. I can't deny any of these things.

MN So, is the problem, then, the fixing of the embodiment of it being your "black piece"—the fixing of it to only that one valence?

DM Yeah, and the sadness I have around that is that I was never trying to prove a point, but it proved all kinds of points front and centre, up, down, and around. Just the fact that the word “black” was used and I do some of the things I do in the work ... Had I not said anything about *Yellow Towel* being a “black piece,” I wonder how it would have been read. It’s not that I wasn’t being careful, I was being generous. Also, naïve.

[They begin watching the initial moments of a Yellow Towel performance]

MN If you were to describe this section of the work and this embodiment, what are the ways you would think about it?

DM Well, I’ll begin with the jogging suit ... Wait, to go back to what we were just talking about, I want to say I also think it’s important that what is happening here telescopes, that people bring in information to me based on what they are seeing. That is super important.

MN It is, in a way, that next level of steeping that you talked about earlier, which you get to play with and within.

DM Yes, it’s really important. I don’t want to turn that off. But the jogging suit. I bought it many years ago for a different project. It was for a musician to wear so they could disappear, but I never ended up using it for that after all. Then, a couple of years later, I was doing a work-in-progress thingy and was three months pregnant. I was still a high-risk pregnancy so I think I wasn’t ready to share the information yet with people. So, I was digging through my stuff and I was like, I need the biggest clothes I own. I felt like I needed to hide, so I busted this jogging suit out.

MN It’s totally a disappearing suit.

DM It’s perfect. As for the NY hat, I bought it years ago at Village des Valeurs because I thought it was hot, and I added it to the disappearing suit.

[Continues watching video of performance]

Okay, there is stuff that happens on the inside of the clothes, but I won’t talk about that. But on the outside of the clothes, in this particular section, I wrote a short score. There is a path, a diagonal, and at the far end of the diagonal there is an inflatable toilet. I have this text about house music—which pulls up all kinds

of memories as I have a deep history with this song from my rave days—and the point is to get from one corner to the toilet while saying the text. Except I haven't memorized the text, so part of it is about seeing how I remember the text while doing the diagonal. So: I gotta say the text, I gotta make it to the toilet, I'm doing it with this kind of accent or affected way of speaking, that's it. The body that comes out of it is a body that is dealing with serious memory challenges and dealing with having people watch those memory challenges. That's kind of a skeleton of what's happening there. This is all very far away from a person who has no home and who is on crack.

MN For someone to see that into what you are doing is to see only one of the vectors that intersects with that diagonal.

DM Exactly. I see what the intersection is, but that intersection is not made up in my mind for the same reasons it's made up in other people's minds.

MN It's an important aspect of the composition, its aboutness. What this section is about is someone walking from offstage, across the stage, to a toilet—

DM While trying to remember something, with a bunch of strangers watching.

MN In that sense, it's exceptionally literal. However, in that movement, there are all of the valences, all of the things that you have soaked into this procession, into this diagonal, and they of course resonate, but they are a tangent outward from the score of the crossing and the remembering.

DM And, also, the way I work is—was it with you that I was talking about memory holes this morning?

MN I don't remember! [*Laughs*] But what about memory holes?

DM It's about the way that information serves me or comes to me, the tie-dye effect of it all. The timing is not linear. The first thing that someone wrote about this work when it was still in progress was that it's about Trayvon Martin. His shooting had just happened. I didn't know about it yet, but then I looked into it and obviously followed the story. But I don't know, I can't discount butterfly effects.

MN It is a resonance because you create a space where such things can be read and interpreted into the work in so many ways.

DM But with the memory hole, sometimes I'm soaking information in and I don't know exactly when it comes out. So, I feel I'm not one hundred percent in control of my output.

MN It relates to this work in that, along with all of the embodiments, movements, and gestures—and how one might project onto them all different forms of age and abilities, from child-like to elderly—there is also this protean thing that happens—

DM “Protean,” what is this word?

MN The word has many associations or connotations but, in this sense, I mean it specifically with regard to Proteus, who was a shapeshifter. I mean it in regard to all of the different transforming bodily instantiations that are brought together through *Yellow Towel*. I think of the protean in *Yellow Towel* on several levels—race, age, ability, as I mention—and also with regard to gender performance and representations of sexuality across a wide spectrum. Throughout the work, you do these things that are explicit in a certain way, and yet you somehow extract out of them the sexuality in a certain way. It's both overt and also diminishing at the same time, if that makes sense. Is that something that you think about in terms of the performance?

DM Yes, of course. This is something people have asked me about and that people have written about the work. Sometimes they discuss “androgyny,” and some people have described my “lack of fear to be ugly.” But that's not how I conceive of it. I'm definitely not aiming for any kind of anything. Definitely not androgyny. I'm attempting to hold all of the things that are in here, and let them exist. People have asked me: How can you allow yourself to be seen in such an ugly way? As a black woman, especially, it's so brave that you...

MN That language feels quite off, no?

DM “Ugly,” yes. “Not sexy,” yes. Whatever. I'm not shocked. From the inside, in terms of how it feels, I can say I felt powerful and exploded in those moments they are citing. I felt fucking gorgeous. I felt extremely sexy. I was all the things, all the moods. I'm not trying to seduce anyone, so that means I can exist in a way that is attractive to me.

MN I'm curious how that bleeds into life outside of the performance.

DM As in, why can't that sensibility exist for me all of the time?

MN Yes, that's it.

DM I've watched myself have the courage to morph into someone that feels closer to what's happening in here. [*Places hand across chest*] And I don't know how this person inscribes itself in the world. It's not so neat.

MN What's it like for you to continue to perform a piece like this? I imagine it being complex, because on one hand repeating the work seems to go against all of the exploration that you have written into its score, but on the other hand you have composed a choreography that is a structure you get to play within and, perhaps, explore the (possibly minute) differences you come up against from iteration to iteration.

DM That's it. When I premiered the piece at the Festival Trans-Amériques, I thought of it as a one-shot deal. I like to work in this way, and formats like *Short & Sweet* are perfect for me because that's how they work—you try something out and then move on to something else. This is something I admire about the visual art performance world: there's a thing, it happens, and then that's it. At the same time, maybe this doesn't make total sense for me because I do love repetition and I like things to live for a long time.

When I started to be invited to tour *Yellow Towel*, I thought, This does not make sense at all. The whole question was: How can I react to something I've already reacted to? I wondered if all the subsequent moments then would be fake, wouldn't feel right. I thought, I don't get why, but I guess I'm going to do this thing. There were seven months between the premiere and the next run, and before that second run, I did a one-week residency with Peter James and did a showing of the work, and I was like, Oh, nope, it's new again, I'm definitely experiencing this thing again for the first time. My experience of the work went in and out of that feeling. Especially if there were several months in between performances, it came in and out of making sense. In fact, last year I really got into a place of feeling, and thought, Oh, this is a whole new situation. I'm probably going to stop touring *Yellow Towel* now, but it's like brand fucking new again.

MN What was it that made it feel that way? Was it a personal thing?

DM Yeah, I'm a different person. Things have really shifted in my mind and I've

made all kinds of new learnings. That's one thing. And on a smaller scale, I'm so sensitive. Every floor in all the theatres is different. There's different dust. The light. Everything is different. The energy in the room is different. The country I'm in, what languages they understand. Everything is different all the time. Because I'm a person who is so sensitive, I can be affected by such small things.

MN Are there specific shifts or moments that stick out for you in the strings of performances of the work? For example, "In this one particular performance, I got this one segment right," or "What happened in this other performance was really unexpected and it really worked." Or is it that such analysis doesn't register because you're so in the thing that the comparisons from one iteration or context to the next don't really map against one another?

DM It's both. This is what I love about getting to do this stuff. It's so living. There are so many negotiations. Sometimes I'll think it feels really good to say this in one particular way, and then I do that same thing another time and I am hit by the fact that I am breaking cardinal rule number one, which is: No Fixed Positions. Don't hold on to anything. I stole that from Bruce Lee, I believe, and I've adopted it hardcore.

[They begin to watch the beginning moments of two different performances to compare them: one from the US premiere at American Realness in January 2014, the second from the performance at the Venice Biennale in June 2017]

MN Do I remember correctly that you told me the show begins offstage?

DM Yes.

MN How deep or far back does it go?

DM Generally, I am in the changing room, and the stage manager says, "They are ready for you"—that's when it starts.

MN Can you describe where that is in relation to the stage?

DM It depends. In the performance we're watching, it's just at the back of the stage and a little bit off to the side. At other times, I have to come down some stairs. When there's a ways to go and I've started the show offstage, sometimes the stage manager isn't quite sure how to deal with me because I don't say to anyone that I'm starting. In starting, it means I stop being polite, basically. By that I mean I'm not

going to say all of the things you need me to say so you feel like you're okay, you know what I mean?

MN Is there a way you like to allow yourself to become visible to the audience?

DM Hmmmm.

MN Because in the two videos I watched yesterday, you definitely lurk a little offstage for a bit.

DM You can see me lurking?

MN Yes!

DM Dammit!

MN But I'm looking for it, I'm watching exactly for those details. I don't recall seeing or recognizing that when I saw it in person. But I do remember thinking: Is this starting? Has this started? Does this performer know where they are? Do they know the performance has started? [*Laughs*]

DM Are you asking me those questions now? [*Laughs*]

MN No! But I am curious about how you choreograph the start.

DM Well, they say, "Are you ready?" and I follow them, and I take my time to make it around to the stage. I take my time to hug that corner, basically. It depends on how I'm feeling that day. Sometimes I can just walk around that corner onto the stage, and other times I'm like, Oh, wait, there are all kinds of systems. It depends! It depends on how noisy the public is. I generally like to come on while everyone is still talking, and I can kind of slip in. So, I'm listening for the right moment, when I feel like maybe no one is looking or I can slip in amongst the chatter. Sometimes it's dead silent in there because they are very polite or because the usher has made some kind of gesture that tells people the show is starting. In that case, it will take me longer, because I have to find a way to make myself feel like I am slipping in unnoticed. I guess I'm always trying to slip in naturally, casually.

MN I've now watched four recordings of *Yellow Towel*, and the length of time from you slipping in and being visible to the audience until the time you make a first utterance—it varies greatly. I'm curious if there is something scorable there?

DM There definitely is. When I come around the corner, I know that the curtain tends to be very soothing. So, I allow myself to be soothed by the curtain. Generally, I'm negotiating my proximity to the curtain and, depending on where people are sitting, I'm negotiating that sensation—trying to gauge what's happening in this space while being comforted by the curtain. Also, I'm negotiating my feet—but, wait, this may be sounds...

MN Please go on! This is the choreography.

DM Okay, so, I'm negotiating the curtain. I'm finding a way to make it from behind the curtain to inside of the curtain, and I'm trying to do all of this without anyone noticing. Except the whole room is looking at me! That's a big ass negotiation, right? And, I'm thinking: How do I feel about all of this? How close is this person? Is it a smooth curtain? Sometimes the curtain texture can make me feel comfortable, or not at all. And then there are all the other things I'm factoring in: Am I hungry? Am I tired? All of this affects how long it takes me. Sometimes, my foot might get caught. Sometimes there is another curtain that I am trying to close behind me so no one sees backstage. I'm negotiating the aesthetic space.

MN That's it, you're engaging the material aesthetic space, right down to its most quotidian elements.

DM Exactly. And also, there's a writing in how I am trying to deal with my feet and my knees, in the bending and opening of the legs and knees, how I'm trying to blur it so it's not too sharp. I've spent a lot of time at the curtain, and sometimes when I'm there I can see my shadow, and I spend some time looking at my shadow. It depends on how tight my hood is tied. Also, the number of nails I've glued on will affect the pacing, as I allow myself to be soothed by the sounds of the nails on the curtain's fabric. So, I go from hugging the curtain to working from the curtain down to myself. Then I try again to make it away from the curtain without anyone noticing that I am moving my feet.

MN The term you are using—"negotiation"—seems like a key term for your sense of choreography. If the main plotline of these initial moments in *Yellow Towel* is to enter and move diagonally across the stage from curtain to toilet, then, in this instance, the negotiations are each obstacle and information point you confront along that line.

DM It bounces between “the choreographic” and what I need to do this job I’m trying to do.

MN And here, at the start of *Yellow Towel*, what I sense you’re performing or relaying is something cosmogenic. You seem to be initiating an entire universe of movement and sound.

DM When I’m in and away from the curtain, I am working myself up to a place where I can feel like I can make a sound. I’m saying, *Ummmmm, uhhhhhh*. I’m thinking, and I’m playing. Then it’s choreographic. I’m writing. I’ve been warming up a little — *so, ummmm, so* — I’m working my way up to saying, *Hello*.