InVisible Culture

Cracks of Productivity: The Vitality of the “Flesh” in Danzad Malditos

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“Are we not in awe of this piece of flesh called our ‘body,’ of this aching meat called our ‘self’ expressing the abject and simultaneously divine potency of life?” — Rosi Braidotti¹

Introduction

Idleness is usually seen as the opposite of productivity, with the latter term being a common imperative in our Western capitalist society. In our work, social media interactions, even in our leisure activities, we are demanded to perform, to be in a constant state of productivity. This essay will offer a perspective on idleness by analyzing the cracks of productivity and how its failures can offer novel ways of dealing with this imperative.

Throughout this essay, such an analysis will be made by looking at a case study: the Spanish theatre play *Danzad Malditos*, a loose adaptation of Sydney Pollack’s 1969

movie *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* By means of reference to the scenes, the monologues, and the way in which the performance is structured, this essay will offer a practical example of how the vitality of flesh can be presented, and how this can be interpreted as a critique towards productivity in contemporary society.

Productivity in this essay is analyzed within a biopolitical framework, mainly through Giorgio Agamben's distinction between *bios* (qualified life) and *zoè* (bare life). I will then relate this binary to the contraposition between body and flesh, with a particular attention to the latter concept. Flesh, therefore, shall be the conceptual tool through which an analysis of the cracks of productivity will be carried out.

The analysis of the vitality of the flesh, and its creative intervention into what it means to fail at being productive, will entail a dual perspective. First, I delve into this concept from the point of view of embodiment and movement. Second, I delineate an interpretation of the flesh through perception, especially through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I then bring together these two perspectives and link them back to Agamben's idea of “inoperativity.”

Finally, this essay argues that the cracks of productivity, as analyzed in several instances of the play *Danzad Malditos*, offer not only an exhibition of exhaustion and failure, but a creative way of dealing with alternative views on what it means to be productive. By exposing the flesh of the performers not just as worn-out bodies but as showing a new type of vitality, *Danzad Malditos* provides a critique on productivity. At the same time, the play opens another path for relating to others: in more ethical, posthuman entanglements where that exhausted and unproductive flesh becomes the main point of connection among entities.

Danzad Malditos and the Cracks of Productivity

Danzad Malditos is a stage play created by a homonymous Spanish collective, based on the main premise of Sydney Pollack's film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* The movie, which is in turn based on another medium—a novel by Horace McCoy—focuses on the lives of several desperate characters that assist a dance marathon during the Great Depression in the United States. These marathons, that turn out to be endurance contests of great entertainment for the well-off class, lure people in precarious situations by promising a monetary price and by supplying daily food rations. The dance marathons could last a few days, weeks, or even months. One held in Madrid in 1932, for instance, lasts two months and the contestants are only allowed to rest for 15

minutes in every hour. During that time, apart from laying down, they have to clean themselves and change their clothes for the next dance.²

Instead of opting for an adaptation of the storyline of the movie, *Danzad Malditos* decided to create a play that is articulated as a real competition. First staged in 2015, the play exhibits a mixture of live competition and scripted scenes. The live competition consists of physical activities or games of chance, resulting in one or more of the actor participants being expelled after each of these trials. Elements of competition are interspersed with scripted scenes composed of text and choreography performed by alternating actors, depending on the outcomes of the preceding trial. Therefore, the actors know every role and perform in different constellations; every time the play is performed a different ending will be shown, with a different duo emerging as the winners each time.

There are five eliminatory trials during the piece. The first one already sets the atmosphere for the rest of the fierce competition: due to the fact that eleven performers have been invited on stage and the dances are mainly for couples, one has to be eliminated. The actors and actresses select on the spot the partner that will accompany them throughout the rest of the performance, leaving one aside. The second trial relies on pure chance: a bottle is given to each participant, nine of them containing water; one of them containing a dark liquid (fig. 1). After the one who has drunk the dark liquid is eliminated, the partner asks another person to form a new couple with him or her. That person can either accept or decline the offer. The third competition consists of a tough physical exercise: the contestants run in circles along the stage while a song is played, and the audience is encouraged to clap along. The last couple will be eliminated. The director, close to the technicians, decides how many times the song will be repeated in each performance, usually in consonance with the audience's reactions: the more they clap, the more he plays the song. The actors, therefore, do not know how many times they will have to perform those extenuating exercises, which contributes to their tired and pleading looks (figs. 2 and 3). On the fourth trial, the eliminated contestants decide unanimously who is going to be the next disqualified duo. Finally, when only two duos remain, someone from the public chooses the winner.

Figure 1. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.*

Figure 2. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Figure 3. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

In between these competitions, several dances take place, along with monologues that occur both every time someone is eliminated and in the middle of the dances. The monologues tend to reflect on past experiences, on the reasons that brought them there. Those delivered by eliminated actors turn into a flow of rage towards society, their other contestants, and the director. In this respect, the director of the play, Alberto Velasco, insists on his creation being a tribute to losers, to all of those who do not make it until the end.³ How can a play that is articulated as a real competition that seeks to find an ultimate winner show the cracks of productivity? How can it give a different perspective on fatigue and failure?

According to Jack Halberstam, failure is an important part of contemporary Western society, as the market economy has at its core the constant shifting between winners and losers, where success is associated with profit. In his project *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam works towards a reconceptualization of failure that refuses to conform to dominant logics of power and discipline. In this way, the focus is not on re-evaluating the standards of succeeding and failing, as in broadening the understanding of those concepts. Rather, the political task that Halberstam summons resides in the dismantling of the very logic that produces success and failure. Understanding that “under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” does not necessarily imply forgetting about the

negative effects that this activity entails.⁴ And yet, the negative consequence of failing has the power to shake the positivity of contemporary life that figures success as only dependent on someone's abilities. The imperative of refusing the self-made, individualistic description of success is of vital importance. Halberstam calls for the ethical impulse of understanding how systems of failure and success are socially and culturally distributed before any action takes place. But how to achieve this in a theatre setting?

Biopolitics: Productivity as a Lens in the *Zoè/Bios* Binary

In this essay, the question of "productivity" shall be a key term in defining the standard logic of success and failure, in which bodies are marked as productive or unproductive based on their ability to contribute to the ongoing economic system. In the case of the industry of the spectacle, where the characters of *Danzad Malditos* are embedded, the requirements are youth, beauty, and talent. This imperative of proving yourself worthy of a system that increases your precarity establishes the link between the company *Danzad Malditos* and the inspiration for their play: *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Aligning themselves with the people that participated in the real dance contests upon which the film draws for the promise of prize money, the people that created, directed and produced the play *Danzad Malditos* seek to denounce the situation of a society in which one has to constantly compete for survival and comply with the imperative of productivity.⁵

For the historical and philosophical account of the division between productive and unproductive bodies, it is of use to turn to the work of Giorgio Agamben and his account of the dialectical interplay between *zoè* and *bios*. The Greeks, Agamben explains, had two terms to express what they meant by "life": *bios* and *zoè*. Whereas the latter implied natural life, the former comprised a particular way of life, one that could be considered to be "qualified." In this way, simple natural life (*zoè* or bare life) was excluded from the *polis* and remained to be associated with reproductive life in the sphere of the home. However, the Aristotelian *polis* did not just imply an opposition between life and good life but an implication of the first in the second, of bare life within qualified life. Western politics then, in Agamben's terms, constitutes itself through "an inclusive exclusion (an *exceptio*) of *zoè* in the *polis*, almost as if politics were the place in which life had to transform itself into good life and in which what had to be politicized were always already bare life."⁶ As he explains, bare life is the necessary exclusion upon which, paradoxically, "civilized life" could be built.

This “inclusive exclusion” of *zoè* into *bios* constituted, for Agamben, the main principle of Western politics—sovereign power. That is why modern democracies, though presenting themselves as a vindication of natural life, conflate with totalitarian states inasmuch as they keep this binary division where bare life needs to be protected, controlled and subsumed by *bios*. Agamben, however, does establish a change of paradigm. For him, the discussions that took place during the Nazi regime regarding euthanasia blurred the line that divided *zoè* and *bios* even more: whereas previously it was possible to isolate bare life, now the line that divides qualified life and disposable life resides within each individual and needs to be constantly redrawn.

This distinction between qualified life and disposable life, in contemporary society, can be better understood through the terms introduced before: productivity and unproductivity. As previously mentioned, the distinction between success and failure is created on the basis of which bodies are able to contribute to the current economic system: the unproductive, therefore, the one that is not able to accommodate to such demands, becomes the exclusion, bare life. This is where power is located in *Danzad Malditos*: it resides with the master of ceremonies who constantly tries to decide where this line is drawn, and who deserves to be called a “qualified human being.”

The Flesh: Contesting the Productive Body

Movement and the Bodily Dimension of the Flesh

For a play where movement and the body play such an essential role in conveying meaning, I find it useful to compliment the dialectical relationship between *bios* and *zoè* with another pair: “body” and “flesh.” The concept of “flesh” acquires a predominant role in Roberto Esposito’s theorization of biopolitics. According to the author, the link that connects and explains the contradictions between biopolitics and the great massacres of Modernity can be understood in terms of a negative protection of life, where the ideas of immunity and self-immunity are essential.⁷ I would like to point out how the demarcation of what needs to be preserved and what needs to be destroyed inside the body of either the individual or the nation (in Agamben’s terms, the distinction inside the individual between *zoè* and *bios*) is understood in terms of body and flesh.

Flesh, as the existence that does not conform to proper life, as the uncontrollable part within the body that exceeds, shall be a crucial point in this analysis for two reasons. The first is flesh’s visible character in the field of movement. The philosophical reflections on the flesh were initially constituted as a reaction against idealistic

positions and an impulse towards immanence.⁸ Pedro A. Cruz Sánchez points out how this turn towards flesh influenced artistic creation from the 60s onward, especially in performance and "body art." The body in art was recuperated not as a glorious solution to the atrocities of the past, (a self-contained subject that was once whole), but the body in flesh was already sick, worn out, and weak.⁹ It is precisely this line of exploration that *Danzad Malditos* continues, exposing the dancers' bodies under uncontrollable, vulnerable, fatigued conditions.

Even though the text of the performance gives us some important clues, as I shall point out in the next section, the potential of this play resides on a bodily level. In other words, the body in scene as an aesthetic force in itself conveys meaning beyond the power of the script that needs to be addressed. The wide variety of bodies on stage already points to the importance of this factor for them to express meaning. The dance pieces that are interpreted tend to focus on non-professional movements: both the variety and intensity of those movement supersede the quest for technical skills. Finally, the choreographies are based on repetitions, physical actions such as jumping or squatting, and on quotidian gestures taken to the extreme, like laughing (figs. 4 and 5). These three instances together create a scene where the body is exposed, overtaken by external factors: by the impossibility of offering a professional performance, by extreme tiredness and frenetic gestures. Furthermore, certain physiological disabilities, such as stuttering are made visible throughout the play, as well as incontinent gestures that arise as a result of their physical efforts, such as panting, coughing, or moaning. The affective potential of the show seems to reside in the performers' failure to fully control their bodies, always constituted and exceeded by some sort of undisciplined force.

Figure 4. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Figure 5. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

The beginning of the play already frames it in this way. The actors, slowly moving around the stage, start mimicking the movements of agitated horses while getting dressed (fig. 6). This gesture, apart from being a reference to Pollack’s movie, signals a point of double connection: first, between the “natural life” (*zoè*) of animals and precarious subjects of the play; second, between the uncontrolled movements of the flesh and the motion of the horses in distress. The structure of the whole play is created to enhance the performers’ fatigue and the spectators are consequently able to perceive how their strength decreases to the point that they can barely stand on their feet. As the master of ceremonies claims at the beginning:

Bienvenidos al lugar donde lo humano muestra sus verdaderas caras, porque la necesidad y el cansancio hacen brotar de cada uno la mejor y la peor versión. Aquí están, once ejemplares únicos: la fuerza, la elegancia, el equilibrio, el gesto, la pose, la templanza.

Welcome to the place where human beings show their true faces, as need and tiredness bring out the best and the worst in each of us. Here they are, eleven unique specimens: strength, elegance, balance, gesture, pose, temperance.¹⁰

Figure 6. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

I would like to interpret this statement in two ways. First, through the power of its irony: even if the aim of the contest is to expose “eleven unique specimens” that embody the best qualities of a “normal” subject, the image with which the spectator is confronted differs greatly. It is not just about the capacity of the show to drain the energy of the contestants but also about how, even at the beginning of the piece, their bodies never resemble the type of uncorrupted health and energy that we are used to perceive in young actors and actresses (fig. 7). Second, and in relation to the first point, these “true faces” of the human being that the master of ceremonies alludes to when speaking of tiredness and extreme need might point at something different than what we are used to. The contestants of *Danzad Malditos* expose their flesh inasmuch as they never fully comply with the requirements of a hegemonic productive body: they never seem to be fully stable, fully in control of their actions and in doing so create a new type of vitality that could afford a state of inoperativity. This “vitality of the flesh” that I shall explore below, might be what these “true faces” afford us to have a glimpse at.

Figure 7. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Perception and Entanglements of the Flesh

The second reason for using “flesh” as a conceptual tool depends on its potential in the field of perception and the term’s capacity to point at a blurred connectivity among entities. In *The Visible and The Invisible*, the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorized “flesh” as the porous border in our process of perceiving the world.¹¹ In Merleau-Ponty’s work, flesh can be understood as a shared sensibility among bodies and the environment. “Flesh,” as he understands it, can refer both to flesh of the world and “my flesh,” and it is better comprehended as an “element” in the classical sense. As he puts it: “to designate it we should need the old term ‘element’... in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.”¹²

The flesh as an element that brings a style of being is closely related to Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of a “postural schema.”¹³ For the subject’s consciousness to emerge and

for it to have an awareness of itself and its situation in the world, it needs to construct a set of postural schemas. These are a system of “I can(s)” (learned consciously or unconsciously) that allow the body to move. Thus, flesh of the world in contact with the flesh of the subject affords a relationality in which the body can arrange its “I can(s)” and create certain postural schemas in order to navigate the world.

This “element” that is the flesh, therefore, allows for a type of communication between entities but, also, for their differentiation; that is, it is associated to a blurred (or chiasmatic) intertwining in the process of perception. As Merleau-Ponty questions: “Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?”¹⁴ Flesh constitutes our main way of communication with others and the environment. Its confusing point of departure resides in the individual who touches and is touched at the same time, thus leading to a difficulty in distinguishing between object/subject, perceived/perceiver. Visibility, however, is not all that there is to flesh: another dimension of the flesh—the invisible—is also constantly part of the world. This, at first, might seem to fall into an ocularcentric impulse. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that this “visible” or “invisible” character of the flesh, more than relating to a specific human sense alludes to the aforementioned description of the flesh as an element. Merleau-Ponty asserts:

There is here no problem of the alter ego because it is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.¹⁵

This chiasmatic relation that the flesh beings to the fore consists in a becoming, or a kinship among body, things, and environments, where its connection with theories of intra-actions and trans-corporeality become clearer. Karen Barad, in a drive to critique theories of representationalism, which treat matter as passive and language as agential, proposing instead to move towards a posthuman understanding of performativity and to relate to matter as whole entities that interact. Barad builds on Judith Butler and Donna Haraway in their analyses of how discursive practices shape not only the subject but also the matter of bodies and, introducing Rosemary Hennessy, reflects on non-discursive practices as well.

Barad’s theory of intra-actions, close to the agential realism of Niels Bohr, seeks to consider configurations and relations instead of things and words. On the one hand,

there are specific exclusionary practices which are embodied as material configurations of the world in causal relationships; on the other hand, there are material phenomena which are constituted by relations and not independent things. This means that the primary epistemological unit is not an independent object (which is an atomistic conception of reality) but a phenomenon: "phenomena are ontologically primitive relations—relations without pre-existing relata."¹⁶ This change of perspective brings about intra-actions as the move through which we cannot assume the pre-existence of entities/relata: "It is through agential intra-actions that the boundaries of properties of the 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful."¹⁷

Stacy Alaimo, greatly indebted to Barad's intra-actions, decides to use her conception of it to theorize transcorporeality. For Alaimo, this term can be defined as the interest to trace the "material interchanges across human bodies, animal bodies, and the wider material world."¹⁸ It relies on posthumanism as it considers the human in a perpetually interconnected flow of agencies and discursive systems. In strong opposition to global capitalism and the medical-industrial complex which "reassert a more convenient ideology of solidly bounded, individual consumers and benign, discrete products," Alaimo proposes to consider not only the agency of matter but also our ethical responsibility towards a set of entanglements of which we are always a part. As she claims: "we are always on the 'hook'—on innumerable hooks—ethically speaking, always caught up in and responsible for material intra-actions."¹⁹

The blurred intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world in Merleau-Ponty acquires an interesting tone when seen through the light of intra-actions and transcorporeality. If the flesh allows us to theorize our entanglement with the environments and with other entities, then the possibility of a posthuman consideration of our being in the world emerges and makes an alliance with Barad and Alaimo's preoccupation with ethical responsibility. The part of the concept of flesh which I previously connected with biopolitics, as this part of ourselves which we are not in control of, the part that disrupts the normative and productive body, can take on an ethical stance when considered through this lens. This neglected flesh in the field of biopolitics, then, could establish a connection among entities, pointing to places of co-constitution that were traditionally dismissed: in unproductivity, in failure, and in weakness.

The interchangeability of those subject's precarious positions is shown, first, in the way several nationalities are represented in the play. The contestants come and speak

in Spanish, French, and Italian, creating a thread that politically and socially connects the situation of several Mediterranean countries in Europe. Furthermore, in one of the first scenes where the dancers need to introduce their backgrounds to the audience, instead of doing so themselves, other contestants give information about each other. Thus, even if the reasons and specific circumstances are visible and expressed, a certain connectivity in their vulnerable situation is enhanced by this exchange of positions and languages. Apart from the dances that are executed in pairs, the contestants render a physical and affective display of co-constitutive vulnerability in a scene where they all lean against each other, supporting the other's body, preventing the rest from falling and becoming an almost indistinguishable human mass (fig. 8). In a similar fashion, the objects that compose the scenography are not shown as individual, complete wholes but, on the contrary, constantly drowning in the sand that covers the entire stage. Partially exposed, those objects diffuse a sense of boundary, and in relation to the floor, these objects are like the dancers, constantly drawn (fig. 9).

Figure 8. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Figure 9. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Finally, like in Pollack’s film, the reference to sacrificial animals—especially horses—becomes a constant in the dramatic text. Even if on some level animals in this play are treated as mere metaphors, deprived of their agency as entities that contribute to our daily intra-actions, there is an interesting factor that might open up a different interpretation. *Danzad Malditos* presents itself as a site-specific play to be performed in Las Naves de Matadero in Madrid. This space, formerly a slaughterhouse, is today one of the main theatre halls in the capital of Spain. Far from being a fortunate coincidence, the performance features, at several times, the song “Too Darn Hot” by Ella Fitzgerald, which acquires a completely different meaning when seen under this light. The master of ceremony explicitly refers to this situation almost at the end of the show: “¿Te das cuenta? Estamos en un antiguo matadero. Estas naves encierran sufrimiento. Esta nave ocultó de la vista la muerte de millones de animales.”— “Do you realize? We are in an old slaughterhouse. These industrial units enclose suffering. This place hid from sight the death of millions of animals.”²⁰

By making the unspoken visible and by directly addressing the audience regarding this topic, the master of ceremonies points at the spectator’s complicity in the creation of two forms of suffering: that wrought by the slaughterhouse and that of the contestants. I would like to propose that more than a metaphor, this fact acts as a point of connection for what Stacy Alaimo encourages us to do: to recognize a shared fate among species and, at the same time, to assume responsibility.²¹

Inoperativity: The Vitality of the Flesh

This way of exposing the flesh of the actors can lead us to what Giorgio Agamben theorized as "inoperativity," and, as we posed at the beginning, to a new conception of failure outside of its neoliberal conceptualization. Agamben, in *The Use of Bodies*, developed this notion while trying to understand what it could mean to "use one's body."²² Basing his reflections on analysis of mainly Aristotle and Foucault's texts he concluded that this "use" (*chresis*), exemplified in the body of the slave, was different from production (*poiesis*) and from practical use (*praxis*), but also that it was something other than modern labor. He turns then to Foucault in order to acquire a clearer view on *chresthai*, which, according to the French author, used not to describe an instrumental relationship of the soul to the rest of the world and the body but a position in relation to the surroundings, to the objects, the other people and to one's own body. However, Agamben tells us, as the "use of the body" is thematized in Foucault as a process and a relation, it cannot possibly be separated from "care-of-oneself." "Care" presupposes "use" or, at least, "use" constitutes one of the instances of relations that one must take care of. This, consequently, may lead to a subject that cares for the one that "uses", translated into the governability of the self and of others.

Agamben finds in Heidegger's theorization of care a new path to "inoperativity." For Heidegger, "care" appears through the suspension of handiness; that is, of familiarity, of common usages. During this suspension, things are in a potential state. Nonetheless, according to Agamben, it is of utmost importance to comprehend this potentiality (*dynamis*) not through an Aristotelian binary of potential/act, not as a passage to act, but as a condition in itself. This form of understanding potentiality is strictly linked to inoperativity which, as Berit Callsen notes, constitutes a dialectics between activation and deactivation. The deactivation of work has the ability to restore a new possibility, a new use. In this inoperativity, at the threshold of use and disuse, an indifference emerges where *zoè* and *bios* cannot be separated.²³

The bodies of the contestants of *Danzad Malditos*, in exposing their flesh on stage, render inoperative the same premise of the play: the exposure of strong-willed, controlled bodies that can withstand the toughest of trials. The actors, from the start of the show, prove to be not productive; they show the impossibility of complying with the requirements of the show: strength, youth, beauty, incorruptible determination. The actors fail constantly the demand of the master of ceremonies: not be dispensable. As long as the show progress, we realize how, for one reason or another, all of them are indeed disposable.

However, by putting on hold the goal of the contest, another use of their bodies, through their flesh, can emerge. A new type of vitality is at play: what Rossi Braidotti calls "the vitality of *zoè*."²⁴ Braidotti, picking up on Agamben's distinction between *zoè* and *bios*, responds to this imperative in a way that shifts the discussion to a Spinozian affirmation of life force. According to Braidotti, the contemporary technologically mediated body and the current social practices of human embodiment can show a vitality that is "unconcerned by clear-cut distinctions between living and dying."²⁵ This situates *zoè* as a vitalist process that moves away from anthropocentrism in favor of mutual interdependence: "*zoè* makes me tick yet escapes the control of the supervision of the self. *Zoè* carries on relentlessly and gets cast out of the holy precinct of the 'me' that demands control and fails to obtain it."²⁶

Interestingly enough, Braidotti at one point refers to this vitality of *zoè* as "flesh." As *Danzad Malditos* progresses, one of the main techniques through which this vitality is made legible is the repetition of songs. The usage of "Padam Padam" by Edith Piaf and "Too Darn Hot" by Ella Fitzgerald as leitmotifs allow the spectator to compare scenes and perceive the difference in bodily energy that the actors and actresses express. Through the perspective of productivity, the dancers' ability to perform tasks slowly decreases; however, when analyzed from the perspective of this flesh that "escapes the control of the supervision of the self," the contestants on stage expose a different type of vitality. This vitality possesses its strength and also its ethical drive on the fact that it cracks but does not break. As Braidotti puts it, "ethics consists in reworking the pain into a threshold of sustainability, when if possible: cracking, but holding it, still."²⁷ Even if the contestants are forced to compete against themselves, their weak flesh connects them to each other and to the environment in a communal pain that is shared, allowing them to hold on (figs. 10 and 11).

Figure 10. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Figure 11. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*.

Conclusion

In its clear connection with the precarious situation of subjects in Spain today, and more specifically, in the spectacle industry, *Danzad Malditos* is a complaint of current situation. However, by only pointing to this complaint, we risk falling into the assimilationist tendencies towards which Agamben himself seemed to be suspicious. It is tempting to merely stretch the category of the "human," to consider those bare lives on stage as *bios*, as qualified life, even if the productivity of those bodies on stage is clearly at stake.

Nonetheless, in this essay, departing from an attempt to disregard these types of binaries, I propose a posthuman turn in the debate by introducing the concept of "flesh" and its double acceptance. On the one hand, as related to the field of biopolitics, flesh explores that uncontrollable part of the self which does not conform to the requirements of productivity and to the normalizing body. On the other hand, in connection to phenomenology and perception, flesh is understood as a point of blurred intertwining of entities in the subject's access to the world. This situation, finally, allows for an understanding of the flesh as the disregarded part of life which co-

constitutes the world and its inhabitants by means of intra-actions and transcorporeality. Instead of proposing yet another distinction between body and flesh, my aim here is to dismantle the binary by focusing on the intertwining of entities and environments precisely on the part which is usually discarded: the unproductive, the weak, the irrationally uncontrollable life force, as exposed in *Danzad Malditos*.

At the beginning of this essay, I asked "how to expose the different ways of failing that do not follow narratives of productivity in advanced capitalism?" I hope to have opened up a new path for reconsidering this question through the vitality of the flesh. The power of the uncontrollable life force that the dancers of *Danzad Malditos* expose in the piece, can render inoperative the aim of the contest. Due to the fact that from the very beginning these subjects do not conform to the requirements of those tasks, they are able to put a hold on that type of work and open up other uses of their bodies. These new uses show the affirmative force of their flesh, which can offer other conceptions of their failure.

At the end of the play, the winning couple, stand on top of the rest of the contestants, whose bodies in an undifferentenced mass create a podium, and look at the horizon with a deranged look (figs. 12 and 13). At the end of the film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Jane Fonda, after having won the contest, asks her partner to kill her. Alberto Velasco, director of *Danzad Malditos*, poses the following question in an interview: "When winning, what does one win, and at the expense of whom?"²⁸ The actors in *Danzad Malditos*, through the use of an unbounded flesh that renders inoperative the requirements of a productive body open new paths for ethical considerations of communal pain and unequal distribution of success and failure. They show us not only how failure can be re-signified but also how, within the rules of the game that have been imposed on us, in the end, the fact is that no-one can ever win.

Figure 12. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*

Figure 13. Scene from *Danzad Malditos*

**All featured images are screenshots from a recording of Danzad Malditos at Teatro del Bosque de Móstoles in 2017 shot by Malditos Compañía.*

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Footnotes

1. Rosi Braidotti, "The Politics of 'Life Itself' and New Ways of Dying," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), 208. [↵](#)
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14. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38. [↵](#)
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