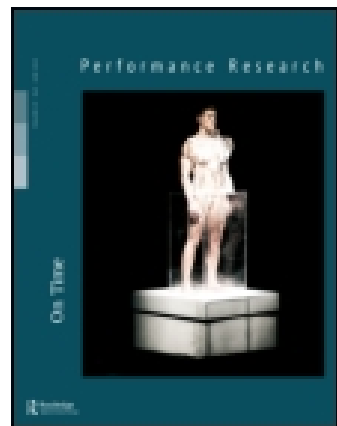


This article was downloaded by: [Megan Hoetger]

On: 19 August 2014, At: 18:17

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprs20>

### Blog response by Tiresias by Heather Cassils

Megan Hoetger

Published online: 13 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Megan Hoetger (2014) Blog response by Tiresias by Heather Cassils, Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts, 19:3, 58-59, DOI: [10.1080/13528165.2014.935193](https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2014.935193)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2014.935193>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# Tiresias by Heather Cassils

Thursday 27 June 2013 8.20p.m.–8.50p.m. · Memorial Auditorium Main Stage

BLOG RESPONSE BY  
MEGAN HOETGER

Having started at the same time as Ron Athey's *Incorruptible Flesh: Messianic remains*, I walked into Heather Cassils's *Tiresias* late. In fact, I walked in just as – I would soon find out – it was coming to its end. The stage was huge (what you would expect of a main stage) and stark; it was completely emptied with only Cassils's naked body, partially contained by a Plexiglas box, atop a white plaster plinth at centre stage. The lighting was also minimal with only two spotlights illuminating the artist's body. The pre-recorded sound of dripping water trickled in as well. Slow and irregular, the sound of the water seemed to exaggerate what already felt like the slowed down time of Cassils's gesture.

With the standard audience seating for the theatre closed off, we sat on the floor encircling the artist who stoically stood with chest pressed into a block of ice cut into the shape of a male torso (the ice sat on a shelf protruding from the Plexiglas box). Taking its title from the blind prophet of Thebes, Tiresias, who is said to have transformed into a woman for seven years, Cassils's *Tiresias* enacted the slow and arduous transformation of such a process. The ice gradually melted under the heat of Cassils's body, streaming down

legs and arms and collecting in the Plexiglas box beneath. The ice must have been freezing – later, when the artist stepped away, there were clearly visible marks left where the ice had been resting; they were bright pink from where the skin had attempted to maintain its warmth in the face of such cold.

Yes, I could point to the relation to minimalism – Cassils's body did break the rectilinear structure of a box; I could talk about poetic enactment of gender difference and transformation – the Plexiglas box segmented the artist's body, masking the torso behind the ice and leaving a naked lower half on display in a vitrine-like case; I could focus in on the beautiful play of light emanating from Cassils's body-turned-sculpture as the warm tones of flesh pressed against the ice on the inhale and pulled away on the exhale, brilliantly producing a glow from within the translucent surface. These are all things I noted, but in the space I became fixated on watching Cassils's micro-movements, on trying to see the effects of the freezing water on the physical gestures – from time to time the artist's body slightly sways away from the ice – finding a moment to break even if only for a split second? And now the

artist is looking down at the ice now – is it moving? Fists are clenching – to keep circulation? There's a pursing of the mouth and Cassils presses tongue against lips – the concentration necessary to not pull away and protect the core from the cold? Will Cassils make it? What does 'make it' even mean here – will the artist remain in this position until the ice melts? Is that even possible? How cold is it? How do you prepare for this kind of endurance feat? Is it slow and steady breathing that makes it possible? Is it these micro-gestures? As if the ice wasn't enough, it must be hard, come to think of it, to stand that still for that long – especially being that cold ...

A total of 25 minutes had passed; I was prepared to stay for the duration. Then, with no discernible signal, Cassils stepped down out of the Plexiglas box, aided by her wife, Cristy Michel, whom, I should mention, was standing beside me throughout my time with the piece, checking the time regularly and, I would imagine, watching to make sure that everything was going safely with Cassils (the structures of care around such a physical feat are also worth more discussion). Hand-in-hand, the two exited the stage without a word. A few other audience members and

I stayed in the space after their departure, waiting to see if Cassils was coming back – maybe this was a break? A few minutes ticked away, and then, suddenly, the ice fell from the Plexiglas box, shattering across the stage floor and instantiating a real break. With that it seemed the piece had come to a close.

After a few more minutes had passed Michel emerged from back stage to retrieve the camera on which she had been documenting the action. One of the few remaining audience members blurted out, ‘It just fell.’ Michel responded, ‘It’s supposed to,’ and then she exited the stage once again. Wrapped up in my own frenzy for the visible (my fixation with seeing the effects), this abrupt

end caught me off guard; I was bewildered. Cassils had stood the position for just over an hour (if it had, indeed, begun at 7.30 p.m.), and now it was over? At first I felt a bit jilted; the action was to be several hours and now it was done? Had I walked into an endurance-lite moment? Once my initial frustration wore away, however, I remembered: even an hour and a half pressed against a solid block of ice must be excruciating.

Who was I to be upset that it had not been longer, more endurance-y? I had been overtaken by my own frenzy, my own desires, my own expectations. I seemed in that moment to have forgotten a key part of the performance: this is an enactment of the

blind prophet Tiresias who transformed into a woman for seven years. Not only was this about the transformation, but about sight (Cassils wore cataracts lenses during the performance). The artist could not clearly see me, and, try as I might, I could not see Cassils clearly either – not in the ways that I wanted to that is. I realized then that my frustration was not about length – it could have gone for several hours – but rather it was about my inability to see clearly. As with most of Cassils’s performances, this was about endurance and transformation, but it was also about such a physical process’s intersections with and disjunctures from the visual and vision itself.

27  
JUNE

9:00 This is the beginning. Conference panel sessions. Reset the compass. Which way is north? We talk about the Stanford iPhone app. I have made my way to an upper room in the Old Union building. Sitting at the beginning is stuffy. A window is behind. Someone decides to open it. I’m reminded of the teachers’ debate over whether or not to open a window in Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening*. But it is a cool breeze on the back of my neck now. I’m writing in my pad. My green felt tip pen is blotchy. A chalk board wall at the back wall with smudges of scrubbed out writing. The paper begins. Finding orientation and concentration. Foucault. Entrepreneur of the self. The self as human capital. Negotiation of space in the city. Fans are turning above and the roof panels converge in perspectival movement towards a vanishing point.