

Suspense, the serious and the superman^{*}

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Suspension lecture, 11 November 2011.
Rhodes Box Theatre, Rhodes University,
Grahamstown.

When considering what to do with one's Friday night, probably very few people would consider a two-hour formal lecture a top priority. But this is a Friday night in Grahamstown, where novelty in leisure and entertainment choices, outside of festival time, is a rarity. It is therefore unsurprising that, on the evening of 11 November 2011, the Rhodes Box Theatre is packed by 7 pm with a variety of students, academics, members of the local alternative scene and the general public.

All have come to witness 'Suspension lecture' – a performance instigated by Annerie Conradie, a temporary lecturer in the Rhodes Fine Art Department. This event – a collaboration between the Rhodes Fine Art and Drama Departments, as well as Freak Factor productions, which is headed by John Wayne Sive, a body modifier and suspension artist – involved a live suspension accompanied by a lecture on the subculture of suspension art and modern primitivism delivered by Conradie.

On arrival, the Box Theatre is abuzz with people finding seats, greeting one another and speculating on their feelings about the upcoming suspension. I take a moment to

savesdrop and most of the conversation centres around anecdotes of previously witnessed suspension experiences; potential, but missed experiences, and speculation about whether individuals or their companions would themselves be prepared to participate in a suspension. There is an element of slightly disguised hysteria in all this chatter, and most certainly the prospective audience is speaking more loudly and animatedly than I have ever seen any audience – in this theatre or in any lecturer theatre where I found myself.

It takes a while for the audience to finish trickling in and find their seats, and all the while the chattering continues. I turn my attention to the stage. Conradie, dressed demurely in a light-blue cardigan and matching turquoise beads, is pacing slowly on beige court shoes behind a wooden lectern. She pages quietly through her notes and is, presumably, rehearsing her text under her head. It has been emphasised in the publicity for this event that the performance has not been previously rehearsed and, as such, it is more a collision of theory and practice, than a collaboration. John Wayne Sive is quoted as saying: '[the event] is a conversation between you [the academic] and me, except you're the only one speaking.'

Contrary to this statement on the other side of the stage Sive, his assistant and the subject of this particular suspension, Sive's fiancée Alice Harlyquin, are relaxing around the suspension equipment. They speak easily and laugh while smoking cigarettes, eating



1. Annerie Conradie, Alice Harlyquin and John Wayne Sive relax before the suspension begins. Photograph by Andrew Sinclair.

2. The audience watches Sive inserting the first hooks. Photograph by Andrew Sinclair.