Performative
Body Spaces

Corporeal Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance, and the Visual Arts

Edited by
Markus Hallensleben

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The scope of the international and interdisciplinary workshop *Body Spaces: Corporeal Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance and the Visual Arts*, which took place at the Liu Institute and the Dorothy Somerset Studio Theatre at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, on March 14-16, 2008, was much wider than this volume suggests. Generous grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and from the UBC Hampton Research Fund made it possible to invite more than forty experts from Canada, the USA, Germany and Japan, including graduate students and performers, all together representing ten different fields. I am also grateful to all UBC units that supported the workshop, especially the Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies (CENES), the School of Human Kinetics, the Women's and Gender Studies Programmes, and UBC Theatre.

The only international guest speaker whose presentation on "Health, Wealth and Stealth: Exploring the Intercultural Body through Kyôgen and Commedia dell'Arte" could not be included in this volume is Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei (UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television) due to her research and theatre project still being in progress. Regrettably, two invitees, Susan Kozel (SMARTlab, University of East London, U.K.) and Lucia Ruprecht (Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge, U.K.), whose work inspired the workshop theme (see the works consulted list at the end of my introduction), had to cancel their presentations for personal reasons. I am especially thankful to Sharalyn Orbaugh (Asian Studies, UBC) and Patricia Vertinsky (Human Kinetics, UBC) for their feedback and support in organizing the workshop, as well as for their stimulating presentations (see Orbaugh 250-54).

The full workshop programme can be found on the project website <http://project.arts.ubc.ca/bodyspaces/>, which was developed by former UBC graduate student Christian Langenegger, who, together with Nicolas Keßels, was also responsible for the technical equipment. The UBC Theatre department provided further support for the two evening performances under the technical management of Jay Henrickson, with Carmen Alatore, Marijka Brusse, Ben Feagin, Lauchlin Johnston and Jay Taylor as technical assistants. Henry Daniel's performance *Touched* was a co-production with the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University and supported by the Iris Garland Visiting Choreographers Fund, Robert Gardiner's SSHRC Research/Creation Grant at UBC and Henry Daniel's Canada Council/NSERC New Media Grant. Henriette Baur contributed the layout for the workshop programme. Anthony Incardona thankfully did the graphic design of the workshop poster, which also became the volume cover.

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Although I sign as sole editor, the publication of this volume owes a great deal to work done by others. My special thank goes to my research assistants and workshop co-organizers Ingrid Petro and Jeremy Redlich. This book would have been impossible without their great effort and without Jeremy's continuous editorial assistance. I also have to thank my colleague and workshop participant Sigrid Schade for valuable comments on the introduction, as well as Staci von Boeckmann and Stephen Starck, Munich, Germany, for proofreading all articles and creating the index. Esther Roth, her colleagues from Rodopi and the editors of the *Critical Studies* series have been of great help in bringing the volume to print.

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The book is dedicated to my daughter Gina Juliana, who was born in 2006 and has extended her space for the same time as the project has grown.

Markus Hallensleben
Vancouver B.C., Canada / Freiburg i. Br., Germany

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Introduction:
Performative Body Spaces

Markus Hallensleben

I

> The performer functions as an activator/ manipulator of the space and its objects, almost machine-like and as a completing particle of the installation metaphor. The changes in the space and the traces left are what describes the essence of life.
> (Penelope Wehrli, New York 1986)

In medical terms, the alterability of the human body has never been easier to achieve than today, and in postmodern societies we have long since cast aside the religious taboo against altering the body. Thus we have lost the anthropological and anthropocentric signifier that the body used to be, and the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, among others, has seen the human body "disappear." Therefore, if we neither own our body nor control it, if our cultural identities, as humans, as ethnic groups, as gendered beings, are constantly in flux, the *movement* of the body in social spaces then becomes a central category, not only in the sciences, but also in the humanities, and especially in gender, performance, theatre, dance and literary studies.

At the same time, while the (living) human body has finally lost its integrity, the artist's body has become part of the artwork and thus part of public space. After the invention of the X-ray the Futurists no longer believed in the "opacity of bodies" (Boccioni et al. 150). In their first manifesto, they consequently put the "spectator in the centre of the picture" (151) by withdrawing the opaque line between their own bodies, the artwork and the viewer's perspective; and when the first human made it safely back from orbit, the French avant-gardist Yves Klein staged his body as a living sculpture (*Un homme dans l'espace! Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide!*). More recent post-avant-garde body artists, such as the Australian body artist Stelarc (Stelios Arcadiou), who extends his body as a cyborg-like media tool, have taken up the idea of performing the human body *in* and *as* political space, as in Stelarc's *City Suspension* performance in Copenhagen on 28 June 1985 when he connected hooks to his skin and was suspended over the Royal Theatre. Later Stelarc went even further and declared the human body *(Leib, zoē)* "obsolete." In the meantime transcultural and interdisciplinary

figurations of the imagined body *(Körper, bios)* have become visible as possible alterations of the physical body – for example in the work of the French performance artist ORLAN, who in *The Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN* (1990–1993) underwent a series of nine plastic surgery operations/performances.

Although the history of twentieth-century European avant-garde performances speaks for itself (cf. Vergine) and can serve as an example for extreme performative body spaces, the phenomenon has not only an interdisciplinary (e.g., Wyss and Buschhaus), but also a transcultural dimension, as is reflected in the diversity of the contributions to this volume, which reach from Asian to European Studies, from nineteenth-century French culture and art to twentieth-century German and Japanese avant-garde theatre, from twentieth-century Polish Holocaust literature to contemporary dance performances and makeover reality TV shows. Since there cannot be a universal definition of the body due to its culturally performative role as a producer of interactive social spaces, this volume discusses body images in relation to cultural spaces from diverse cultural, historical and disciplinary perspectives, and thus fosters a transdisciplinary and international collaboration around the theme *performative body spaces* (e.g., political body spaces as social choreographies; transcultural body spaces that transgress gender; visual and textual, medial and technological body spaces, which lead to performative body alterations and modifications).

The case studies in art, literature and media studies, the methodologies in human kinetics and cultural studies, gender and performance theories, as well as dance and theatre practices discussed in this volume include literary-rhetorical approaches (body metaphors as literary figures of speech), cognitive points of view (body images as figurations of thought and communication), cultural discursive methods (body spaces as performative rituals in educational, historical, medial, gender, postcolonial and transcultural contexts), art as scientific research projects (human-machine interfaces in robotics and autonomous systems), as well as improvisation and performance techniques (e.g., gender spaces in *nihon buyô*). In addition to its broad interdisciplinary approach, the volume is concisely structured, bridging the gap between theories and practices of body performances by focusing on the intersection of body and space as biopolitical choreography, transcultural topography, corporal mediation and controlled interface. All four sections of the volume share a common understanding that any body image, including the physical body, *is* and *has* a performative quality. The human body as cultural object thus always *has* and *is* a performing subject, which combines the political with the theatrical [e.g., Brandstetter, Karwowska, Vertinsky], transgresses race and gender [e.g., Redlich, Lanki, Hirata], shows the construction of matricide and ethnicity [e.g., Ikeuchi, Wilke], unveils the male gaze of private and public corporeal topographies [e.g., Godfrey, Brown,

Rumold] and finally becomes, as a meta body, a medium that overcomes the borders of artificiality and technology [e.g., Pentney, Pritchard, Daniel]. The innovative impulse of these approaches is the belief that there is no distinction between a creative and a scientific approach when performing, discussing and theorizing the human body.

This collection is based on selected contributions to the international and interdisciplinary workshop *Body Spaces: Corporeal Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance, and the Visual Arts* (University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, 14–16 Mar. 2008),[1] during which more than forty experts from Canada, the USA, Germany and Japan, including graduate students and performers representing ten different fields, came together for innovative discussions and highly experimental performances. Within a transcultural framework they explored new ways of theorizing, teaching about and performing with the human body, thus bridging the multiple gaps between discipline-centred theories of the body and the various practises of diverse cultural body images in literature, theatre, dance and the visual arts.

Fig. 1. Improvisation performance of the theme "body modifications." *Viewpoints: Movement Technique for the Stage.* Dir. Catherine Burnett. Perf. Students of the UBC Theatre Studies Department. Dorothy Somerset Studio Theatre, University of British Columbia Vancouver, Canada. 16 Mar. 2008.

While not all presentations could be included here, the volume still gives the reader an idea of the wide scope of the workshop, whose topics ranged from scientific talks by computer specialists (Richard Vaughan and Ted Kirkpatrick, Simon Fraser University) to improvisations by students of the University of British Columbia Theatre Studies department, who under guidance of their movement instructor Catherine Burnett, and based on Bogart and Landau's *Viewpoints* technique, performed some of the theories and body images discussed during the workshop (see fig. 1). Workshop participants thus had the unique opportunity to see some of their concepts, arguments and images of body spaces embodied on stage, and not only discussed the body as object (*Körper*), but also included their own bodily experience (*Leiberfahrung*). In addition, there were two evening performances open to the public: Henry Daniel's experimental dance piece *Touched* involved the work of two well-known members of the New York-based group Troika Ranch, choreographer Dawn Stoppiello and media artist Mark Coniglio, and featured student performers from Simon Fraser University, as well as autonomous robots on stage, while Julia Nolan (saxophone) gave a well-received encore performance of Robert Pritchard's multi-media piece *Strength*.

The volume continues this unique dialogue between scholars of performativity *and* performers, theorists of choreography *and* dancers, computer scientists *and* theatre practitioners and makes use of recent German theories on performativity, theatricality and cultural identity such as those of Benthien, Fischer-Lichte, Lehmann, Kolesch and Krämer, as well as of keynote speaker Brandstetter, based on the works of Benjamin, Plessner, and Agamben, among others. In its transcultural analyses, then, the volume implicitly points to the rootedness of the English term *body* in a German cultural context. Etymologically deriving from the Old High German *botah, body* is not just a word within a *linqua franca*, but has become a concept that shows how the ongoing globalization and mediation of the human body is still bound to European traditions and mythologies. Consequently, it can only be fully understood by considering its origin in German philosophy and European historical anthropology (e.g., Kamper and Wulf).

The chief objective of the workshop, however, was to reach beyond disciplinary and cultural borders in order to create a transdisciplinary space that allows for connecting body theories with practices. While some of the contributors are distinguished scholars in their fields and/or internationally known performers, in their work they all share the commitment to going beyond disciplinary and cultural borders: Gabriele Brandstetter (Dance and Theatre Studies, Free University, Berlin, Germany), Henry Daniel (Performance Studies, Simon Frasier University, Vancouver, Canada), Sima Godfrey (French Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada), Yasuko Ikeuchi (Gender Studies, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan),

Eiichiro Hirata (Cultural Studies, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan), Colleen Lanki (Theatre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada); founder of Kee Company and Artistic Director of TomoeArts, Rainer Rumold (Avant-Garde and German Studies, Northwestern University, IL, USA), Patricia Vertinsky (Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada) and Sabine Wilke (Germanic Studies, University of Washington, USA). When – as here in the collaborative workshop and research project *Body Spaces* – artists, performers and scientists collaborate by exchanging ideas and methods within projects of mutual interest, they again raise the awareness that interdisciplinary collaboration on a multifaceted definition of the *body* cannot be limited to the scientific community, since "Body Politic, the struggle around biopower – certainly, as Foucault foresaw, the great question of this century – cannot be sustained if one agrees to give science the imperial right of defining all by itself the entire realm of primary qualities" (Latour 228).

While there is substantial theory and expertise on issues of the body and gender (e.g., Butler; Irigaray; Haraway; Duncan), political bodies and spaces (e.g., Baudrillard; Deleuze/Guattari; Foucault; Harvey), postcolonial and transcultural identities (e.g., Adelson; Bateson; Bhabha; Spivak), as well as the performative representation and alteration of the human and posthuman body in literature, the sciences, and the arts (e.g., Barthes; Schechner; Gilman; Hayles; Featherstone; Latour), the transdisciplinary approach of the volume intends to go beyond theories of the body as social space (e.g., de Certeau; Lefebvre; Soja) in order to define the human body as *performative* space, which is also inherent to twentieth-century European corporeal philosophies (e.g., Benjamin; Agamben; Bataille; Plessner; Merleau-Ponty). A definition of *performative body spaces*[2] therefore would not only include the idea of space as a relational and discursive (imaginative) category (Gregory; Massey), but also the concept of the body as a malleable (transparent) image space in the arts and sciences (van Dijck 15). By allowing a transdisciplinary, critical analysis of body images in-between textual and choreographic, technological and performative spaces, all contributions promote a transcultural dialogue on theories of performativity, theatricality and cultural identity for which body and space are relational categories.

With the exception of *Bodycheck*, a volume edited in the Rodopi *Critical Studies* series by Luk Van den Dries et al., which relocates the body in contemporary performing art, Nancy Duncan's edited volume on *Body Space*, which investigates feminist approaches to human geography, and Sigrid Weigel's philological study on the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, there are surprisingly few scholarly publications available within literature and gender studies that deal with *both* domains body *and* space from an aesthetic point of view, in which performativity, as defined by Erika

Fischer-Lichte (38-74), is seen as the main concept. Other publications with similar titles and topics are practical textbooks, either in the field of architectural design, health practices or acting improvisation techniques (e.g., Tufnella and Crickmay), or explore the theme solely from a (British and North American) performance studies perspective (e.g., Hill and Paris; Fuchs and Chaudhuri). Most publications stay within disciplinary (and sometimes even cultural) borders, be it in the fields of sociological, philosophical, and geographical studies; and if they extend their reach, they exclude recent Japanese or German-language scholarship (e.g., Read *Architecturally Speaking*).

Nevertheless, an increasing number of publications indicate that there is a growing awareness of the performative relation between body and space, as it can be observed, for instance, in feminist (e.g., Grosz) or materialist studies (e.g., Hitchcock), contemporary performance art or dance studies (e.g., Lepecki) and specific cultural area studies (African, Asian, Latin American Studies). To my knowledge, none of them, however, have yet taken on a transdisciplinary and transcultural approach *across* such diverse fields as Asian and European Studies, literature and theatre studies, visual arts, dance and media studies. In comparison to the large number of anthropological and sociological theories (e.g., Bourdieu; Csordas; Low; the Sage journals *Body & Society* and *Space and Culture,* to name but a few), there still seems to be a niche to fill that lies in applying these theories to performativity studies not just within British and North American scholarship, which at times seems to neglect contemporary research in languages other than English (e.g., Read *Theatre and Everyday Life*), although it frequently refers to German philosophers, writers and theatre practitioners such as Benjamin, Kafka, Peter Stein and Pina Bausch. Recent theories of performativity and theatricality as explored within a Japanese and German framework, in addition, can help to re-evaluate sources not only in their original language and cultural context, but also in terms of their origin within prominent scholarly discourses other than those in English.

The performative notion of dance as "the body's devotion to the moment that cannot be kept" (Mackendrick 150), for instance, was first introduced and discussed by Brandstetter (*ReMembering* 104) in the much deeper historical and philosophical context of "Choreography As a Cenotaph: The Memory of Movement" (102-32). While one could argue that in this instance two scholars might have come to similar conclusions when describing dance as "embodying transgression," since they have some references (e.g., Rilke, Nijinsky, Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze) in common, it is surprising to see that Mackendrick does not further employ the origin of European *choreography* in Greek mythology, while Brandstetter bases her entire argument on it. From here, it would be only one small step to put choreography and *choro*-graphy in analogy.

In this sense, the collection of essays offers new perspectives in describing and analysing bodily images as instances of performative and transcultural semiotic practices based on specific cultural rituals and spatial traditions (e.g., the influence of avant-garde aesthetics, such as Benjamin's corporeal topography of the image as physis-zone, not only on the European avant-garde but also on Japanese theatre and North American media). Whether the body is seen as figurative or performative, the circulation of body images within a global and intermedial context calls for an understanding of corporeal topographies as cross-culturally and technologically built, at times re-creating inherited figurative images that travel through the arts and sciences, cultural spaces and times.

II

> A human being always and conjointly *is* a living body (head, trunk, extremities, with all that these contain) ... and *has* the living body as this physical thing.
> (Plessner 34-35)

Since the publication of Helmuth Plessner's anthropological study on "the limits of human behavior," we have become familiar with the concept that we not only *have* a body, but also that we *are* a body. We can look at our physical bodies as objects of desire, in popular culture, in the sciences, in the arts, in politics, and observe it as a thing *(Körper, bios);* and we can perceive our body as a *living body (Leib, zoē),* as an organic entity that allows the experience of life in all its forms: from reproduction to alteration, from conservation to destruction. We can *use* our bodies (or parts of them) as tools, and at the same time we can *be* the tool that allows *living,* acting, interacting, creating life and producing spaces, creating ideologies and rituals, producing ideas and material realms, figural topics and urban topographies (cf. Lefebvre). It is exactly this ambivalence of *being* and *having* a body that allows for understanding the human body as *performative space.*

The crucial question, however, is: who are the agents of such a performative body space? How *do* we interact when we assume that we act beyond a dichotomy of body as thing (sculpture, *bios)* and body as living being *(zoē)*? In other words: how do *we* create the space *in-between* our bodies, *with* our bodies, against *other* bodies? What allows us to differentiate between artificial and natural body spaces, concrete and representational body spaces, private and public body spaces, female and male gendered body spaces?

If we assume, following Merleau-Ponty, that "space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the

positing of things becomes possible" (243**),** then we can also catch a glimpse of the wider discourse of the body, and – in a broader evolutionary, ecological and anthropological context – ask with Lefebvre, how "the body, with its capacity for action, and its various energies, ... create[s] space" (170). Lefebvre's answer is as much based on modern physics (e.g., Hermann Weyl) as it is implicitly influenced by Plessner and Walter Benjamin:

> There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before *producing* effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing* itself by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space. (170; emphasis in the original)

This performative notion of body spaces works in two ways. On the one hand, the places can be perceived as body spaces or corporeal topographies; on the other, the body itself can be read in its natural and cultural formations, as a topographical body. Thus the body shape follows the natural and cultural spaces, while the natural and cultural places become visible as corporeal topographies. In short: the space constitutes the body, and the body becomes the space.

Lefebvre's concept of body spaces is nothing less than a medial, visual interpretation of Benjamin's theory of the "body and image space" ("Leib und Bildraum", "Der Surrealismus" 310) and his seminal concept of revolution as bodily experience *(Leiberfahrung, Erlebnis),* which introduced the idea that the masses are the agents of change in society and therefore can change societal spaces. Whereas Benjamin referred to the collective body and the imaginative space that could constitute places such as the famous nineteenth-century Paris arcades, Lefebvre, as well as other recent theorists of cultural spaces such as de Certeau, (who with his notion of "space as practiced place" also relies on Benjamin) stress the underlying analogies between body and media, text and technology, movement and space.

If we take Lefebvre's concept to be valid that our bodies *are* and *have* the space they are creating, then we create and constantly re-create and change our bodies by creating and producing our cultural space; then we perform ourselves, we *do* our bodies, or in the terms of performativity studies, we choreograph our bodies, which then not only means that we control our movements in space, but also that we design and redesign our bodies in space. The human body, thus understood as a physical zone in constant flux, *is* and *has* culture (quite literally) as a tool. It creates culture by controlling itself, and it controls cultural spaces by creating and redefining itself. It *is* the

tool itself and *has* the tools that allow it to produce and, hence, control space. Therefore body and space are not separable entities, but a unity; and the movement of bodies in space, and this can serve here as a definition of the human body within its cultural space, could be best described in terms of choreography:

> The body itself is not a given, natural (spatial) unit, but rather becomes configured, as it were, through images and myths which postulate it as a symbolic force … and as a rhetorical figure … In this way, concepts of the body in space arise as topographies and choreographies (both meaning the description of space): a body realisation which at the same time describes a mnemonic space. (Brandstetter, *ReMembering* 20)

Brandstetter's research on performative body spaces then, as is also demonstrated in her contribution to this volume (in section one), aims to accomplish exactly this: by using modern dance and its origin in modern movement theories as an anthropological concept, she re-connects newer theories of body and space with the European avant-garde of the early twentieth century, in which those theories are – sometimes explicitly, often implicitly – rooted, and she unveils the Dionysian side of the body in Western culture by reminding us of the temporal limitation of our bodies in death and dismemberment:

> Space and making spatial, time and making temporal, the media and making "medial"; these do not only mark the forms and conditions of perception, but are also the fundamental parameters of the body art that dance is – choreography. Thus regarded, dance forms something like the paratext of the texts and images configured here: less as a historic and exemplary object of analysis, and more as a paradigm of the representation of the body in motion. (22)

Here, dance serves as a special example (and spatial metaphor) of a body in motion; on the one hand, it can be seen as a fixation of spatial paths and bodily movements in presence; on the other, it creates a transitory image that carries into the future the traces of its loss in the past: it can only be described or notated in absence. Therefore, choreo-*graphy*, in the literal meaning of the word, as Brandstetter points out, "is an attempt to retain as a graph that which cannot be held: movement:"

> On the one hand, "choreography" means the writing of movement as notation; on the other hand, it also refers to the text of a composition of movement. Choreography, as the writing of and about movement,

> as preserved memory … places and erases traces of memory [and – understood as a theory of body and space – MH] has deeply engraved itself on the modern consciousness. (104)

Our globalized cultures are thus based on the European culture of *graphein*, of leaving traces in space. Writing is just one example of making oneself visible in order to be present; walking and dancing are two other instances of avoiding the absence of one's own body. But by doing so, we change and in a certain sense not only create, but also destroy spaces. It is an unavoidable, vicious circle.

If we follow Agamben's argument on the "bare life" (*Homo Sacer; Means without Ends*), based on the concept that any body politics begins and ends with the idea of a "bare life" or "naked human life" (20), then the living body is not only a peculiar entity in need of protection, but also an ideological invitation to destroy "life as form" or the political "*form-of-life"* (*zoē*) (9). We follow a tradition, which, because it cannot be passed on outside a textual order, needs a constant reinstitution of text and language, and, if seen metaphorically and metonymically, a reinstitution of tissue (as *text*) and tongue (as *parole*); in short: it is a constant reiteration of the body (*bios*) as textual space.

Since etymology suggests that body – understood as a set of tissues – and text are related (Lat. *texere*), there is only a subjective, metaphorical, textual understanding of the human body. If we further draw an analogy between "nature" and "body," we can use the word "body" as a textual metaphor without having to refer to the physical body. As Derrida pointed out in "White Mythology", the concept of "nature" has been used without reference to the reality of nature, and the same should be applied to the use of the concept of "body." The Enlightenment, for instance, has used the "sun" as a figure of speech in a double sense. It is a metonymically derived metaphor of physical nature *and* nature as metaphor. Thus, based on the double understanding of "sense" as perception and meaning, Derrida showed that both literal and textual dimensions of "nature" or "sun" are implicated in one another. He went even further and deconstructed any metaphor, in its paradoxical dialectic, as metonymy. The same can be claimed for the "body" in that the organic body is always already textual, or is woven and articulated (or disarticulated) like a text, just as any text has a corporeal or cognitive dimension built into it. While there might be an illegible "body" beyond the metaphorical and metonymical double bind of *being* and *constructing* a textual image, we can only cognitively grasp text in bodily terms and vice versa (see Hallensleben).

If the image is text, then the body is space. If texts can create images, then spaces can change bodies and vice versa. If images can change cultures, then the body can create text; it *is* and *has* the text that controls

cultural spaces, and at the same time is controlled by cultural images. Consequently, Butler's concept of gender performativity has to be applied to the whole body. We are not what we think, but where we move. It is not *how* we move, but *where* we position ourselves in space which makes us human. As Leroi-Gourhan has pointed out, language evolves with the ability to walk upright (thus freeing the hands).

Avant-garde aesthetics and feminist theories, such as those of Judith Butler, also draw on the notion that body metaphors can be constructed, like other metaphors, without reference to the organic body *(Leib, zoē)* and that gender is a performative category. Since modernism (cf. Maude: Waugh), any aesthetic work on the body, whether in the arts or sciences, can be understood as an embodiment of life as text, and it claims the body *(Körper, bios)* as a performative image space, as an adjustable, alterable, and textually-based figuration, open to performances of all kinds.

For this reason, Gabriele Brandstetter analyses dance, with its proximity to gesture and language, not only as an ethnographic ritual, but also as a biopolitical act, from modern dance movements to the contemporary dance choreographies of William Forsythe, which present the body as "subverted and destabilized." In her chapter on *Political Body Spaces in the Performances of William Forsythe* (section one) she analyses the re-presentation of the body in Western society by looking at different ways of portraying culturally-determined images of the body, and she asks, for instance, how environmental and political spaces are constructed by the figuration and defiguration of body movements as acts of collective memories, written testimonies or even human rights.

Recently, the Italian philosopher Agamben has utilized Benjamin's approach for his philosophy of politics as "the sphere of pure means," for which the human gesture is "absolute and integral:" "The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human being as pure mediality" ("Notes on Gestures" 111). In other words: not only do gestures allow the body to talk without words, they also incorporate language; they embody language, and thus they *are* language and *have* a textual structure built into them. They communicate language, and they communicate by moving the body in space. Thus the body, and how it moves in space, would be nothing other than the embodiment of language, and thus communicability would be nothing other than an incorporation of language into the human body.

It is remarkable how Agamben's "Notes on Gestures" in the original ending of the Italian version, which is missing in the English edition of *Means without End*, concludes with a reference to choreography and the image of a dancer, who then would be nothing other than someone who embodies language as a medial act: "Dance … exhausts itself between possi-

bility and reality, alludes to a being in the middle where potency and act, means and ends, balance one another out and produce one another" (113). Seen in the tradition of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and the turn-of-the-century concept of virtuous vitality, in which Lefebvre and many other body space theorists also stand, the philosophical thinker can become a dancer, whose political stage is a rope in the air, and whose performances are dangerous acts, where body and language transcend physics. So when, as in Henry Daniel's art-as-research project and dance performance *Touched* (section four), scientists become choreographers who conduct an experiment by following the rituals of the performing arts, the artists are not only human objects as part of a study, they become researchers themselves.

What unites all the contributions to this volume, despite their diverse fields and methods of study, is an underlying anthropological understanding of the human body that can be found in de Certeau's and Lefebvre's notion of space, as well as in Benjamin's and Agamben's notion of the body as image space based on the concept of bare life. It is the belief that, since images can be interpreted as cultural text, the image of the human body is as malleable as the physical body itself.

In re-instating historical and political acts of violence, literature as well as theatre performances depict the human body of the twentieth century as subverted and destabilized, with Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" and Agamben's *Homo Sacer* as probably the best-known references. The first section on "Biopolitical Choreographies: Performing the Body as Racial and Political Space" examines significant instances of twentieth-century body politics, beginning with an analysis of the gendered impact of the dance metaphor in memoirs of (Polish) Holocaust survivors in the context of Nazi concentration camps [Karwowska], and leading to an inquiry into William Forsythe's political dance performances (e.g., *Human Writes*) which question politically violent acts against individuals and cultural identities by re-writing them on the bodies of performers and the audience [Brandstetter]. Other prominent examples of such provocative re-enactments of body politics that aid our understanding of biopower politics in modern European societies are the influence of Laban's fascist choreography on the British and North-American education system [Vertinsky] and the inscription of European and Asian notions of race and beauty on hybrid body images in the work of the Japanese German-writing author Yoko Tawada [Redlich].

Postcolonialism and posthumanism have added new transcultural and intermedial perspectives to our understanding of the human body and culturally diverse body images. From the creation of liminal spaces in Japanese *buyô* dance that allows for performing both genders [Lanki] to so-named "authentic" Polynesian cultural performances in industrialized Hawaiian tourist parks that recall the popular *ethnic shows* at the turn of the twentieth

century [Wilke]; from the image of Greek matricide in the Japanese avant-garde theatre of Kishida Rio [Ikeuchi] to the gender-crossing embodiment of voices in the European-influenced avant-garde play *Medea* by the Japanese performance group Ku Nauka [Hirata]: there seems to be a common awareness among scholars who deal with cross-cultural, Asian-European body spaces that the body as cultural image has a performative category, which transgresses societal and gendered borders. Building on theories of performativity from Butler to Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Transformative Power of Performance*, section two on "Transcultural Topographies: Transgressing the Body as Gendered and Cultural Space" focuses on the role of performing Western body images and transgressing gender images in East-Asian cultural and transcultural spaces.

The contributions to the third section on "Corporeal Mediations: Visualizing the Body as Private and Public Space" are united by the idea that Butler's understanding of gender as a social category has an underlying – though not yet fully analysed – topographical component, based on the dichotomy of public and private spaces. Whether it is the relations between fashion and space, and more specifically the way that nineteenth-century French fashion mediates the female (social) body in public space [Godfrey]; or in the form of depictions of nineteenth-century women readers by Renoir and Degas as challenges to gendered assumptions regarding female physicality and sexuality [Brown]; or the decadent and performative artwork of Oskar Kokoschka that references patriarchal, surrealist and medial body spaces such as those in Bataille and Benjamin [Rumold]: these contributions discuss the ways in which the interaction of bodies in cultural and medial spaces produces new concepts of hybrid and imaginative bodies, at times even re-creating private spaces and changing public places. Finally, with the help of somatechnics theory, Pentney analyses how North American makeover reality TV-shows perpetuate the Western European notion of Caucasian beauty by blurring the margins of viewer and participant, thus constituting and positioning the living body (*zoē*) as lived body (*bios*), and individual space as public domain.

The shifting of identities and the alteration of the human body is not only guided by gender as a social category, but also by technology, especially in the convergence of media and the sciences. Section four on "Controlled Interfaces: Imaging the Body as Research Object and Artistic Space" therefore focuses on two interdisciplinary art-as-research projects. Robert Pritchard's multimedia music performances build on current interdisciplinary research at the University of British Columbia Media And Graphics Interdisciplinary Centre (MAGIC) in Vancouver, Canada, and utilize interactive speech synthesis and Cyberglove® technology to create a meta-body which can serve as an example for the creation of interfacial organisms through multimedial body performances. From both an artist's and researcher's

perspective, his study re-examines the dichotomies of the human body in between mind and body, real and virtual, visual and acoustic spaces. Finally, Henry Daniel's art-as-research project and dance performance, *Touched,* an interdisciplinary collaboration with two computer scientists from Simon Fraser University, utilizes motion tracking technology and leads to the question whether the human body is not just bound by culture and technology, but – as intelligent medium – embodies information. It emerges as an artificial "choreographic organism" that evolves by depending on and at the same time changing its environmental space.

Notes

[1] See the workshop website at <http://project.arts.ubc.ca/bodyspaces/> from March 2008.
[2] I tackle this definition in my authored book project with the current working title *From the Textual Body to Bio Art: Body Images in Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Literature and Twenty-First-Century Body Art Performances*.

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I.

Biopolitical Choreographies: Performing the Body as Racial and Political Space

Metaphors of Dancing and the Human Body in Nazi Concentration Camps

Bożena Karwowska

In my essay I discuss literal and metaphorical uses of dancing in the context of Nazi concentration camps in memoirs and novels of (Polish) survivors of the Holocaust. I look at 'dance' and 'dancing' as an act/art/performance acquiring various meanings in the situation of a destabilization of the human body and the blurring of gender differences in concentration camps. In addition to drawing on Georgio Agamben's and Judith Butler's views on the modern idea of gender of the human body, I also use notions of Black feminism, especially concepts related to the implications of the "theft of the body" on gender and sexual identities (Hortense J. Spillers). In my essay I show how the act of dancing (as a performance and act) is utilized by prisoners as a means of expressing sexual identities. I also look at (gender specific) usages of the metaphor of dancing and see them as ways of expressing a unity of the female/male body and as survival tactics in the Nazi concentration camps.

The recent revival of interest in the Nazi concentration camps is connected to the fact that, in the memories of survivors, the camps represent a scene of terror and all-powerful authorities, which motivate and determine the limits of human behaviour. It is thus a system of power which does not depend on the number of guards but on the physical and psychological refusal to grant the prisoners the right to be human, giving them instead the status of objects and of limiting their lives to the performance of basic bodily functions. It is a system which Foucault calls "biopower", or the power over the life (and its quality) of a prisoner. Sovereign power, traditionally characterized through the right to control life and death with the arrival of the administrative apparatus overseeing the life and health of the subjects, has changed the above formula 'to create life or allow to die'. As Foucault puts it, "While in the right of sovereignty death was the point in which the sovereign's absolute power shone most clearly, now death instead becomes the moment in which the individual eludes all power, falling back on himself and somehow bending back on what is most private in him" (qtd. in Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 221).

According to Giorgio Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, the camp is a paradigm of post-modernity and hence in describing and analysing it one should, when considering the documents of survivors who experienced the camps, search for the answers to the most important questions concerning contemporary humanity. And the limit of humanity is the descent into the desperate clinging to life and, more properly, to "naked life" (*Homo Sacer*) reduced in fact to the mere performing of basic human functions. Humanity,

connected to what Greek tradition calls *bios* (valuable life) is then, in Agamben's understanding, a victory, in a certain sense, of the spiritual sphere over the biological imperfection of the body. However, he also underscores the importance of corporeality, noting that even in the stage of "naked life" it is imperative to continue using the terminology of ethics. The post-modern world is a reality in which the political body becomes indistinguishable from the biological body and the body's limits are set by the political manipulations of biological life.

For many Polish authors who survived the concentration camps, writing about their experiences was an unprecedented challenge as they had to confront and convey a cultural crisis which found its 'dwelling' in language, that is, in its symbolic order. While this crisis did not become a subject of their reflection and was – in many cases – hardly even understood by them, it was nevertheless felt and intuitively portrayed in books at a later date. To overcome this inadequacy, writers and former camp prisoners, such as Stanisław Grzesiuk (*Pięć lat kacetu* [*Five years in Concentration Camps*]),[1] Zofia Romanowiczowa (*Passage through the Red Sea*) and Seweryna Szmaglewska (*Smoke over Birkenau*), turned to the literary description of the prisoner's body as a medium relatively free of symbolic meanings and thus were able to describe, in their view, the experiences of prisoners in a more adequate way. This brought to light issues traditionally overlooked or glossed over in literary texts and critical evaluations, as for instance the prisoners' sexuality. However, the lack of appropriate critical language resulted in eliminating, in the critical 'martyrological' discourses (Werner), these authors' quests for new, more appropriate representations of prisoners' experiences. When one deconstructs the traditional categorizations, it becomes evident that the circumstances of the lives of prisoners of various nationalities in Nazi camps made the body a leading means of communication there. As regards critical reflection and assessment, which has until now been expressed almost exclusively through the linguistic medium and probably tied to it, there is a need to recognize that the supranational character of the Holocaust and its verbal testimonies require that the critic transcend 'national', patriarchal and unicultural categories of description. Such liberation of criticism from the above constraints is, for instance, reflected in the usage of various feminist concepts, which are not the property of a single culture, especially when categories of feminist approaches, ranging from French feminism to Black American feminism, are employed concurrently.

Interestingly, some of the concepts of black feminism arise from situations very similar to those described in the camps by Giorgio Agamben (*Remnants of Auschwitz*). For instance, an analysis of an advertisement regarding the purchase of slaves with certain illnesses for medical purposes yields similar results, as Agamben mentions, to one on the medical experi-

ments conducted by the Nazis in the camps, because in both cases concepts and definitions of the human body are affected. In both cases the resulting atomisation of the captive body, caused by the isolation of discrete elements of carnal material (the flesh) from the whole, leads according to Hortense J. Spillers, to “the loss of the thought or suggestion of an ethical nature, about the connection between human personality and anatomical features, between one and another human personality, between human personality and cultural institutions” (368). Drawing on feminist studies of Black American slaves, Spillers views imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps as “theft of the body” that is “a willful and violent . . . severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire” (368). One of the consequences of such theft is that the captive body is turned into an object and gender differences are blurred. In the camp, the value of the body as an object is determined by a system hostile to the captive, so that when placed in such a system the captive loses both identity and personality. In fact, fragmentation of the body, typical for slave narratives, is also one of the characteristic features in (Polish) memoirs of Nazi concentration camp survivors.

If in Spillers’ view the body in the biological sense (as material) has a zero degree of social conceptualisation, then the body as a cultural construct is a space subjected to various social and political manipulations (e.g., by the imposition of fashionable images). However, from the point of view of those enslaved, the body is not a cultural construct but a private space in which there are joined and intersecting biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritual and psychological human fates. It cannot be differentiated into biological and cultural space but is their welding together into an unbreakable unity.

Treated by the authorities as an object, as biological material, subjected to emaciation leading to a state of ‘bare existence’, the body in the concentration camp represented more than mere physical survival. Its condition determined all remaining human – including socially ‘constructed’ – fates. For the prisoner the body was a private space[2] (often the only kind of privacy) and thus prisoners (perhaps unconsciously) tried to prevent the symbolic reduction of the body into its parts and to save their humanity, though their actions were quite frequently intuitive.

One such practice of preventing the fragmentation was the expression of sexuality. This may be the reason why homosexual relationships in the camps are not portrayed by Grzesiuk or Romanowiczowa as a part of a gay or lesbian identity and have little in common with partnership. These relationships are actually described as a replication (in camp conditions) of the traditional, patriarchal functions of a man and a woman. Another practice – typical for male prisoners – was fighting (or beatings), as an activity preserving the ‘wholeness’ of the body, or acts requiring the coordination of body and mind. Stanisław Grzesiuk, for instance, refers to beatings and fights

in the camps as a way for men to “talk,” to communicate with other prisoners.

Corporeal communication, whose medium (the body) is the prisoner’s only ‘property’, does not conform to a symbol system in the same way that language does. However, because of the unifying character and representation of the captive body, the symbolic may mark its presence also in corporal communication, especially in metaphorical figures of the body and its movements. In this context one of the most famous Auschwitz murals, a drawing of a ballerina, and other uses of the dance image, pose an interesting example in so far as they refer to the body as a base and material for artistic creation. However, one should also mention here that, among the arts practiced by prisoners in Auschwitz (and other camps), classical ballet (or any other form of ‘trained’ dancing) was not present. Many memoirs refer to musical concerts for SS officers and camp prisoners, and portraits and landscapes painted by the latter for German camp officials, but – maybe because of its special connection with the body – ballet was not an art officially (or unofficially) supported in concentration camps and was not practiced or performed under the auspices of the SS or even secretly among the prisoners. It was the act of dancing, not the art, that was occasionally witnessed and later described in camp memoirs.

In contrast to fights and beatings, dance and dancing are more frequently mentioned by women authors than by men and are – in general – connected with *feminisation* rather than with *manly* characters and actions. This gender bias may not be surprising in view of Elizabeth Dempster’s observation that dance

> has traditionally been defined in relationship to the male-identified art forms of music and drama, and its communicative potential, force and action is commonly misrepresented as dependent upon those relationships. . . . The “male” arts of music and drama commandeer the space of mind and spirit; the female-identified art of dance is relegated to the nether regions of an unthought and unthinking body. (38-39)

In the context of the camps dance is an act that preserves, or brings back, the wholeness of the body, but it still leaves the prisoner mute. Thus, as such, it still represents a lack of “male” agency and is relegated to the marginal position of non-manly acts and activities. Describing male prisoners of Dachau and Gusen, Stanisław Grzesiuk refers to dancing only with regard to social gatherings of German homosexuals. Grzesiuk tends to accept homosexual relationships in so far as they replicate, or are based on, the heterosexual system of dependence; this means that he clearly differentiates them from homosexuality defined in terms of identity, with its own rituals and mores.

Gay culture was totally alien to him, and he even found it distasteful. He encountered it during concerts of his orchestra, when, as he says, "the 'guests' would come, he and she, in couples and would start their frantic dancing" (504). He makes clear that he never engaged his orchestra (a jazz band) for that kind of "*party*, but that the *szwule*[3] – as they were called - were quite clever." He particularly disliked "dress-up parties" which included dancing.

> One day a couple of Germans came, one of which wore make-up and was dressed as a woman. That wasn't serious stuff – just for laughs – "a game of *szwule*". The one dressed as a woman made eyes at the men, enticing them with artificially rounded shapes. He talked in a high, shrill voice, inviting them to dance with him. This was typical humor for German thugs. It disgusted me. (505)

Similarly unsympathetic is the description of dancing at the lesbian party in the women's concentration camp in Birkenau, in Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's book, *Z Otchłani* [*From the Abyss*]:

> The lavatory barrack is almost empty, but full of life. Witches from the *waszraum* and three lavatories organized a night party there. . . . One of the witches is frying something, the other is playing on a harmonica, and four are dancing. "Fat John", more than ever resembling a gorilla, in the first pair with Zoska from the *waszraum*. The floor is covered with a layer of *szajsa*, thus the podium is used as a dancing floor. There, between two rows of awfully stinking holes, steaming like volcano craters, the two pairs are performing their dance among swords. (180)

Both authors refer to the dancing of the camp functionaries; however, it is not only the homosexual orientation or the camp function that – connected with or expressed through dancing – is seen as distasteful and degrading. In another passage Kossak-Szczucka describes a recruitment of female prisoners to the camp's brothel (*puff*), and an "ordinary"

> prisoner, Gypsy. Not young – let's say – old, terribly skinny. A woman with dark skin and black hair, immediately starts dancing a wild Cossacks' dance. She throws her bare legs energetically into the air in Russian "prisudy", bare heels bang on the dry, concrete floor; dried up breasts vibrate as two pieces of brownish leather. She spins without a break, flashes her eyes and teeth. While spinning, sitting down, and throwing her legs, she begs her masters in broken German to accept her. It is true, that she is no longer young and is

> too skinny, but she will gain weight fast. And who can dance as well as she does? Who dares to compare to her? (83)

Sexuality itself – in its concentration camp version – and its expressions are being questioned and ridiculed in these texts. Let us remember here that patriarchy was the only system known to the prisoners and was understood as 'normal' (i.e., as dignifying a human being). As comparatively open homosexual relations among heterosexual men were serving as imitations of prisoners' manly functions outside of the camps, the gay/lesbian prisoners, in order to 'differentiate' themselves from others, had to rely on performing their identities through rituals and mores, which included dancing. The act of dancing – in this case – marks the social position of its performers. Typical examples are a woman who loses her modesty and begs to become a prostitute, or gay and lesbian prisoners expressing their own culture. As such, dancing is seen here as a sign of social marginalization or belonging to a group characterized by bodily manifestations of its members' identity, as for instance gays expressing, by their open sexual behaviour, their identity more than sexuality, or prostitutes advertising their services by displaying their bodies on the streets to prospective buyers. Thus dancing, in both its forms, as ballet and as untrained form related primarily to social activities, symbolically restores the 'wholeness' of the body (and its parts) not only through coordinated movement but also through its sexual connotation and culturally-constructed meaning. The 'feminisation' of its participants and its connection with laughter gave the camp parties a subversive character. For sexual minorities, who were doubly victimized in the concentration camps, dancing was an expression of belonging to a group by re-enacting their sexual identity in public spaces of the camps that were accessible to all prisoners. Victimized by the SS, as well as by other prisoners (who were repeating the gesture of the perpetrators), prostitutes and gay and lesbian prisoners used dancing as a 'survival' tactic.

The connection between dancing and sexual expression was so evident for prisoners in the camps that the metaphor of ballet – as a series of studied movements – was even used to point out relationships not based on 'real love'. A young female prisoner, the main character of Zofia Romanowiczowa's novel *Passage through the Red Sea,* describes her break from a homosexual relationship, "caused at least in part by those handkerchiefs knotted around the neck in a certain way, the passing down of the hair at the temples, and the languorous poses of those who walked up and down between the barracks, in a parody of the same ballet" (133). Romanowiczowa's narrator recalls these theatricalities years after the liberation in connection with her unfaithful boyfriend Paul and his advances:

> He was amusing, and he meant to be. I knew the method, I myself had once been involved in that game with its unvarying rules, in that ballet-like performance where the steps follow one another in tried and proven order, conforming to the smooth-running mechanism of seduction. (133)

The main character of *Passage through the Red Sea* seems to agree with Elizabeth Dempster's remarks that point to dancing as an act in which "the body is dispossessed of its capacity for mindful action" (38). Relying on models visible in the camps, Romanowiczowa sees dancing in terms very similar to its description in one of the most famous dystopian novels, Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We,* where the narrator writes, "Why is dance beautiful? Answer: because it is *unfree* motion, because the whole profound meaning of dance lies precisely in absolute, aesthetic subordination, in ideal unfreedom" (4). A trained classical ballerina achieves this "aesthetic subordination" by practicing every day for hours in front of a mirror and mastering the coordination of movements and gestures of the performing body. In feminist terms, Eluned Summers-Bremner describes this as follows:

> In my experience, the self and other (man/woman) of Irigaray's visions of culturally productive exchange can also be understood as the two selves the classically trained dancer learns to hold in tension: the self she sees from a distance in the studio mirror – body as passive instrument, as object of her labors – which would be "woman" in the traditional binary, and the self she is while dancing, from which the impulse to dance itself arises, equivalent to "man," the "active" part of this event. (94)

In contrast, the female body in the camp was deprived of gender-specific gestures, among which was looking in the mirror. As Romanowiczowa writes, "we had no mirrors back there, thank God, to bear witness to our humiliation, except perhaps for a few broken bits of glass that the cooks hid away in their mattresses. But of course, they were the only ones who could take the risk of looking into them" (*Passage through the Red Sea* 19). This absence seems to be especially interesting when compared with the importance of a mirror for the training of a classical ballerina, and thus for the forming of the body as material for the aesthetic function of art. Eluned Summers-Bremner notices:

> The perception of the self in the mirror as separate, distant from the working, dancing self, implies an idealized construction, a creature of the mind, but one whose physical appearance is simultaneously excessive and lacking in relation to another, distant ideal ("that

> looks terrible, I know how the movement *ought* to look"). . . . They are, of course, not really separate at all, but these two selves must shift in their relation to each other if the classically trained dancer is to achieve a sense of dancing integrity, is to overcome the self-alienating pain of what dancer Shona Innes describes as a "conditioning to fail." (95)[4]

One may just wonder why and how the image/metaphor of a ballerina found its way into the Nazi concentration camps and gas chambers. Romanowiczowa, like other authors of concentration camp memoirs, sees the human body in the camps as unattractive and ugly; the only remains of its beauty being an image stored in the prisoner's mind and imagination. It is obvious that this memory is possible only because of the lack of mirrors which would replace it with the real, current images. The ballerina – in turn – sees her body, its mirror image and the perfect image in her mind as three necessary elements that must interact in the process of becoming a dancer and thus – at the same time – merging art with the artist. It is thus a question of the specific conditions in the camp in which the views of the prisoner and the ballet dancer could meet each other.

A good example of such a situation is provided by the description of the violinists playing in Birkenau's orchestra in Seweryna Szmaglewska's *Smoke over Birkenau*. The scene described by the narrator takes place during the selection of Hungarian Jews brought to Auschwitz in 1944:

> They [the SS men] laugh when they look at the young Hungarian musicians, Jewish women, newly recruited for the orchestra, who play the fast and furious czardas for them. The soloist virtuosos sway voluptuously with their violins to the rhythm of the tune, swoop low to the ground, then transported by the cadence of the music, toss their arms and instruments upward to play above the heads in a passionate tempo. They almost dance as they play. (264)

There are no mirrors in the camp, but there is a 'perfect' image of the ballet dancer in the narrator/prisoner's mind, an intuitive knowledge of how the perfect dancer 'ought to look'. It is thus – in the example quoted – both the need of the violinists to express themselves, not only through the symbolically 'male' art of music but also through the movement of their female bodies, and the body-music coordination observed by the spectators – drunk perpetrators and their surprised victims. As for the performers their acceptance into the orchestra meant an escape from immediate threat of physical extermination, 'saving' the body, which – in turn – could now be regarded as possessed by the music and its liberating function. Dancing is thus a figure that brings 'wholeness' not only to the segmented body of the (female)

captive prisoner, but – through metaphorical usage – it also allows the prisoner to achieve unattainable fulfilment of the psychological desire of completeness, to 'become one' in the Lacanian sense. The prisoners experience the metaphorical 'wholeness' of the body through the aesthetic function of art. The vocal and thus symbolically masculine music playing becomes an experience of completeness only when accompanied by the mute, thus feminine, dancing. It is thus a purifying experience, which brings lost value to the body (as a cultural construct) and detaches it from the everyday observations of the bodies of other prisoners reduced to mere human flesh (weak material).

In his divagations on the nature and functions of sovereignty, Giorgio Agamben discusses the question of human beings living with the consciousness of their mortal bodies and having the power to end their lives (*Homo Sacer*). Living a normal life is – in his view – possible only by maintaining the tension between the knowledge of imminent death and the feeling of hope. Camp prisoners – in order to keep their will to survive alive – had to keep the tension between the reality of their fading bodies (as seen in comparison to other prisoners) and the image of the perfect, beautiful body capable of the act of dancing. This extends to their own imperfect movements and gestures, and the crippled and fragmented bodies of other prisoners compared with the perfect image of what the body 'ought' to be as a material of art. The "dancing violinists" or a drawing of a ballerina (cf. Hunt) were thus bringing back the distinctiveness of two spheres of the body – its biology and its cultural construction, ultimately liberating the captives and restoring to them their bodily space of freedom.

Notes

[1] All quotations from this edition are my translation.
[2] For this reason Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the female body as a situation seems to be more appropriate here than the sex/gender distinction (see Toril Moi, *What is a Woman*? 3-120).
[3] This is originally a German slang word for gays, spelled 'schwule". Here it is spelled as recorded by Grzesiuk in *Lagersprache* - the lingua franca of the camps.
[4] She refers to Shona Innes' "The Teaching of Ballet."

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From Dance under the Swastika to Movement Education: A Study of Embodied Culture

Patricia Vertinsky

By all accounts Rudolf von Laban, Germany's most famous theorist of dance, led an extraordinary life, one intimately bound up with the political, social and cultural upheavals that formed the turbulent backdrop of modern Europe. Laban worked willingly with the Nazis as Germany's dance master before incurring Goebbels' displeasure on the eve of the Berlin Olympics. He later took refuge at Dartington Hall, a unique arts and educational community in south-western England. The Dartington progressive ethos and Laban's emphasis upon dance as an educational force – including the cooptation of his work by female physical educators – had a substantial, albeit temporary impact upon British primary schools. If embodied practices such as Laban's modern dance are viewed as both symptomatic and constitutive of social relations, informative ways of experiencing and knowing the world, then tracing the context within which they were nurtured and their diffusion, along with the changes and re-inscriptions that occurred in this transmission, is a useful way to illuminate how ideologies become attached to bodily discourses.

Introduction

Different forms of dance and gymnastics can be seen as the result of cultural embodiment, just as cultural embodiment can be seen in the work of different choreographers (Smith 79). I draw here on the work of Marcel Mauss who was the first to explicate the cultural importance of what he called "techniques of the body," that is, the ways in which, from society to society, people learn to use their bodies. It is generally in these ill-demarcated domains, argues Mauss, that the urgent problems lie, and this is where we have to penetrate. Pierre Bourdieu further developed these ideas with his attention to systems of predispositions that become inculcated in the body in everyday life along with the use of instruments or technologies such as school curricula (80-2). Michel Foucault, of course, by attending to the ways in which power relations shape the culture of the body through biopower and a wide range of disciplinary techniques has helped us to realize more fully how "subjects are gradually and materially constituted through a multiplicity of forces, energies and desires" (97). Issues of gender are integral to all these theories and to any examination of culture and embodied practices (Desmond 33).

In addition, William McNeill has demonstrated how group consolidation, through a variety of forms of movement, has operated throughout history by such means as systematic military drill, courtly dancing, mass cal-

listhenics, football rituals and so on. Hence, the notion that moving our muscles rhythmically and giving voice can consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings is neither new nor surprising, especially in relation to sustaining a masculine aesthetic prone to fascist tendencies. In my recently co-edited anthology, *Physical Culture, Power and the Body*, Ian McDonald (well supported by Paul Gilroy's arguments) illustrates the various ways in which the dominant culture of sport has propped up hegemonic masculinities, producing bodily dispositions and cultural traits that are prone to fascistic ideologies. Broadening sport to the larger domain of physical culture Hans Bonde, in his recent biography of Neils Bukh, the great Danish gymnastics educator, shows how Bukh became the face of Denmark at home and abroad during the 1930s by presenting his special version of the Western civilized body through demonstrations of rhythmic men's gymnastics. Bukh, mesmerized by the Nazi view of the world, stood as the central designer of a masculine aesthetic for inter-war gymnastics culture. His aim was to form, choreograph and stage young people's bodies to access political power, and he was enormously successful. His dynamic primitive gymnastics, with its muscular contact between men, revolutionized men's movement, contact, mass unity and the expression of male passion. The German Nazis enthusiastically used Bukh's gymnastics (from their racially-bonded neighbouring country Denmark) as an element in the building up of a Germanic physical culture in Germany – helping develop a new habitus for German youth.

Rudolf von Laban

The German Nazis, however, were equally enamoured of the very different embodied practices of Rudolf von Laban – Germany's most famous theorist of modern expressive dance (*Ausdruckstanz*). Laban, one of the major representatives of the new and more creative directions being taken by dance and physical culture during the first decades of the twentieth century, helped orchestrate the notion that the German dance movement was the true art of dance and not merely rational physical drill, gymnastics or old-fashioned ballet. His idea was to substitute the artificial nature of theatrical dance with more liberating community dance forms where the individual could integrate into and learn how to operate within a group. His grandiose schemes for dance and spectacle "dressed up in the mystifying language of race, instinct, cult, bonding, hierarchy, subordination and self abnegation" caught the attention of Goebbels' Ministry for Enlightenment and Propaganda leading to Laban's position as director of the German Dance Stage (*Deutsche Tanzbühne*) (Karina and Kant 101). This effectively placed him in charge of dance and movement throughout Germany and allowed him to elaborate his notion that modern dance could be a vehicle for conveying important ideas through choreographed public festivals and movement choirs which also became

ready receptacles for fascist propaganda and expressions of party devotion in the Third Reich. Because of this, the association between *Ausdruckstanz* and National Socialism has come under vigorous investigation, with a focus on the connections which can be drawn between artistic form and political ideology – most notably by Susan Sontag in her critique of Leni Riefenstahl. Turning to Laban, whose pupil Mary Wigman was one of Riefenstahl's early dance teachers, Marion Kant has insisted that Laban's involvement with the Third Reich (and its effects upon his later work) needs to be taken more seriously. This task has been made difficult though by the fact that "Laban fabricated a powerful mystique and his disciples have perpetuated an aura of mystery surrounding him with a rhetoric that is sometimes even murkier than his own" (Kant, "Laban's Secret Religion" 85).[1] Karina and Kant draw attention to this mystique, asking "why should dance be an exception to the general demolition of self serving myths that protected Nazis in post-war Germany or Austria until quite recently. . . . How is it that dance been treated so gingerly?" (xi).

By all accounts Laban was an extraordinary man – a visionary, a mystic, artist, dancer, choreographer, womaniser, charismatic teacher and theorist. And he led an extraordinary life – one intimately bound up with the political, social and cultural upheavals that formed the turbulent backdrop of modern Europe. But in the decades following his death in 1958 and until very recently, surprisingly few of his pupils or scholars have analysed his work which has tended to evoke either unconditional support or immediate criticism.[2] Laban worked willingly with the Nazis as Germany's dance master before incurring Goebbel's displeasure on the eve of the Berlin Olympics. He became one of a number of Hitler émigrés given refuge at Dartington Hall, a unique arts and educational community in south-western England.[3] The Dartington ethos and Laban's later emphasis upon modern dance and educational gymnastics as an educational force – especially the cooptation of his work by female physical educators – had a widespread and relatively unexamined impact upon British primary schools in the years after World War II, and it is this dissemination of his movement practices in the UK that is the focus of this discussion.[4]

The field of movement is particularly hard to hedge when one tries to look at the political ground trodden by Laban and his physical education followers. As a reluctant émigré to England in the late 1930s, Laban was forced to rely on the training of predominantly female physical educators to earn a living. When the British primary school child became the thrilling object of their gaze and authority, with the belief that the crafting of moving bodies along Laban's principles was transformational, it seems appropriate to ask whose political ground were they treading, and whose mystic cannons were being fired in the primary school gymnasium.

Laban's Path to Dartington

Laban's path to Dartington was a troubled one (Hodgson 8). He took his past and his ideology with him when he fled to Dartington Hall, from where he was helped to "sell its parts" in the British schools (Kant 59). We cannot assume that he simply abandoned his mystical religious commitment, his occult and racist views, his reactionary politics, or that his ideas and belief systems were not deeply embedded in the movement practices his pupils and supporters found so promising for the education of the British child. Furthermore, Laban's powerful gift for motivating people (especially his female disciples) to pursue ideals that are not easily understood needs to be considered further. "After a session with Laban," said Joan Littlewood (an important figure in modern theatre in Britain), "you began to look at the world with different eyes, as if he had changed its colours or its shapes" (72-3). So in making sense of Laban's impact upon movement education in England (and the physical education profession more broadly) we need first to look at the ideological and political influences which affected his artistic activities during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich before assessing the impact of Dartington which was in the mainstream of progressive thought in education during the inter-war years.

Laban's Early Years: The Road to Berlin

Laban was a man of his time – a central European, born into a well-off Hungarian military family in Bratislava, whose travels took him to the centres of artistic thought during times of great debate concerning the nature of aesthetic experience (Foster 46). In Paris he became caught up in the artistic ferment of the avant-garde where Expressionists sought experimental modes of expression and movement to portray the new man (Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolf Laban* 110). Dancing, especially, was celebrated as an erotically charged and intoxicating activity in a Nietzschean sense on a par with war and sports. In this milieu, Laban painted in his Montparnasse studio, contemplated the rhythmic ideas of Delsarte and Dalcroze, and became deeply influenced by Kandinsky's theories of the dancer as living brush (cf. Kandinsky).

In 1912 he went to Ascona, a centre of counterculture in Switzerland, where artists such as Paul Klee and Dadaist Hugo Ball communicated with an assortment of rebels against contemporary culture and the perceived oppressions of city, industry and technology. Laban practiced there as dance teacher and psychosomatic healer in his summer dance school at Monte Verità, and like others in his circle, he saw his School for the Art of Life as a place where he could get in touch with the physicality of nature, renounce "civilizational influences" and mount festive celebrations of the spiritual life. Man, he proclaimed in Nietzschean terms, must seek a state of festive being –

which included in his school a large dose of nudism, sexual adventure and nature worship (cf. Koegler). In one of his earliest choreographed dances, for example, Laban encouraged his students to dance naked and barefoot to the rising and setting sun and let the rhythm flow through their naked bodies in a mystic encounter with nature and pagan rites (Toepfer 99). At the outbreak of World War I, Laban, penniless and ill in difficult wartime circumstances, moved with his wife, mistress and three young children to Zurich. Here he engaged with the early flowering of Dada, the secret seductiveness of Freemasonry and almost died of influenza before hurriedly leaving as a result of debts, his dubious reputation for womanising and of his suspicious dabbling in occult, ritualistic Masonic activities (Foster 15).

"German Dance" in the Shadow of Nazi Germany

His choreographic career, however, blossomed during the 1920s and early 30s in Germany where he began to orchestrate huge dance symphonies and movement choirs. By 1927 there were at least nine Laban dance schools in various European cities led by his former pupils, and he had landed the two most prestigious jobs in dance in Germany – one at the Bayreuth Wagner Festival working for his idol Wagner and the other as Director of Movement at the Berlin State Opera. Now acknowledged as a leader of the "New German Dance" – as *Ausdruckstanz* was re-christened – he began work on his autobiography and applied for German nationality in the shadow of the "nazification" of Germany.

The Nazis were not slow to recognize the political potential of Laban's talent for choreographing huge dance spectacles. Laban, whose politics were in line with their own, seemed to be the right man for the task (Dörr 22). Thus, in 1934, Goebbels named him Director of the German Dance Stage. This placed him in charge of dance and movement throughout Germany and gave him free rein to mount large scale dance festivals, including a dance pageant on the eve of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. When he unveiled his epic spectacle *Of the Warm Wind and the New Joy* it was a celebratory ritual of music and movement reminiscent of the films of Leni Riefenstahl. Laban claimed it was designed to celebrate National Socialism and, indeed, "it embodied in dance the idea of the national community rhythmically oscillating in unison" (23). The spectacle did not appeal to Goebbels, however, who abruptly cancelled it as an intellectual contrivance that failed to capture the clarity of the National Socialist's new order. As Dörr explains, "the stylistic principle of [Laban's] expressionistic dance contradicted the choreographic ordering principle of the National Socialists. Laban's dance-centred philosophy was incompatible with the Nazi's petrified world view, even when – and nothing could hide this fact – a basic accord existed between them" (25).

Stories differ on the exact nature of Laban's fate with the Hitler regime. His work was branded hostile to the state and his earlier Freemasonry activities denounced. A campaign against him in the press hinted at homosexual activities (Segel 87). Crushed, he left Germany, headed for exile in Paris and thence to Dartington Hall. He never set foot in Germany again.

Laban at Dartington Hall

Laban was depressed when he arrived at Dartington Hall and he remained in ill health for much of the rest of his life. He had no money and little influence except among his dance friends at Dartington. His prospects were bleak considering his German citizenship, suspicions about his collaboration with the Nazis, his passion for "German dance" with all its connotations, his lack of formal education and his limited grasp of the English language. He confided to Kurt Jooss, his former pupil and rescuer, "I care very little whether I see a moving, dancing body ever again."[5]

Yet within a few years, Laban's approach to movement had taken the female physical education world by storm and by the late 1950s, modern dance and its derivative, modern educational gymnastics, were well-established in many British schools and teacher-training colleges. In some ways, the shift to a framework incorporating Laban's movement techniques was a perfect fit for the broader progressive educational ideals of the time, especially Dewey's views on child-centred education and Froebel's work on creativity in the kindergarten. Though Joan Littlewood claimed that Laban was sidetracked into education by Lisa Ullmann, a former pupil and young German dance teacher he met at Dartington who adopted the role of his constant companion, his ideas nevertheless had a significant effect within the physical education profession (cf. Willson).

Laban profited from the experimental climate in education of the time when he came to promote his views on movement education. But he also held fast to his devotion to "pure" German dance. In the archives at Dartington Hall, I found one of Laban's letters to the owner of the hall, where in 1939 he had outlined a plan for organizing a community dance and enclosed a copy of the program of his festival pageant which had been cancelled by Goebbels as an example of his proposed "new way of body-mind training for laymen" (Laban, letter to Leonard Elmhirst, 10 Mar. 1939). It showed how, in many ways, he remained politically unreflective about his notions of embodied practices and choreography.

From Ling to Laban: The Diffusion of Modern Dance and Movement Education

When war time exigencies forced Laban and Ullmann (as German aliens) to leave Dartington, Ullmann sought work opportunities for them in Manchester through their contacts with teachers of dance and physical education. Her work was made easier as interest in interpretive movement (at least among some women educators) increasingly nudged aside Per Henrik Ling's more rigid and formalized Swedish system of gymnastics, which had been the hallmark of professional female physical educators since the late 1890s (Fletcher 55). Though it was only vaguely formulated, the idea of freeing the expressive body from rigid training and bounded spaces fit well with the child-centred ethos of post-war England and a renewed focus on the arts which claimed that every child could be a dancer. Although Laban had been forced to abandon movement festivals in Germany, he still regarded group interaction and improvisation as central to the development of personal, social and kinaesthetic awareness.[6] In 1945, the Art of Movement Studio in Manchester became the training centre for Laban's movement concepts and a year later he published Modern Educational Dance, "the most widely read and arguably the most influential of his writings on movement and dance" (Segel 187). It was reprinted five times.

The story of Laban's work with female physical educators is not well documented, though they are said to have done all his drudge work. His influence spread without his constant personal touch, leading, some said, to the replacing of his Bohemian outlook by an ultra conformist school-mistresses' circle (cf. Kirk). It was within the "tight little specialized empire" of professional female physical educators that Laban's ideas flourished. It was they who helped to adapt educational gymnastics from modern dance and promote it widely within the prevailing holistic, child-centred progres-sivism, such that by the end of the 1950s educational gymnastics were in the ascendancy (Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolf Laban* 38).

Gender Struggles in Physical Education and Dance

British male physical educators were soon complaining that Laban's ideas were "over the top" – that movement education failed to provide an adequate grounding in skill development or competitive games. They blamed Laban's personal influence over a "mystic cult of female groupies" overcome by his personal charm (226). Furthermore, the whole context of physical education in the schools and in higher education was changing with the rapid increase in secondary-level schooling after World War II. Male teachers soon gained the majority within the formerly female-dominated profession and they championed the sports and games that had been played in elite British public

schools since the nineteenth century. Thus, the child-centred progressivism within which Laban-inspired movement education had found such fertile ground at Dartington during the 1940s and 1950s found diminishing support in light of the changing realities of educational policy and practice in the l960s (McIntosh 261, Bailey and Vamplew 87). Those who scrutinized school physical education practices in the mid 1970s barely mentioned Laban and modern educational dance (Whitehead and Hendry 26).

The Ideological Moorings of Embodied Practices

It is thus a complicated matter disentangling bodily practices from their ideological moorings, especially where Rudolf Laban is concerned. A decade after his death in 1958, dance historian Lincoln Kirstein tried to explain how Laban was a Nietszchean theorist, a Wagnerian innovator dedicated to quasi-mystical attempts to enforce the unique supremacy of movement as movement. He was clearly a man of astonishing variety, Bohemian by temperament, creative, and relatively uneducated, leaving hopelessly contradictory documentation of his ambitious enterprises (Hodgson 78).

But, as we have seen, he was also a late and reluctant Hitler émigré. Laban did not participate accidentally in the Nazi regime. His theory of dance and community disposed him to arrive at the same *völkische* ideas as the Nazis. He was particularly adept at working with crowds. He knew that the appeal of mass movement spectacles lay in their power to turn simple action into a power for building group identity around totalitarian ends (cf. Mandell). Could he fail to see or feel the enormous attraction of fascist celebrations and their overwhelming impact on participants (Theweleit 430)? Was he blind to the impact that Walter Benjamin could see all too clearly, that fascism might help the masses express themselves but it certainly did not help them to gain their rights (241-42)? Here Benjamin was drawing his famous connection between the aestheticization of politics and politics in their paradigmatically right wing form, fascism and militarism (cf. Simons).

So while it is clear that the National Socialists saw the potential for exploiting Laban's talent for creating mass movement choirs and dances, it is misleading "to assume that the mass movement aesthetic inherently embodied a totalitarian vision of communal identity" (Toepfer 301). On the other hand, the emotional effects of the dance and gymnastic displays in enhancing an idealized sense of belonging to a community were powerful and begged direction. As Laban's chief assistant once explained it, "we are a people's community led by the Führer and our lay dance is education in this sense: to lead and become led" (Dörr 23).

The relationship between German body culture and the rise of the Third Reich is complex, as is Laban's connecting role. Suggestions have been made that the mysticism and irrationalism of *Ausdruckstanz* and its

links with Expressionism in some ways facilitated the rise of fascism and that "the Asconan enthusiasm led straight to Nuremberg" (Hodgson 39). Laban's biographers and dance followers feel he was simply blinded by his devotion to his creative work, which eclipsed his awareness of his role as cultural propagandist for National Socialism (39). Yet at no time did Laban protest. He routinely used the *Heil Hitler* greeting and obeyed requests to remove Jewish dancers from his companies. There is no mention in his autobiography of any anguish over Nazi atrocities, and he worked willingly with Goebbels who wrote in his diary, "Laban does his job well" (Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolf Laban* 192).

There are a number of other perspectives which place Laban's work in the complex context of German body culture, but the most damning argument raised by Kant places a much more sinister spin on the ideologies which underlay Laban's view about embodied practices. Closely analysing Laban's own writings, Kant has traced his commitment to the foundation of a secret religion with a new dance form at its centre. If, as she argues, expressive dance was part of a carefully-devised, quasi-religious cultic belief system derived from a secret Masonic order (with its links to all sorts of Rosicrucian, Eastern philosophical and Western ritualistic elements), then we really do need to rethink the entire history of its development, "for it is these ideas which have seeped into the way dance is done, thought, written or spoken about" (Kant 43, 59).

Concluding Thoughts

Perhaps one must conclude that there is no safe guide through the complex and confusing mindscape of Laban. His view of modern dance as a deeply religious activity derived from mystical Freemasonry might provide the clue to understanding his activities. What he tested at Monte Verita was the same kind of practice repeated in Germany and then brought to England. Long after Laban's death, Lisa Ullmann herself wrote that developments at Ascona through to the present could be regarded as one coherent lineage (89). But it was the views on child-centred and holistic education fostered in Dartington School that became the main vehicle for Laban's modern dance and movement education in the schools, and for a string of female physical educators who would implement them, albeit for a limited period.[7] Their enthusiasm for promoting the "master's work" was unbounded but it is hard to see how the modern dance practices they fashioned in the schools were either indelibly tainted with reactionary politics, fascist ideologies and secret cultic mysticisms or that they opened the floodgates to a new and ecstatic world. On the other hand, as Fisher and Fisher have pointed out, the relationship between education and fascism in England during the 1930s incorporated some ostensibly egalitarian and progressive ideas which may have influenced a number

of female physical educators who had studied modern dance in Germany and Italy at a time that Eric Hobsbawm has called "the age of extremes" (Fisher and Fisher 72). More likely, they saw the potential for modern dance to provide a means of healthy exercise and effective movement in refreshing contrast to the discipline of formal gymnastics and sports skills. They may have enjoyed the idea that modern dance characterized the resistance of the body to such disciplining but they were wrong in thinking that it promised a mechanism for female physical educators to sustain their leadership in a profession slipping out of their grasp. Male-oriented competitive sport and changing disciplinary practices gained ascendancy in physical education in light of a rapid increase of secondary schooling and a burgeoning demand for male teachers who might bring a more scientific approach to skill acquisition, tests and measurements and strength and endurance activities (Bailey and Vamplew 82). In addition, there was a problem for teachers using Laban's work, suggests Preston-Dunlop, because a sufficient understanding of his work was not easy to acquire, leaving inadequately trained teachers to try to guide children to create movement forms and sequences (*Rudolf Laban* 105). Dance-as-art all too easily lost ground in a male-driven, subject-centred scientific curriculum and it would take decades before dance was welcomed back into the schools, not as part of physical education but on the heels of a regeneration of the creative arts in education in the twenty-first century.

The jury has a long way to go in debating these issues. Do teachers, dancers and students need to know the murky origins of what they do? Do ideas and belief systems remain embedded in practices and alter values, as it were, from below? Do the forms of bodily dispositions that provide formal structure need the apparatus of mysticism, secrecy, irrationality and reactionary politics that Laban taught? Did the irrational ideas, which pervaded all of his work, render his philosophy and theories unsuitable as educational practice? Certainly dance creators and creations must be understood as unavoidably taking part in contests over the construction of gender and race, conflicts among classes and professional groups, struggles between political theories and regimes – all of which are meaning-making systems around the site of the body (Tomko xv). Performance theorist José Muñoz has shown how dance sets politics in motion, bringing people together in rhythmic affinity while expressing histories of embodied identities through movement (14). In this sense, dance activities can be understood as creating, expressing and articulating cultural and social knowledge: a way of being in the world and of forging particular group identities. If embodied practices such as Laban's modern dance are viewed as both symptomatic and constitutive of social relations, informative ways of experiencing and knowing the world, then tracing the context within which they were nurtured and their diffusion, along with the changes and re-inscriptions that occurred in this transmission, is a useful way to illuminate how ideologies such as fascism become attached to

bodily discourse (Desmond 33). After all, said Laban, through celebratory community action "real dancers hope to communicate a sense of purpose and destiny for the human race" (qtd. in Hodgson 32).

Notes

[1] See also Karina and Kant, *Hitler's Dancers* 85.
[2] There has been a recent resurgence of interest in Laban's work, especially in Labanotation. See for example, Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana. Sanchez Colberg (eds.), *Dance and the Performative: A Choreological Perspective – Laban and Beyond*; Evelyn Dörr, "Rudolf von Laban: The Founding Father of Expressionist Dance"; Larraine Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia: Dartington Hall and its Dancers*.
[3] For more, see Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Émigrés*.
[4] This discussion of Laban's work in England draws from Patricia Vertinsky, "Movement Practices and Fascist Infections: From Dance under the Swastika to Movement Education in the British Primary School."
[5] Kurt Jooss, interview with John Hodgson, Dartington archives, Oct. 1975. See also, Ann Hutchinson Guest, "The Jooss-Leeder School at Dartington Hall."
[6] So, too, did Sir Oswald Mosely's British Union of Fascists and National Socialists who had successfully employed the spectacle of mass meetings and community singing and saw education as an important element in their crusade. Cf. Pamela Fisher and Roy Fisher, "Tomorrow we live: fascist visions of education in 1930s Britain."
[7] See, for example, discussions in Nicholas' *Dancing in Utopia* and Willson's *In Just Order Move.*

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Political Body Spaces
in the Performances of William Forsythe

Gabriele Brandstetter

In his recent pieces *Three Atmospheric Studies*, *Human Writes* and *Decreation*, contemporary dance choreographer William Forsythe presents the body as subverted and destabilized. The idea of human rights, to protect the individual body within the political space of law, includes the distortion and displacement of the body as well. How can performance re-write these violent acts against individuals and cultural identities? Forsythe's strategy includes the observer (beholder) within the process of "writing" human rights and opens the performance up to the engagement and cooperation of performers and spectators. Within the process of displacement and *différance* in a bodily de- and re-writing of the text human rights, Forsythe's choreography *Human Writes* suggests a deconstructive reading which includes the complicity and agency of the audience member as co-writer.

In this article I ask how the process of performance designs political spaces as an effect of choreo-graphics, choreography in the sense of a bodily writing in time and space. The question is how this choreographic writing process is related to spatial representations of bodies in media and how this process generates de-figurations of body and text. If we consult handbooks on media studies and media theory we soon arrive at the dicta with which Dieter Mersch opens his volume on *Media of Arts: Contributions to the Theory of Presentation*: "Media theory is the name of an as yet unspecified programme," (9) and: "The use of the term 'medium' is ubiquitous" (10).[1]

Depending on the theoretical approach, the term 'medium' is used in relation to technical media in the narrower sense (such as print, telegraphy, photography, video and computers); or the term is oriented toward functions, as in the distinction between storage media (writing, audio tape, digital carriers) and representational media like architecture or theatre; or the term is extended to symbolic processes (such as language, money, communication); or, most commonly, in relation to mass-media processes, their material carriers, their economic structures and technical developments (such as press, radio, television, internet). In the case of Theatre Studies,[2] more so than in newer media disciplines, we begin with the following question: what are we to make of the *concept* of media?[3] In what follows I will use the term 'medium' in its literal sense: medium; the middle; the middle of that space which yields insight for the witness and for those who act as intermediaries. This middle, medium, is not *central* or centred. It refers rather to a time-space interval which, when placed in an intermediate zone, is intermittent, fluctuates[4] and is

involved in transmission processes. Medium and mediality – it is in the field of translation that the structure of media resides in this act of transformation, in a process of 'creating difference'.[5] Given the turbulence of the translation process, medium and mediality should always be seen from the point of view of movement. Movement is a constituent part of the performativity[6] of media. But even before the performance of the relevant media and media processes, movement also determines the media element itself: in the differential movement, in the interstice, in the interval of transmission.

Can theatre and media studies be intertwined? My interest here is not in digital media and their use in the theatre. Instead I would like to stress the importance of reflecting upon the mediality of those traditional media that mark key issues of the mediality debate and are also relevant to theory of drama: writing, memory and body and their relation to the audience. All media have the peculiar property of disappearing in the act of "appearing," as Dieter Mersch says in discussing the negativity of media processes (16). The process of transmission implies a putting on view that concerns the visibility or invisibility of the transmission itself. This, in my view, is the place of the theatre.

I want to base my remarks on the mediality of voice and choreography, with the accent on writing. In terms of media history[7] it is the effects of 'anthropo-techniques' (language, writing and body) that make the general stage situation possible as a *monstre*, as a demonstration of the bringing-to-life – and here, after all, is the point where theory and theatre intersect (see Neumann et al.) I would like to illuminate these questions of becoming visible from a specific perspective, namely that of writing (i.e. choreography as writing movement), and I want to ask how political body spaces are linked to processes of media-transfer. William Forsythe raises these questions in his concept of choreography in terms of transmitting between picture, body and voice, as well as between video and the theatre stage.

William Forsythe is one of the most interesting and creative choreographers in contemporary dance. Raised and largely trained in New York, Forsythe started his career in Europe, where he was engaged first at the Stuttgart Ballet, working with John Cranko. He was director of the Ballet Frankfurt from 1984 until its closure in 2004, when he established the ensemble The Forsythe Company, which is now located in Dresden, Zürich and Frankfurt.

Forsythe started out in classical ballet, but re-oriented the basic idea and technique of ballet into one of the more dynamic art forms of the twenty-first century. Through this, and through the connections he establishes between body movement and art forms like architecture, video and text, he has opened ballet to an unlimited potential of figurations and a new dynamic (see Brandstetter, "Defigurative Choreography" 37-55). His newest works explore the implications of a contemporary shift from the politics of individual

sovereignty to one of networked multitudes – especially in his performances *Human Writes* (2005) and *Three Atmospheric Studies* (2006).

In a long series of performances that imply and reflect media in different ways, William Forsythe has dealt with the mediality of choreography, and scholars have analysed his works extensively, specifically from the point of view of media studies (see Evert). While the work with digital media and their storage function is primarily used as an analytical instrument and, particularly in his case, as a reservoir for improvisational tasks (e.g. in *Self Meant to Govern* or notably in the CD-ROM *Improvisation Technologies*, produced in 1999 in association with the Centre for Art and Media ZKM, Karlsruhe), Forsythe has been devising another model of mediality in his choreographies since the late 1990s. He is interested in a very specific theatrical constellation – namely, that of presentation or performance as showing oneself (*monstrare*) or something else, on the one hand, and viewing or observing on the other. He transgresses the threshold which normally forms a physical barrier between auditorium and stage, hall and forestage or platform as performing area. Forsythe is trying to transform this conventional constellation, which he makes the subject of choreography, or rather of choreographic circumscriptions (if we assume that choreography also means spatial de-scription in and as movement). In *Kammer/Kammer* (*Chamber/Chamber*, Frankfurt/Main 2000), for example, the line of division between stage and auditorium is quite conventional. This demarcation line, however, is shifted by the use of overhead screens hung in the auditorium at irregular intervals, screens which project live transmissions of actions taking place on stage in constantly shifting spaces. The audience can see only some of these screens, but most they cannot. The visibility and invisibility of the bodies in the cubes, which are placed on stage, are translated into an image-*monstre* that hangs over the spaces of the audience and renders them mobile. The effect of video transmission – the exposure or presentation of something that would otherwise be hidden – keeps dissolving in the audience's field of vision, as the latter are constantly forced to divide their attention between the images on screen and what is happening on stage. Such a transmission, or "performance of absence" (see Gilpin 55), refers not only to the in/visibility of movement on stage and in the grey zone of intervals between dancers/performers and audience members (Brandstetter, "Preserving the Performance" 15-23), it also reflects the framework of this media staging: the ability of the theatre to show the conditions of a *monstre*, namely showing not primarily in the sense of interpreting and indicating (i.e. in the sense of *deixis*), but in the sense of "causing to appear" (see Seel).

In *Kammer/Kammer* the programmatic formula – "Je traduis" ("I translate") – is presented as a physical framework in the shape of letters placed around the stage. In Forsythe's choreographies translation has played an increasingly important role as a way of reflecting upon mediality. In

A L I E/N A(C)TION (1992) it was the strangeness, the otherness, that was transmitted by the dancers over the TV screen and turned into "action," thus hiding the corporeality of the film images from the spectators' view. *Clouds after Cranach* – the second part of *Three Atmospheric Studies* – deals with the act of translation in the service of humanitarian and political goals, and the catastrophic consequences of failures of communication up to and including the cry, the inarticulacy that eludes and resists media transmission. A lot could be said about these pieces – especially about those instances in which Forsythe tests the limits of the ability of media (image and microphone) to transmit and amplify a political critique by using choreography to reflect upon media inarticulacy, as in the third part of *Three Atmospheric Studies* (see Brandstetter, "Figuration der Unschärfe" 74-79).

Three Atmospheric Studies is a triptych of dance performances drawing on a wide range of iconographic traditions. It is perhaps Forsythe's most explicitly political work, in the way it imposes images of war by means of the human body. Two parts of *Three Atmospheric Studies* refer to pictures, but the choreography does not depict the pictures (i.e. the pictures are not illustrating the dance and they are not displayed on stage). In the Berlin performance (2-4 Feb. 2006) they were hung in the foyer of the "Haus der Berliner Festspiele" but not quite out in the open; most of the spectators[8] probably did not even see the pictures. One of them is the famous painting *Crucifixion* by Lucas Cranach (see fig. 1). The other is a press agency photograph (see fig. 2) depicting an exploding landscape, flight and a scene of violence from the war in the Middle East. Both Cranach's biblical scene as well as the contemporary war image underlie the choreographic structure as an iconic but nevertheless invisible atmosphere of violence, pain and distorted political body space.

The title *Clouds after Cranach*, and the meteorological study of an "atmospheric" catastrophe of war and climate collapse, intertwine pain and strategies of superiority and power, for instance in the last part of the piece, where performer David Kern describes a cloud formation using gestures as in a TV evening news weather forecast. While he is talking, the dancers evoke a series of bodily collisions against the wooden wall on the stage. The sound – technically enhanced – resembles the well-known soundtracks of war movies or documentaries. Against and within the atmosphere of these crashing sounds, Dana Caspersen's medially manipulated voice can be heard. Her voice is transformed into an artificial male voice and she is talking like a U.S. soldier, commanding and explaining that everything that had happened was "in order" and that there is "no reason" to be frightened. She/he is talking as if everything were under control – even in a shattered reality where action, knowledge, feelings and suffering no longer constitute a whole: no longer a coherent space of life.

Fig. 1. Lucas Cranach the Elder. *The Crucifixion.* 1503.

Fig. 2. Athar Hussain, photogr. *Bomb Attack in Karachi.* 15 Nov. 2005. Reuters.

The bodies in this dance-performance are in a permanent tension and torsion: they are distorted via media-intersections; the voice is disconnected from the gendered body. The dancers are entangled with one another like 'chimaeras', contaminated in multiple body spaces and generated by a violent and highly dynamicised pressure of emotions and blind actions. The invisibility of the pictures during the performance – the diptychon of Cranach and the war photograph – is important in Forsythe's political aesthetics. There is no linear reference on stage. The actions of the bodies do not depict or translate these pictures in a mimetic sense. The choreographic body space instead actualizes the *presence d'absence* of images of violence and pain. The proliferation of a long iconic series of images of human suffering and catastrophic events in human history forms part of this strategy of invisibility: body spaces and their political affairs are – in Forsythe's aesthetics of media translations – staged in the mind and the imagination of the audience members.

In another piece, entitled *Decreation* (2003; see fig. 3 and 4), Forsythe deals with the questions: how is the organic body transformed – "de-created" – by visual media? How do segmentations, mirroring or close-up video-transferring open another stage of bodily experience?

Fig. 3. William Forsythe. *Decreation*. Photogr. Dominik Mentzos.

Fig. 4. William Forsythe. *Decreation*. Photogr. Dominik Mentzos.

As seen in these illustrations, *Decreation* is one more piece in Forsythe's series of explorations of the relation of body and media, fragmentation and politics. Finally, I would like to draw attention to those works of Forsythe's in which he shifts and indeed dispenses with the boundary between stage and auditorium, between dancers and audience. The basic principle seems simple and, in terms of the performing arts, is certainly not new: dancers and the audience share a space, moving in one and the same room. To put it another way: by moving on the same dance floor as the dancer, those in the audience – no matter how they move, walk, stand, sit or 'keep still' – become part of the choreography. Forsythe adopted this approach for his piece *Endless House* (Frankfurt/Main 1999). In the second part he dissolves the conventional theatre auditorium: the spectator is invited to move among the dancers on the stage floor, to seek out a position from which to watch the performance. As a result of taking up positions on stage audience members are confronted with the realization that visibility, in the sense of seeing what is going on, is either not attainable at all or only partially, in fragments and excerpts – and in passing.

The price of participation is the invisibility, absence and inaccessibility to those actions which cannot be kept in the field of vision, which take place 'behind the spectator's back', so to speak, thus confronting them with their inherent blindness whether they move or not. The audience members' movement, as dis-orientation and as the loss of the ordered framework, is thus a contingent element of this choreography: it is a way of walking as a spatial description that demands a critical confrontation with the politics of seeing. At the same time (as in all William Forsythe's work) it is a critical confrontation with dance as a politics of the body when dance, as an art of placing steps, does *not* reflect the laws of its bodily standardization. Choreo-*graphy*, on the other hand, is the reflection of bodily movement in the way the space is described and moved about in. Seen in this way the medium is *writing*. Thus the "trapdoor of scription," as Roland Barthes has called it (9), instantly opens up. Without going into the thorny theoretical debate on the subject of writing here, we can say that in Forsythe's choreographies one difference is quite clear – the difference between writing (as movement) and what is written (in the sense of "*graph*", or "*scriptura*"), what (to quote Roland Barthes once again) disappears into the "trapdoor of scription, into what is written down." It is the body, the movement (of writing), that fits itself into the hierarchical structures of writing, translated into signs. The movement of the body, as it becomes a writing tool, yields to the "subordination" (Barthes 9) that grammar prescribes. Choreography, as Forsythe sees it, re-writes this subordinative prescription by reflecting upon, and making visible, the absence of the body in writing, and by continuing to transmit it. It is constantly retranslated while changing position through its movements.

In this sense William Forsythe's choreography *Human Writes* (world premiere 2006 in Zurich, German premiere in September 2006 on the occasion of the opening of the Hellerau Festspielhaus) is a reflection on the mediality of writing; or more precisely, as the title *Human Writes* indicates, a reflection on writing as a human action (see fig. 5). At the same time as the title suggests its homophone meaning "human rights," it deals with writing as a constitutional text, a key legal text, namely the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and its history. This history is one of translations, of inaccuracies, of violations of this basic legal text. The "Performance Installation" (as *Human Writes* is subtitled) lasts three hours. Both the structural arrangement and the concept are subject to clear rules (I will sketch them here briefly). The room – the festival hall in Hellerau – is furnished with 40 tables arranged in four rows covered with white paper on which single sentences from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* are written (or "pre-scribed") in different languages.

Fig. 5. William Forsythe and Kendall Thomas. *Human Writes*. Photogr. Frank Sygusch.

The dancers' task is to copy this writing/these signs according to the following rule: "The act of writing must be accompanied by a parallel inhibition of that effort. No stroke or character may be directly accomplished. . . . Any and every mark that contributes to the formation of a single letter must be the result of physical restraint, encumbrance or resistance."[9]

Fig. 6. William Forsythe and Kendall Thomas. *Human Writes*. Perf. William Forsythe. Photogr. Frank Sygusch.

The rule of indirectness – of a writing hindered by obstacles to body movement – directs the attention to the mediality, to the middle between the written itself and the act of writing that normally functions automatically or in an automated fashion as the performance of a body technique (i.e. it points toward that midway point at which uncoordinated resistance and hindrances to the smooth movement of writing occur, causing interruptions and distortions). Sitting at one of the tables writing is William Forsythe. With his hands tied behind his back and one half of his body bent over and half-lying on the surface of the paper, he attempts with six thick charcoal crayons which he 'holds' in his mouth to copy individual strokes of the letters specified on the sheet – endlessly laborious, slowly, operating with his head and jerky movements of his whole body – his joints twisted to the limits of endurance, executing a trembling, jerky writing movement, engaged in a writing task with carbon and spittle, smudging the legal text, and getting his face and body all black from the unremitting effort to write the clear script clearly, performing an act of transcendence that places an extreme strain on his body (see fig. 6).[10] At another table a dancer can be found under the writing surface. With the aid of physical 'directions' (right, left, up, down), which a spectator conveys to him physically, he attempts to copy the lines of the letters, groping blindly with his hands, slowly, hesitantly, with intense concentration (see fig. 7).

Fig. 7. William Forsythe and Kendall Thomas. *Human Writes.* Photogr. Frank Sygusch.

These efforts at writing are as hampered as far from any *eloquentia* or conventional rhetoric school of writing. Far from calligraphic perfection, these are extreme challenges to physical and mental coordination. The spectators are more involved here, more deeply engaged than in Forsythe's earlier works. The programme note explains that the performers request the aid of the audience to take an active part in this work, this "Human Writes/Rights" project, in order to bring about a joint reflection on the role of art in creating a 'culture of human rights.' Unlike in *Endless House* or in such Forsythe installations as *White Bouncy Castle* or *You Made Me a Monster*, the audience is not only drawn into the choreography to find themselves moving in the middle of the scene and the action (i.e. contributing to the choreography and its visible aspects with every step, with each angle taken up from which to view the action); with each movement of the eyes and each blind spot they produce openings and grey zones of perception. Here, however, each audience member is called upon to take part in the writing, to inter-act with the dancers and to inter-act and move with other spectators as well: whether merely strolling, watching, walking, standing still or making a clear commitment to the uncertain, risky, arduous physical work of mediation in the writing process. Every action, as well as every 'non-action' of the spectator, is transformed into an ethical decision. Choreography, the body-writing, the process of making a copy of the law, takes place via de-tours, is conveyed through a chain of gestures. This shift of the script into the communal, intercorporeal act of writing reveals a choreographic "*différance*" (Derrida).[11] The disturbance in the transmission of the writing act directs the attention not primarily to the writing as text, but to the spaces in between: the hesitation, the slowing down, the irresoluteness of the physical act and the gaps, the interstices. The mediality of the act of writing is reflected through distortion, incompleteness and falsification. It is the (in)visibility of the violence *in* the writing of the law at the very point when this text, the "Human Rights," promises to guarantee the body's "freedom from violence," which becomes visible in the distortions of the act of writing.

In the course of the performance the drudgery, the awkwardness, the futility, the violence done to the body as the tool of the legal text, constantly intensify, while at the same time the zones of disorder in the room proliferate. In the merging of spectators and actors there are shifting spaces, spots of emptiness, of forsakenness, of violent and hammering writing operations. One performer carries the table upside down, balanced at an oblique angle on his shoulders, like Christ with the cross. In another zone four female performers, bound to one another by ropes, try to draw lumps of coal on the vertically tilted table tops behind their backs either by pulling each other this way or that, or by putting up resistance: an extremely violent scene with intense affection, in which the fact of being bound together is reminiscent of the Laocoön Group as well as of allegories of a multifaceted body politic.

Audience members are no longer the 'audience' or 'the public' but – whichever way they turn – are restored to their status as individuals and made the co-writer of this choreographic installation. They are co-writers, conveyors of the writing impulse and de-tour. They are enclosed, whichever way they turn, and yet also excluded at constantly changing intervals and body constellations in the midst of the act of writing. The mediality of *choreo*-graphy – in the strict sense of the term[12] – shows itself on the fringes of this process not as 'writing', not as what is written down in Barthes' sense (13), but as the motion of writing. Thus, in the course of the evening both audience and performers take part in a writing process that shows something in terms of physical action and attests to something that the legal text conceals. The transmissions reveal that the text degenerates in the course of *re-écriture,* and how it does so. The declaration of the "Human Rights" is the text that says explicitly and as a repeated political act: "*habeas corpus*." *Human Writes* is a performance that presents and makes an act of transgression palpable. The choreography explores the boundary between writing and body, between law and the movement of re-writing, reflecting what in this zone eludes medialization: the un-translatability of pain and those acts of physical violence that constitute the failure, the violation, the 'inhibition' of "Human Writes/Rights," the loss of that inalienable right, which was enshrined for the first time in the English "Habeas Corpus Act" of 1679 – the declaration that protects the individual's body, life and freedom of movement against the invasive power of the state. It took a long time for the legal freedom of not being arrested without court scrutiny and a court order to be incorporated into the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. Giorgio Agamben followed Foucault in drawing attention to the contradictions of this basic law of modern body politics and the central significance of the body in "human rights" and "biopolitics" (see Agamben part 3 §2, 78ff).[13] "Corpus is a two-faced being, the bearer both of subjection to sovereign power and of individual liberties" (73). These contradictions, according to Agamben, have not yet disappeared from modern states: "there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics" (72).

In the face of the realization that "humankind continues to be inhabited by the inhuman" (Jean-François Lyotard qtd. in Forsythe's programme note), *Human Writes* is an attempt to use choreography in the literal sense of writing in order to push a spatial description, by means of physical acts, to and beyond these limits where art can be effective as political action. If human rights, as a protection of freedom from physical harm and a guarantee of liberty, are to be an effective part of political constitutions, this 'composition' (in German *Verfassung* in the sense of generating the text and as the text of a political constitution of sovereignty) of the legal text is always a transcription, a physically anticipatory recollection of its innate human character. This

composition (as *Verfassung*) in Forsythe's choreography is a communal act of writing which gives real physical form to what is excluded from the written legal text: the implicit, structural violence of the law itself. Thus choreography in the process of writing "*Human Writes*/Rights" amounts to a permanent process of editing the script. Again and again we are forced to come to the dismaying realization that – because of the great dis-order and re-arrangement of the Code of Human Rights in Forsythe's performance installation – hardly a sentence or even a word of the text is legible. In a rather superficial sense one may regard Forsythe's choreography of *Human Writes* (like his *Three Atmospheric Studies*) as a critical reflection on media politics in times of terrorism and the global power of the Western media. As choreo-*graphy*, on the other hand, *Human Writes* dramatizes the objections of art to the political, economic, legal and media-determined availability of the body. In this process Forsythe keeps redefining the boundary at which the discursive, communicative function of writing – as storage and as a medium of presentation – goes into reverse, and this is where he marks art's objection to the availability of the process of writing. Art, on the other hand, lays claim to the unavailability of the body and its movement. The movement, the act of writing as choreography, would then be a form of rendering visible a politics of mediality: in the transmission process as an aesthetic, as a political act, in which the different movements of writing and deletion come together. One can, as William Forsythe said in the conversation following the Hellerau production of *Human Writes*, "write well . . . for bad reasons;" but one could also "write 'badly' – for good reasons." In other words, he encourages critical reflection on the body politics of the Human Rights.

Notes

[1] Translated by Iain W. M. Taylor, whom I also thank for his translation of my keynote essay, which first appeared in a different and altered article version (see Brandstetter, ""Un/Sichtbarkeit"). Mersch's thesis is that the aesthetic and above all the artistic in the arts is considered the touchstone of the specific range and effectiveness of media (see Mersch 14). I shall adopt this approach in my remarks as well.

[2] For the debate on the concept of theatricality and the difference between the German and the US academic discourse see Fischer-Lichte, "Theatricality" 80-90; Reinelt, 201-215; Carlson 238-250.

[3] See Bolter and Grusin; Higgins; Weber; as for the German discourse see Balme and Moninger; Eichler and Blechmann.

[4] See Mersch 10; further see Greber.

[5] See, among others, Martin Seel.

[6] I use the term performativity in the sense of Erika Fischer-Lichte's distinction of performance and performativity in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. On the concept of 'liveness' between performance and media (the "performativity of media") see Auslander.
[7] See Niklas Luhmann and Vilém Flusser, among others.
[8] The term spectator is used within a theory of theatricality, in which it is used to describe the interrelationship between the action on stage and the visual perception of the audience (member). It correlates to the German term *Zuschauer* (viewer/observer) and references Hans Blumenberg's seminal metaphorological study *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer* [*Shipwreck with Spectator*].
[9] Quoted from the programme note, Hellerau, 15 Sept. 2006.
[10] Fig. 6 is the only available documentation of Forsythe as performer during one of the performances of *Human Writes*, albeit showing him in a different pose.
[11] See Brandstetter, "Defigurative Choreography." This reading of Forsythe's choreography is implicitly based on terms of deconstruction. As Forsythe's choreographic work, beginning with "Artifact" (1984), constantly deals with questions of the representation of the body and of theatrical space, with displacement and defiguration of movement codes – for instance the code of ballet, or the kinespheric system of Rudolf von Laban – one can read his pieces as a choreography of deconstruction.
[12] In the literal sense choreo-*graphy* means the "writing of the body in space." See, for instance, Brandstetter "Choreography As a Cenotaph" 104.
[13] On the *Habeas Corpus Act* see Agamben 73f.

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Reading Skin Signs:
Decoding Skin as the Fluid Boundary
between Self and Other in Yoko Tawada

Jeremy Redlich

In this article, utilizing primary texts by the Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada and with theoretical support combining cultural, racial and performativity studies (Benthien, Bhabha, Butler, Fuss, Pellegrini, Mirón and Inda), I argue the contours and boundaries of the body cannot be taken for granted as biological givens, but rather that these boundaries are continuously in a process of materialization, subject to the cultural, social and linguistic impressions that mark the bodily boundary, namely skin, as a surface that is coded and decoded like any other text. Tawada's texts are rife with bodily changes and transformations, and thus invite a rethinking of the processes involved in constructing the racial and gendered body, and how seemingly 'natural' and 'authentic' bodily borders might be open to modification and resignification if they are understood as discursively-produced rather than as biological facts.

This paper takes as its point of departure the body in motion, or more specifically, how bodily borders and bodily identity can be read as fixed and stable only with enormous difficulty and wilful neglect of the processes involved in the formation of human subjectivity. Working with selected texts by the Japanese-born author Yoko Tawada, who writes in both Japanese and German, I examine how the contours or boundaries of the body cannot be taken for granted as biological givens, but rather how these boundaries are continuously in a process of materialization, subject to the cultural, social and linguistic impressions that mark the bodily boundary, namely skin, as a surface that is coded and decoded like any other text. How skin as a boundary is even to be approached is an exceptionally nuanced and historically complex undertaking. Skin can be understood as a protective sheath that ultimately conceals the authentic essence that lies beneath, thereby making it foreign and external to the 'true' self. On the other hand, skin can be viewed as the essence of the subject itself, standing metonymically for the whole as opposed to foreign to it. In this latter instance skin then must be considered in relation to the meaning and production of notions of 'colour' and 'race' – notions which Tawada's texts serve to articulate, complicate, make visible and denaturalize, as skin, while the most visible signifier of identity and difference is often dismissed as invisible or irreducible beyond a biological truth. Tawada's texts invite us to take politics more seriously and biology less seriously, for skin colour is a signifier which has meaning in a culture, meaning

that is not always the same, and meaning that invariably changes with context. Attempts to naturalize race take it out of history, yet because these differences are visible to the eye, they are seemingly indisputable, for seeing is believing, as the saying goes, and thus the body becomes the ultimate transcendental signifier beyond language and culture. Yet it is the so-called reality of race that stands in the way of fully comprehending how its boundaries keep moving. There cannot then be any singular and absolute definition of skin and therefore this paper will certainly not aim to provide one, but what is certain is that skin is very much the effect of culture and a racial signifier, as it marks not just the actual but also the profoundly symbolic bodily boundary subject to ceaseless transformation.

As I will show with selected texts by Yoko Tawada, her characters are in a perpetual state of transformation. Their bodies morph into different species, body parts go missing, or their features are depicted as changing landscapes, unsettling the congealed materiality of human borders in the representation of a constantly shifting skin-scape. Ultimately the very notion of a 'natural' body or 'authentic, essentialised' identity is unsettled in Tawada's literary creations, while the skin and boundaries themselves are revisited as both superficial and constitutive in the production of cultural identities and differences.

Befitting the provisional and indeterminate nature of bodily and linguistic identity, Tawada regularly employs water and movement as literary devices to underscore change and transformation in her texts. Water as an essential component of transformation has played a significant role in Tawada's literary career even from its early stages, as highlighted in one of her earlier stories, "The Bath" (originally written in Japanese in 1989 and later translated into German and English.) The opening paragraphs of this short work provide a useful source for analysis and serve to frame the text as a whole, essentially performing what it describes:

> Eighty percent of the human body is made of water, so it isn't surprising that one sees a different face in the mirror each morning. The skin of the forehead and cheeks changes shape from moment to moment like the mud of a swamp, shifting with the movements of the water below and the footsteps of the people walking above it.
>
> I had hung a framed photograph of myself beside the mirror. The first thing I would do when I got up was to compare my reflection with the photograph, checking for discrepancies which I then corrected with makeup. (3)

Beginning with a description of the body consisting of mostly water underscores the movement and flow of bodily borders and therefore bodily identity, but in its daily transformation the malleable body is also subject to

manipulation by outside agents. Here it is apparent that the human body, with its fleshy integument, is represented not as a self-identical, fixed or stable being, but rather as active and productive, as a series of processes that requires the daily application of make-up to police and administrate the bodily contours that are subjected to external influence in its construction. There is both a certain degree of agency and subjugation represented in this description, giving the impression that the subject has the power to manipulate and exert her will over her body image, while at the same time having no choice but to meet the prescriptive standards demanded of her from without by linguistic, social, sexual and cultural factors that pre-exist us and which we can never completely control. Being represented as "like the mud of a swamp" indicates that the mutable "skin of the forehead and cheeks" is perpetually being inscribed and re-inscribed by social and cultural factors, highlighting skin as ultimately an ambiguous palimpsest forever undergoing a process of construction. Skin, as the site where boundary negotiations are performed on a daily basis in a ceaseless process of subject construction, is presented in this moment as more than just the biologically-determined bodily integument, but rather as a parchment invested with cultural meaning to be read, policed and altered from both inside and out.

There is clearly a certain flexibility in the shifting image of the narrator's skin that "does not constitute a solid line of separation between the inside and outside world, but rather is porous and amorphous" (Fischer 65, my trans.), yet this constant change seems to be exactly what she is attempting to counter with makeup and a photograph. The latter half of the above excerpt from "The Bath" is problematic for a number of reasons, all of which centre around the notion of authenticity. The photograph hung next to the mirror is meant to be a fixed sign representing the authentic subject, untouched by time and a direct and unmediated representation of the referent. The very notion that there is a singular self and static identity to which one can conform is subverted by the constant daily discrepancies that appear in the protagonist's mirrored reflection. The emphasis on the daily repetition of maintaining the photograph's expectations and resulting norms, ones that seem to be susceptible to movements from above, highlights that these norms, which require repetition and recitation, themselves are vulnerable in their very repetition. They are in the end nothing but their repetition, as they exist only as norms on that temporal basis, and they do not and cannot programme or determine everything that is possible. This work of assigning gender and race to the subject is vulnerable in what Butler calls its alterability or citationality (*Bodies that Matter* 12-16). The fact that the protagonist is attempting to conform the image in the mirror to the static image of the photograph gives the impression that the gender and racial performance proceeds from a prior ground or origin, yet this act reveals the pervasive performativity that standard accounts of identity fail to see. The application of

make-up here is meant to bring the protagonist up to standard as demanded by the image in the photograph, yet what this whole repetitive process actually does is break up the illusory coherence and apparent naturalness of the identity that is presumed to underlie the performance – for which gender and racial performance is real or authentic at this point? The protagonist here is attempting to replicate the imitative structure of gender and race, revealing both to be themselves imitations, copies and citations of originals that do not exist.

Later in "The Bath" the discrepancies, imperfections, bodily movement and the fluidity of identity are collectively manifested in the fish scales which have appeared on the protagonist's body and which she needs to remove daily through a procedure of self-surveillance and control. The photograph in this episode represents a prescriptive and idealized model which she is compelled to follow but never quite gets right, as her own identity is perpetually changing and the normative ideal is inherently unattainable. In a certain way the photograph itself also does more than merely present the artificial representation of the image it denotes; it is also a kind of modern skin surface itself. And much like skin bears the marks of cultural, historical and social impressions, so too does the world leave its trace on the photographic surface, as Steven Connor indicates in *The Book of Skin*.[1]

Likewise the mirror serves a regulatory and productive function here as it reflects the subject's image of identification, but from the outside. Here we think implicitly of Lacan's mirror stage, where on the one hand children recognize themselves in the mirror reflection as independent and self-contained beings, but on the other understand that the mirror image is fully separated, removed, foreign and other. The mirrored image here, as Ann Pellegrini notes in *Performance Anxieties*, serves as a means of positing both a racial and gendered identity as a life-long process and training, where the sense of oneself as other in multiple respects receives "continual and painful reinforcement from without" (80). That her sense of self is the product of an imposed image of expectation and authenticity is, then, part of the protagonist's subject formation. She is compelled to react to these expectations of authenticity with the application of makeup, a cosmetic cover-up that intuitively counters the notion of the naked skin as the most natural, but ultimately proves that an authentic, unmarked skin and a singular, static self are illusive, even fictitious. Tawada later considers the mirror as image constructor in *Verwandlungen*:

> Since I was born into this world, I have never seen my face from the outside. No mirror shows me how I look when I'm speaking with another person. I often see puzzling traits in the faces of others. They fascinate me and I reflect them on my own face. My face is a sketchbook. (50, my trans.)

Again Tawada is playing with the notion of the face, and by extension skin, as a canvas upon which cultural, social and historical inscriptions are written, or to refer back to an earlier quote, that skin is like the mud of the swamp carrying the footprints of those walking above.[2] The makeup which the protagonist in "The Bath" applies to hide her difference is a kind of transformative mask that serves as "a metaphor for the protagonist's self-inscription and internalisation of various categories of ethnicity or femininity" (Kraenzle 80). The mask she wears is not necessarily of her own choosing though, as Tawada later suggests: "The expectations of the observer produce masks and they grow into the flesh of the foreigner. The constant gaze of the other is inscribed into one's own face. A face can keep several layers. Perhaps one can even flip through a face like a travel report" (Verwandlungen 53). In this short paragraph the face and the flesh are depicted as palimpsests written on and formulated repeatedly by "the gaze of the other," inescapably linked to the cultural, social and historical codes and meanings that can be read like a travel report. It bears noting then that the makeup the protagonist puts on every morning is actually white foundation, which brings to mind both the image of a geisha, but also the idea that a white surface, like in print production or painting, is a "kind of color-neutral canvas or blank sheet, a tabula rasa" (Benthien 148). In contrast, so-called deviations like yellow or black skin are seen as marked epidermis. Exactly in the same way as the European gaze was considered neutral, in the context of cultural history, so too was white skin regarded as the norm and thereby ultimately 'invisible'. Whiteness derives its power as ideology from its capacity to remain "unseen," as both David R. Roediger and Richard Dyer have underscored in their respective studies, thereby implicating skin here as a resilient signifier of race and visible reflection of raced ideologies.[3]

Later in the "The Bath" the protagonist's skin is literally marked when her boyfriend Alexander (Alex-ander, *der Andere*, "the other" in German) inscribes an X on her cheek in order to mark her as his possession. The narrator describes the scene with "the X on my cheek dug into my flesh. It stopped the light from playing and crucified the image of a Japanese woman onto the paper" (12). Her skin is depicted here as the site of writing, a place on the body where cultural and ethnic identity are inscribed.[4] But as the text shows, such a fixed and stable identity proves unsustainable. The protagonist will undergo a series of bodily transformations (she grows scales on her skin, she loses her tongue and eventually she becomes invisible), which ultimately points toward the continual flow of bodily identity.

It comes as no surprise then that both the photograph and the mirror that inform and dictate her sense of self were given to the protagonist by outside agents, namely her boyfriend Xander ("the photograph beside the mirror is one Xander took of me several years ago" [8]) and her mother ("the mirror that was hanging with its face to the wall beside my photograph had been a

parting gift from my mother" [41].) The protagonist, a Japanese female who moved to Germany, works as a translator and has a German boyfriend, is seemingly suspended between two cultures whose claims on her authenticity she is unable to satisfy. Her attempts to meet Xander's prescriptive and normative ideal of the Japanese female prove unsuccessful during and after a photo session in which Xander, who significantly is a photographer for a travel agency, seeks to capture her "essence." With the instructions that she "relax" (read: remain docile), "smile" (read: be cheerful and hospitable) and "don't talk. It's no good if you talk" (read: speaking lends her agency and upsets her image as meek and subservient), Xander aims to affix her identity to an imposed, singular image of the Asian female. However, once the photographs are developed the protagonist does not appear, because, according to Xander, she doesn't "have a strong enough sense of [herself] as Japanese" (11). The protagonist resists being burdened with the idealized yet ultimately unattainable stereotype demanded of her by the travel magazine, or to put it differently, Xander's Leica "was trying to capture [her] skin" (10). This leads to an insightful exchange on the dialectic of skin as on the one hand natural and bound to an essence and on the other as a cultural construct and a visible reflection of racial ideologies:

> "Do you really think skin has a colour?"
> Xander laughed. "Of course. Or do you think it's the flesh that's coloured?"
> "How could flesh possibly have colour? There's colour in the play of light on the surface of the skin. We don't have colours inside."
> "Yes, but the light plays on your skin differently than on ours."
> "Light is different on every skin, every person, every month, every day." (11)

In many respects this verbal back and forth is indicative of a larger debate focusing on skin as the battleground for the sciences and humanities, though in this case there is rightfully no clear winner, and thus it takes its place somewhere between the two. That skin is both a natural and cultural border is perhaps not as self-evident as this dialogue would suggest, for physiological views of the body as tied to its static skin have long dominated perceptions of the body's exterior and have resulted in the sedimentation of hierarchies of skin colour as desirable or undesirable. Differentiating humans into a variety of natural and distinct races based on their typical phenomenal characteristics (which regrettably seems to invariably result in designating some of these groups as inferior) amounts to locating difference in a pre-discursive domain, essentially as part of nature, and thus as a static essence. However, if we see race not as the effect of biological truths, but rather as a "historically contingent, socially constructed category of knowledge" (Mirón and Inda 85), then

race ceases to refer to a pre-existing subject and can instead be seen to function performatively in the constitution of the subject, whereby "a naturalized effect is only acquired through the repeated or reiterated naming or reference to that subject" (86). This indicates that race is susceptible to being rewritten, which effectively serves to destabilize the coherence of racial identity by making it an effect rather than simply an origin of linguistic practice. Yet to say that race is a biological fiction is not to deny that it has real material effects in the world, for it is no more accurate to maintain that 'race' is itself merely an empty effect than it is to insist that 'race' is solely a matter of skin colour. Race and skin colour will always mean different things depending on when, where and who one is, yet it is still not self-evident that racialization of the body is a process, like gendering, and that the act of subject constitution cannot be understood as a singular act, but as a reiterative practice through which discourse produces the effect that it names. As Butler notes, with the doctor's interpellative claim "It's a girl!" begins a long series of performatives that constitute the subject and continuously serve to gender the subject throughout her lifetime, for this "girling of the girl" certainly does not end with this initial act of interpellation, but must be "reiterated by various authorities and in various times and places in order to reinforce the naturalized gender effect" (Mirón and Inda 94).

Frantz Fanon points to this scene of social interpellation in his *Black Skin, White Masks,* in that moment where the little white girl says to her mother "Look, a Negro!" (91). Here the black body is called to order and incorporated into a system of racialized meanings, part of a process of what Fanon terms epidermalization, or what I have referred to as racialization. Fanon underscores the arbitrariness of the racial signifier in Western culture, with its coding in language, and significantly draws attention to how the body image of the black subject is not constituted by "biological determinations from within the body, but rather by cultural overdeterminations from without" (Fuss 75). As Diana Fuss notes the very title of the text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, like the Tawada quote above, allows for both essentialist and constructionist readings, as the "black skin" underscores the priority and ineradicability of the racial body, while the "white mask" "foregrounds the possibility of culturally assuming racial identities and the processes of racialization which constitute them" (75). In professing that there is "colour in the play of light on the surface of the skin" the protagonist questions the very notion of essentialised identities that are naturally bound to physical determinants, suggesting rather that external factors are involved in this construction and that no subject remains static, but rather is in a constant state of transformation.

It is in fact the ease with which Xander has recourse to racial divisions of difference that so unsettles the protagonist in the exchange, as

Tawada later relates in the short text "Actually No One Is Allowed to Say It, But There Is No Europe:"

> The fact that he emphasized the two words "your" and "our" so strongly surprised me. I couldn't understand his intention. If his identity as "white" is so important to him, he'd be better off asserting that white collectivity exists on a totally different level than skin colour, because no white person possesses paper-white skin.
> ("Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen" 45, my trans.)

Here Tawada points out that because "Xander saw 'white' skin colour as a component of his body and not as a metaphor" (45) (i.e. if skin colour as race is natural, beyond history, permanent and fixed and not cultural and discursively constituted), then it is also not open to modification and change, and thus hierarchies and irreconcilable differences will persist. There is also an implicit suggestion that whiteness as power is maintained by remaining 'unseen' and that whiteness as race resides in invisible properties when she declares:

> Because optical perception comes to us too easily, we often remain too passive. Out of laziness we transfer verbal images into optical ones, instead of translating the play of light into language. He is a black man, says the brain, and the eyes then are no longer capable of actually perceiving his skin. (46, my trans.)

For racialization to occur the structure must be reiterated again and again, to the extent that over time these divisions, based on seemingly obvious physical determinants, like skin colour, seem natural.

Looking back to "The Bath" again, the narrator further contemplates skin as a cultural boundary towards the end of the text:

> Only adolescent girls are unable to put on makeup without a mirror. Adult women can do without. The location of the skin can be determined by touch. You just put out your hand and feel where this world ends: that's where my skin is. The skin is a membrane separating this world from the other one. I apply a special makeup until my skin becomes transparent. (54, my trans.)

As the border separating "this world from the other one," skin is invested with a cultural significance beyond its physicality in so far as it is the surface that projects one's identity, it is the text that others read and upon which is written, and ultimately "speech about one's own skin is speech about oneself

as body" (Benthien 9). Skin then announces belonging or foreignness, and in so doing doubles as the border between inside and outside.

For the protagonist of "The Bath," whose body is depicted as in a perpetual state of metamorphosis, shifting identity and skin in a state of transformation mean that she never quite represents the image of authenticity that is expected of her as either a foreigner or a native. In Europe she is not quite Japanese enough and therefore requires makeup as a mask and dyes her hair black to meet the standard, whereas once she returns to Japan, she is again interpreted as inauthentic, only this time for her excess rather than lack. Her mother asks her:

> "How did you get such an Asian face?"
> "What are you talking about, Mother? I am Asian."
> "That's not what I meant. You've started to have one of those faces like Japanese people in American movies." (44)

The protagonist's identity is thus presented as overdetermined authenticity. She is the carrier of multiple faces, it would seem, a fact which both her boyfriend and mother interpret as a loss of identity. For Tawada, conversely, human subjectivity by its very nature is multiple, perpetually in transit and always in dialogue with the cultural and social context which it inhabits. Human borders are constantly in flux, as the identities are contingent upon these borders, and henceforth the frequently-employed motifs of water and movement become all the more prominent in Tawada's work. At the conclusion of "The Bath" the narrator connects the idea of porous bodily borders with the idea of national and geographical borders, as human identities are in fact frequently based on these so-called fixed natural demarcations. The following passage from "The Bath" bears a striking resemblance to a text Tawada published shortly afterward entitled "Where Europe Begins:"[5]

> Seven-tenths of the globe is covered with water, so it isn't surprising that one sees different patterns on its surface every day. Subterranean water shapes the earth's surface from below, the ocean's waves eat away at the coastline, and human beings blast holes in mountainsides, plough the valleys for fields and fill in the ocean with land. Thus the shape of the earth is constantly changing. (49)

The porous bodily border in the "The Bath" that proved so unreliable in maintaining its fixity is again taken up as the subject of investigation in Tawada's first text in German, "Where Europe Begins," though this time in the context of physical geography and national and cultural boundaries. I will now conclude with a brief examination of the problematic ties binding territorial models of identity and further emphasize Tawada's literary pro-

gram as one built upon the notion of transformation. Similar to models of linguistic and bodily identities, borders affixed to national identities are fluid constructions of human perception and are frequently transgressed and subverted through the itinerancy of individuals. “Where Europe Begins” challenges the notion of a static, homogenous subject by presenting a protagonist who is continually in a state of movement between ‘home’ and ‘destination,’ existing in an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 5).

This text is the travel report of a narrator who travels from Japan to Moscow via the trans-Siberian railway in order to arrive at the place where Europe begins. Siberia is presented as the border between East and West, or as “the border between here and there . . . such a wide border!” (129). It is the conceptual room between Europe and Asia and thus acts as the in-between, interstitial space, and in this in-between space the notion of the homogenous subject is disrupted by the conflicting and contesting identities that form its hybrid nature, in this borderline engagement between here and there, in this place of neither one nor the other. The heterogeneous natures of the subjects on this voyage thus become apparent in this text through their displacement and unboundedness, yet it seems that once they are presented with an awareness of the provisional nature of their territorially defined identities, they suddenly attempt to root themselves in the idea of home. Even before the ship has departed someone asks “Where did you grow up?” (124), immediately appealing to ideas of origin and place as identity, to which the narrator comments “[o]n board such a ship, everyone begins putting together a brief autobiography, as though he might otherwise forget who he is” (69). Feeling lost and disoriented the passengers attempt to assert their identity in relation to home, which is then “a location signifying roots and accompanying notions of essential identities” (Kraenzle 84).

As the passengers pass through Siberia though it becomes clear in this borderland that ideas of essentialised, national identities are difficult to sustain when they are subverted by an awareness of the spatial relativity of their borders. Even as a young girl the narrator questioned the legitimacy of inclusionary/exclusionary models of territorially-constructed identities, stating:

> When I was a little girl, I never believed there was such a thing as foreign water, for I had always thought of the globe as a sphere of water with all sorts of small and large islands swimming on it. Water had to be the same everywhere. Sometimes in sleep I heard the murmur of the water that flowed beneath the main island of Japan. The border surrounding the island was also made of water that ceaselessly beat against the shore in waves. How can one say where

> the place of foreign water begins when the border itself is water? (Tawada, “Where Europe begins” 122-23)

The narrator here point to the difficulty of fixing identities to borders when the borders themselves are fluid and continually shifting. Not only are liquid borders fluid but so too are the land borders that seem so fixed and defined. The narrator notes that “there have been claims that a land bridge once linked Japan and Siberia. Presumably, human beings also crossed from Siberia to Japan. In other words, Japan was once part of Siberia” (127). Again the notion of a fixed, homogenous identity based on territory and nation is disrupted by the apparent lack of stability of the criteria on which identities are founded, suggesting then that “the way we create borders has nothing to do with ‘natural’ external limits, but is intimately connected with the limits of our own identities” (Kraenzle 87).

The relativity and contingency of these borders is further highlighted in the confusion which arises out of the very question as to where Europe begins. The narrator believes it begins in Moscow because that is what her parents had always told her, yet a young Russian tells her that the Ural Mountains in fact signify the beginning of Europe. This assertion is emphatically rejected by a Frenchmen who declares “Moscow [is] not Europe” (Tawada 141). Europe then becomes less a fixed geographical area but rather an idea that shifts and alters according to individual perspectives and perceptions. In this in-between zone of Siberia the fixity of Europe and Asia as models of identity are questioned by the uncertainty as to where one stops and the other begins. In-between Japan and Moscow, in-between East and West, the stability of a homogenous identity is challenged through movement and dislocation in “Where Europe Begins,” and where new possibilities for plural identities are formulated through an understanding of the hybrid nature of human subjectivity.

Disrupting notions of fixed and stable identities through an understanding of the fluidity of bodily and spatial borders is a theme that runs throughout the texts examined here but essentially is also the commonality that unites Tawada’s oeuvre as a whole. Her texts are critical of naturalized links of identity to singular categories that do not take into consideration alternative possibilities of heterogeneous subjectivity, for these natural and essentialised ties are frequently the root of exclusionary models of identity that can lead to the physical, mental and juridical marginalization of minorities or those perceived as ‘other’. As described in the examination of “The Bath,” the body is in a state of perpetual transformation and is constantly being inscribed by social, cultural and historical factors that mark and define it. The body in this text then is both cultural and material, produced in the mirror image, split, repeated and reiterated, and beholden to a fixed photograph that hangs next to a mirror, attempting but inevitably failing to fix and

stabilize the subject to the frozen stereotype. In this case, as in so many other cases throughout Tawada's works, subjectivity and psyche are no more certain or in doubt than the body itself, for here we are presented with a subject, a mirror, a photographic screen and the process of identification, ultimately pointing towards the ambivalence and fundamental mimetology of all identity constructions. Skin can no longer be understood as a biological given but is rather culturally imbedded and produced, or as Benthien argues, "skin is constantly interpreted, read, invested with or emptied of semantic meaning, recoded, neutralized, and stylized" (11). Forever in motion, the body and the skin that envelops it becomes a metamorphic place that Tawada's subject surveys and attempts, if unsuccessfully, to correct on a daily basis.

In a similar manner, transformation of boundaries plays a significant role in the perception and re-conceptualization of identities in "Where Europe Begins," as here the fluidity and mobility of borders underscores the fact that perceptions of space and the identities tied to that space are, in fact, culturally specific. The shifting border of where Europe actually begins is contingent on the observer's perception, as the Western European man has a very different idea of where Europe begins from the Siberian girl, which implies that boundaries are not naturally occurring but are instead a human construction. In presenting bodies and boundaries as constantly in a state of transformation, "The Bath" and "Where Europe Begins" emphasize the provisional and fragmentary nature of identity and subjectivity, but also hopefully serve to perform what they describe by transforming the reader's perception into a more self-critical awareness of the "disturbing otherness" and plurality of all individuals.

Notes

[1] "If ours is a world in which skin surfaces of all kinds have multiplied, the first such surface was perhaps the photograph. . . . Photographs . . . have been touched by the world's light, leaving its trace upon the surface of the photographic film." (58)

[2] The notion that skin, and the face, are pliable and receptive to outside influence runs throughout Tawada's works, for example in "Shadow Men:" "The professor looked like a doll kneaded from mud. . . . Amo touched Professor Ludwig's cheeks, which really did feel like mud, his fingers sinking right into them" (37-38), and in "Trang Tien Bridge," in reference to a young girl selling souvenirs on the street: "why haven't the tourists' shoes left prints on her face?" (63).

[3] Written in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, in *Überseezungen* Tawada underscores skin as a surface of inscription and the arbitrariness of the racial signifier as a determinant for inclusion and exclusion, while

simultaneously problematizing white skin as an unmarked surface: "A wooden bench stood before my eyes. . . . But on the back of the bench it said 'Slegs Blankes,' meaning that the bench is only for the 'Blankes,' and I felt eyes all on me. I didn't know whether or not I had a right to sit on the bench. What are people who are described as 'Slegs Blankes' supposed to look like? 'A blank space,' a hole, still unwritten, free. Can anyone have a skin colour that resembles a blank piece of paper?" (74, my trans.)

[4] Tawada points to skin surface as a site for cultural inscription throughout her works, for example in "Canned Foreign" she writes "Every attempt I made to describe the difference between two cultures failed: this difference was painted on my skin like a foreign script which I could feel but not read. Every foreign sound, every foreign glance, every foreign taste struck my body as disagreeable until my body changed." (87)

[5] It bears noting that this passage also mirrors the opening paragraphs of "The Bath" quoted earlier. Whereas the opening paragraphs of "The Bath" compare the human body with a physical landscape, this passage depicts a physical landscape, regulated by cartographic prescripts, that also serves as a metaphor for the mutable human body.

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II.

Transcultural Topographies: Transgressing the Body as Gendered and Cultural Space

The Body in Space:
Layers of Gender in Japanese Classical Dance

Colleen Lanki

In *nihon buyô* (Japanese classical dance) each dance is gendered as either *otokogata* (male form) or *onnagata* (female form), identified primarily by the movement of the dancer's body in space. The gender of the dancer and that of the dance are not necessarily the same, a dynamic that is an inherent aesthetic of *nihon buyô*. There are further layers of gender signification in the costuming determined by the gender of the dance and dancer. Gender signifiers in *nihon buyô* are complete artistic constructs played out on both male and female bodies and are never meant to completely obscure the gender of the dancer, for the audience's knowledge of the layers underneath heighten their appreciation. This article looks at the signifiers that define a dance as male or female, and discusses how these are played out on the bodies of both male and female performers, creating a liminal space where gender layering is played with and enjoyed.*

Body. Space. The Body in Space. How an individual moves is a signifier of identity: of one's body's culture, personal history, age, emotional state and gender. Many of these signs are socially constructed – consciously or unconsciously learned movement patterns and codes that can be read 'correctly' by other members of one's society. In the heightened theatrical context of *nihon buyô*[1] (Japanese classical dance) these signifiers are completely codified and stylised and have become set *kata* or forms. Any knowledgeable audience member watching a *nihon buyô* performance receives a great deal of information about story, context and character from the simplest of movements. These movements of the body in space in *nihon buyô* also create different layers of gender signification.

The audience and performers are always aware of three distinct but connected layers of gender signification in *nihon buyô*: the gender of the dancer's body, the movements of that body in space which signify the gender of the dance, and the decoration of that body with costumes, make-up and wigs which is determined by a combination of the first two layers. In this article I will describe how these layers work on the body in space and argue that this layering of gender in *nihon buyô* is part of its aesthetic, with the interplay of real and stylised gender signifiers creating a liminal space where the lines between male and female are played with and interwoven.

Under the Layers: Some Background

Much of the basis for this paper comes from my own experience with *nihon buyô*. From 1996 to 2001, while living and working in Tokyo, I was a *deshi* (apprentice) to *buyô* master Fujima Yûko.[2] I was not her first non-Japanese student, but at that time I was the only one working regularly with her, and twice a week I attended lessons in her private studio in Azabu-jûban.[3] During that time I was not acting as a researcher but was purely a *deshi* to Fujima Yûko. I neither recorded every conversation, nor documented every word or action, but I spent more than six years being with her and my *sempai* and *kôhai* (senior and junior students) absorbing as many of the movement patterns as I could into my body and asking as many questions as I felt were allowed. The lessons, recitals, personal videotapes and private conversations of those years shaped my thoughts and opinions of *nihon buyô* and are the foundation of this article. Although I do not believe that my being a Caucasian Canadian female changed the way she treated me as a student, it certainly influenced the way I perceived and learned, and it is also the gaze through which I write. Any detailed descriptions of the movements or choreography will reflect the *kata* (forms) taught in the Kanemon section of the Fujima School.[4]

Layer 1: The Body

I will start my discussion of the first layer of gender by briefly looking at two of the three dimensions of significant corporeality that Judith Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble*: "anatomical sex" and "gender performance." Gender is assigned by biology and then made easily recognizable through a series of codes learned in childhood, all of which are designed by the culture an individual is raised in, or as Laurence Senelick lays out in his introduction to *Gender in Performance*: "Gender exists only in so far as it is perceived; and the very components of perceived gender – gait, stance, gesture, deportment, vocal pitch and intonation, costume, accessories, coiffure – indicate the performative nature of the construct" (ix). These gender signifiers are played out through our bodies everyday in the way we move, speak, adorn ourselves and use space in relationship to our environment or to other people. I will not deal with Butler's category of "gender identification," as that is outside the scope of this article. For my argument, it is enough to say that dancers of *nihon buyô* are members of a society and that they live their prescribed gender signifiers everyday, thus identifying themselves in public as being either male or female. Both men and women perform *nihon buyô*, and audiences are generally aware of the gender of the dancer in a performance. This creates the first layer of gender – or gender signifier – in *nihon buyô.*

Layer 2: The Body in Space

In *nihon buyô* the dances themselves are gendered and defined as *onnagata* (female form) or *otokogata* (male form) and every movement in *nihon buyô* can be identified as being performed in either *onnagata* or *otokogata*. The gender of the dancer does not determine the gender of the dance, nor is the gender of the dance a determinate in whether the dancer should be biologically male or female: For example a female dancer and a male dancer will perform an *otokogata* dance in exactly the same way. What determines a dance's gender is the quality of the movement and the specific postures and gestures within the dance, which often come from the gender of the main character being performed but is also shown when the dancer is indicating or personifying abstract concepts rather than an actual person. These signifiers are *kata* – meaning literally forms, patterns or models. They are essentialised patterns that have grown out of the acting techniques and styles of past virtuoso actors and dancers (Brandon 65). *Kata* in *nihon buyô* mainly refer to the movement techniques but can also refer to the costuming, make-up or scenic elements. Although the production elements in *nihon buyô* also have clear gender categories, what identifies whether a dance is male or female is the movement *kata*. Any observer who understands the gender signifiers in *nihon buyô* immediately recognizes from the position of a dancer's body or from one gesture of a dancer's hand whether the dance is male or female.

There are fundamental choreographic principles in both *otokogata* or *onnagata* dances which identify a dance as *nihon buyô*. The primary position involves a straight upright position of the spine and the 'centring' or grounding of the body through the *koshi*, or pelvic area. Another principle found in all dances is the basic orientation of the body in one of eight directions from the centre of the body: *shômen* (directly forward), *ura* (directly backward) *shimote* and *kamite* (45 degrees right and left respectively), *shimote ura* and *kamite ura* (the two 45-degree angles behind the dancer), as well as *shimote yoko* and *kamite yoko* (directly to the right and left). A dancer's body in either *otokogata* or *onnagata* dances always faces one of these directions, the most popular being *shimote* and *kamite*, as the 45-degree angle is thought to be the most flattering. A third fundamental factor in *nihon buyô* is the importance of the eyes. Fujima Yûko believed that the eyes are second only to the *koshi* in importance, and that a dancer whose eyes are 'dead' – blankly looking out somewhere, rather than actively seeing what the character being danced is seeing – is simply not a good dancer. These factors apply to both male and female dances and are the foundation of *nihon buyô*. Other movement *kata* signify the gender of each dance.

Fig. 1. Fujima Yûko performing *Yukari no Tsuki*.

In *nihon buyô* the use of space in the movements is a prime determinate of gender. In an *onnagata* (female form) dance the body is basically turned in on itself so that it appears smaller and has a more restricted kinesphere (fig. 1). The legs are turned in from the pelvic area so that the toes appear turned inwards, and the knees rarely separate. The shoulder blades are pushed together and pulled down to give the appearance of sloping shoulders. The upper arms are turned out, while the lower arm is turned in, and the elbows are generally kept close to the body and pointing towards the floor. Hands are soft and lightly cupped, with the thumbs tucked in. These corporeal positions or shapes, and a contracted kinesphere signify 'female gender' in *nihon buyô* and were designed to dramatically and stylistically obscure maleness. Kabuki actor Onoe Baikô VII talks about his physical transformation from man to stylised woman in an *onnagata*[5] role:

> I'm a man right? So I have to hide the fact that I'm a man. Most fundamental and therefore most important is that an onnagata must always keep the shoulders pressed down. You have to pull the shoulder blades together, until they touch, until it hurts. I'm a man so my shoulders go straight out. An onnagata's shoulders must slope downward. My hands are a man's hands, so I hide them. . . . I make them look smaller by holding the fingers together, sometimes slightly curling up the little finger and the next one. (Mezur, "The Kabuki Onnagata" 237)

Texturally, gestures in *onnagata* movement are generally quite subtle and soft, with transitions between postures or poses made in curves and arcs rather than sharp straight lines.

In *otokogata* (male form) dances, the movements are bigger and more expansive, and the body uses a larger kinesphere. The legs are turned out from the hip, and the knees are always positioned over the toes, so that at any given time, even when bent, the dancer can see his or her own big toe on the inside of the knee if looking down. The arms are also more expansive, with the general position being one where the upper arm is turned in and the lower arm turned out. Elbows are kept away from the body and lifted and the shoulders are kept down (not lifted with the elbows) with the shoulder blades pulled together to create an open chest. Hand shapes can vary from one that is almost like the *onnagata* but slightly less cupped for a young refined male role, to a wide-open hand with the thumbs outstretched for a bigger, more boisterous or heroic male character. The position that most clearly exemplifies 'male' is called *emen* (fig. 2). The legs are held in a wide stance, with one leg in one of the 45-degree directions and the other 180 degrees opposite. The knees are bent, with two-thirds of the dancer's weight on one leg and one third on the other. The *koshi* is dropped evenly (the body is not tilted). Arms

are held out in the same directions as the legs with the elbows up, and the head is usually held straight. *Emen* is a position indicating strength and determination that is found in all male dances but never used in female ones. *Otokogata* movement stands in direct contrast to *onnagata* in order to provide a clear distinction in the signifiers for male and female.

Fig. 2. Colleen Lanki (right) in an *emen* position with Sueyoshi Risa (left) dancing *Kodakara Sambasô.*

There are a number of specific movements that illustrate the difference in kinesphere between *onnagata* and *otokogata* forms. One very clear example is the *negite-das* or twisting step. In *onnagata* the front foot twists out at 45 degrees and the rear foot slides around in front, meeting or crossing the first foot while the body shifts to the same 45-degree angle. The body is literally folding in on itself with each step, using as little space as possible while moving forwards, consistently placing the body in the flattering 45-degree *shimote* or *kamite* direction. During the *negite-das* in *otokogata* the front foot still twists out at 45 degrees but the rear foot slides forward to extend out at a 45-degree angle to the opposite side in a wide-open stance. As in *onnagata*, the body shifts from *shimote* to *kamite* but remains open and expanded, using as much space as possible. Although the 'twist and step' is the same in both *onnagata* and *otokogata*, the shape of the body in space genders the dance movement.

Even in *seiza* – a simple kneeling posture where both knees are on the floor and the weight is resting on the heels – the kinesphere is clearly

different between the female and male forms. In *onnagata* the knees are held close together, while in *otokogata* the knees are held not touching each other but generally a fist-width apart. In *otokogata*, the farther apart the knees are, the rougher or more 'male' the character being danced is portrayed. The kinesphere distinguishes not only between male and female form, but signifies the degree of femininity or masculinity of the movements and character.

Although *kabuki*, and therefore *nihon buyô*, was initially created by women and developed by troupes of performers of both genders, a *bakafu* government edict in 1629 banned all women from the professional stage, and since then the bodies that have created the form and its gender signifiers have been predominantly male.[6] Thus, the male performers were forced to develop a set of highly refined performative gender signifiers in order to effectively play the female roles. As only one gender historically performed both male and female roles, gender signifiers in *nihon buyô* and *kabuki* are highly 'feminised' and, in some cases, the male signifiers highly 'masculinised'. For either gender, the movements of the body in space are very exaggerated through highly defined use of space, pattern and tempo, and they take enormous effort to perform. Katherine Mezur quotes Bandô Tamasaburô, a famous *kabuki* actor of *onnagata* roles, "There is nothing natural about performing onnagata . . . It is extremely difficult. There is no letting down, you must perform the finest detail, moment to moment" ("The Kabuki Onnagata" 239). I would add that the *otokogata* roles are every bit as detailed and difficult to master, and that the gender signifiers are no more natural to perform.

Within a given choreography, a dancer can play many characters and indicate or embody atmospheres or inanimate objects. In *onnagata* dances, the emphasis is on atmosphere or mood changes rather than full changes of character, and the dancer never drops or relaxes the female signifiers. In contrast, within *otokogata* pieces the dancer can shift time, place, age and in some cases gender. For instance, in the *otokogata* dance *Kuruwa Hakke* the dancer begins personifying a young male en route to a pleasure district. The dance follows his journey, and the dancer becomes a series of characters including a boatman, an elderly woman, an elegant high-ranking prostitute and a farmer planting rice and catching fireflies. The dancer also embodies or physically depicts a number of inanimate objects such as a bridge, Mount Fuji, and a pile of futons. Throughout *Kuruwa Hakke* the dancer shifts from male to female movements, depending on the gender of the character, and uses male or female body postures to create the non-human elements. The inclusion of female characters and therefore female gender signifiers in an *otokogata* dance is common, and the virtuosic shifts in body posture and gesture make such dances interesting. The reason that there is never a switch to male *kata* in a female dance likely comes from the fact that the dances were originally created for male dancers, as the layering of a female gender on a male body would have been challenging enough. There may also be a feeling

that the illusion of the feminine would be shattered if the male body of the dancer suddenly revealed its masculinity.

Because the highly codified gender signifiers in *nihon buyô* were almost entirely created by men to be played out on the male body,[7] a female dancer performing an *onnagata* dance becomes a female body imitating a male body performing codified female gestures and postures. Again, *kabuki* actor Tamasaburô sums it up concisely: “to perform a man performing onnagata, that is what makes onnagata” (Mezur, *Beautiful Boys* 135). This multi-layering has been used as an argument that women cannot adequately perform *onnagata* dances. “The kabuki dance was not originally designed to be done by women. Therefore, these same experts say, the dance would look all the more unnatural if performed by real women” (Ashihara 102). Currently thousands of women successfully perform female dances in recitals, but the argument that the female *kata* layered on a male body is more aesthetically appropriate or pleasing still keeps women from performing on the professional *kabuki* stage. In order to perform *onnagata* dances, both male and female dancers needs to learn male and female forms. If these forms are successfully embodied, the audience will recognize the dance or character as female, and what gender layer lies underneath simply adds to the enjoyment or appreciation of the dancer’s skill. However, there truly is something more impressive about a large masculine body transforming into a fragile young female character, than the body of a twenty-year-old female doing the same. When the stakes of the gender-play are higher, the enjoyment of the audience is greater.

The attraction of this contrast can work for *otokogata* as well. When a female dancer performs a male dance the audience can more fully appreciate the gender layering. One historical example of this was Marichiyo – one of the most famous Shimbashi *geisha* in post-war Tokyo. Marichiyo danced exclusively *otokogata*, and an *Azuma Odori*[8] program from 1950 has her listed as dancing both the very masculine warrior character Tomomori-no-Rei in *Funabenkei* and the elegant artist Utamaro in a piece called *Utamaro Emaki*. In the *Azuma Odori Stage Photo Album* published in 1951, there are photographs of her in full costume as some of the most famous male roles in *kabuki*, including the *wagoto* (gentle male) character Izaemon in *Kuruwa Bunshô*. The English language foreword to the book claims that her popularity is “far greater than those of stars in film and stage circles [sic]” (Betsusho 1951). She was obviously a very talented dancer, but I believe part of the attraction was that she danced male roles. A more personal example is the responses I get when I dance *otokogata*. Invariably, the enthusiasm from the audience and from my colleagues is much greater when I do male dances than female ones. In every instance the word *kakkoi* (cool, suave, attractive) is used again and again implying that the layering of the male signifiers on my very tall, female body is aesthetically very interesting. The layering of

one gender on another, and in my personal case perhaps the layering of one culture on another, heightens the impact of the dance.

Layer 3: The Body Decorated

Although the main determining factor of the gender of a dance is the movement, there is another layer of gender coding in the costume and adornment of a dancer. There are levels of costuming depending on the location and formality of a performance and specific signifiers of a male or female dance in each level. In addition there are details in the costuming, wigs and make-up that not only identify the dance as being *otokogata* or *onnagata*, but are dependent on the gender of the dancer. Every decision made regarding the costumes, wigs and make-up is connected to the gender of the movements (and therefore of the character being danced) and in some instances these decisions are also connected to the gender of the dancer.

The levels of costuming and adornment can range from the regular male or female *kimono* to formal *kimono* through to full costume. For a fully costumed and wigged performance, the character dictates what is worn, with no differentiation made for a male or female dancer – same costume, same make-up, same wig. Other levels, however, are quite different for male dancers or female dancers. Although some of these choices are personal, they are an important part of the *kata* of *nihon buyô*.

For *onnagata* dances, a female dancer can wear a regular woman's *kimono* and *obi* with a regular female hairstyle and no special make-up. She could also perform in what is known as *suodori*, which means she would wear a special woman's *kimono* with a long trailing hem that folds open at the front, a wig in a female style (which style depends on the character) and full white make-up on the face and hands (fig. 1). The collar in a woman's *kimono* is pulled low at the back – courtesans and *geisha* characters are pulled down lower than other female characters. The third option for a woman dancing an *onnagata* piece is to wear full costume, which for some dances is the *suodori* option. A male dancer can also dance either in full costume or *suodori*, wearing exactly the same *kimono*, wig and make-up as a female dancer. He cannot, however, wear a regular woman's *kimono* or perform in a female costume without wig or make-up. A man dancing an *onnagata* role without wig or make-up must perform in regular male attire: a man's *kimono* and *obi*, or *monsuki* and *hakama* (formal men's *kimono* with family crests and formal pleated trousers).

In an *otokogata* dance, both male and female dancers can dress in full costume with the wig and make-up appropriate to the character. In addition, both male and female dancers can dress in formal men's *monsuki* and *hakama*, without wig or make-up (fig. 2). In this case, a female dancer will tie her hair back in a ponytail, unless her hair is already short. A male dancer

has no other options for *otokogata*, but a female dancer does. She can choose to perform in regular women's *kimono* (no wig or make-up) with a special *obi* style called a *kôken*. This particular style of *obi* knot immediately signifies that the dance is male. In this situation the *kimono* is worn slightly differently, and the underskirt worn is special in that it is not split. These details allow for freedom of movement without the possibility of the dancer's legs showing in the wide-open stances of a male dance. The second costuming option for female dancers is a form of *suodori*, which is distinctly female but with definite male signifiers. A female dancer can wear a formal *kimono* that reaches just to the floor, with the same specially tied *obi* as mentioned above. The dancer wears white make-up similar to that in *onnagata suodori* but with less pink tones under the white and thinner lips. She will also wear a woman's wig styled in a distinctive way called *maeware* (literally "front-split") because it is parted in the centre of the head at the front. This hairstyle is worn only by women dancing male roles in *suodori* dress. The extra options for female dancers performing *otokogata* allow for gender layering where the costumes emphasize the dancer's female gender, but the male signifiers are clearly understood by anyone who can read them.

Although there are no official dictates as to the colour, patterns or styles of the regular *kimono*, *obi* or *hakama* worn when either a male or female dancer performs without wigs or make-up, certain tendencies are evident. Female dances/characters get warmer, redder tones while male dances/characters use blues, greens and browns. Fabric and fan patterns will vary depending on the character, for instance ocean motifs for *Urashima Taro* (a Rip van Winkle-type story of a man who lives hundreds of years under the ocean) or iris motifs for *Ayame Yukata* (*The Iris Robe*). The colours and patterns chosen hint at the gender of the dance and at the nature of the character being danced but never totally obscure the gender or nature of the dancer. The less costumed or made-up a dancer is, the less hidden his or her gender is, and the greater the reliance on movement *kata* to indicate the gender of the dance.

Layers 1, 2 and 3 Combined

In *nihon buyô*, a male or female body performs gendered movements and is decorated to partially enhance and/or obscure the genders already present. Signifiers of gender are complete artistic constructs, created by men for men, but are played out on both male and female bodies. The layers of gender signifiers are never meant to completely obscure the gender of the dancer, for the audience's knowledge of the layers underneath heighten their appreciation. Mezur quotes *kabuki onnagata* Nakamura Shikan VII.

> What do you see when you watch an onnagata onstage? You know I'm a man. For me to go onstage and look completely like a man would be bad. Instead, I'm a little concealed in a female disguise. But, gradually you see me, Shikan, a man, as the female (on stage). But you see I'm a man, too, right? (Mezur, *Beautiful Boys* 41)

When a woman is dancing *otokogata*, the performance becomes a "male disguise," for *otokogata* gender signifiers are no more realistic than for *onnagata*.

Whether male or female the layers and mixes of gender signifiers create a sense of interest and pleasure for the audience. The 2003 *Azuma Odori* performance provided perhaps the most fascinating example of gender layering in *nihon buyô* I have ever witnessed. As mentioned before, the *Azuma Odori* is performed entirely by the *geisha* of the Shimbashi district of Tokyo, so every performing body onstage was female. In a piece called *Edo-Matsuri*, a group of characters of a type I had never seen before entered, moving like young males, but with very distinct gestures and foot positions that were female. The gender signifiers of the body in space were indicating that these characters were both male and female, which in most instances would have been a mistake on the part of the dancer, but as these were highly trained professional performers, and each dancer in the group was making the same movements, this could not be the case. They were dressed in costumes I identified as those of a young male, but with distinct patterns and colours I would have categorized as female. The effect was fascinating for me, as I not only enjoyed the dance itself, but was completely intrigued by the multiple layers and mix of the gender signifiers. There was something charming and mystifying about these female dancers who were obviously quite deliberately performing both male and female gender *kata*.

These characters were *Tekko* – special attendants at certain Edo-period festivals who were women dressed as men and who led processions of *o-mikoshi* (portable *shintô* shrines). The characters were in fact women pretending to be men, so the performance consisted of female dancers playing women who were dressed as young men, and the depiction was designed to be evocative of both genders at the same time. When discussing the significance of these characters with master kabuki musician Tokiwazu Mozibei V, I asked whether he found these characters appealing. His response was an immediate affirmative, adding that he found them attractive and sensual because of the mix of male and female forms. The *geisha* performing the *Tekko* characters in the *Azumi Odori* were performing multiple layers of gender *kata*, creating a deliberate sense of curiosity and allure for the audience.

There is one more layer of gender in *nihon buyô* that is contained in that space within the dancer. About four years into my training, master dancer and teacher Fujima Takaaki asked me whether I preferred to dance

onnagata or *otokogata* dances. When I responded that I felt my body was best suited to the male form, Fujima Takaaki replied that it is not the physical appropriateness of a dancer's body that is truly important, but what is in a dancer's heart. The core of a dancer's performed gender comes from that dancer's internal affinity to the form. Many dancers (myself included) perform both genders, but many specialize in either the female or male form. Fujima Takaaki identified himself as a male dancer who taught both *onnagata* and *otokogata*, but he specialized in *onnagata* dances – and he clearly, in his heart, identified himself as a performer of female form movement and female form dances.

The body of the *nihon buyô* dancer merely existing in space indicates a gender. When that body begins to dance *nihon buyô* it becomes a body in space making specifically gendered movements. If that same body is decorated in a particular way, there is another level of gender signification which never fully obscures the gender of the dancer. And finally somewhere in the heart of the dancer lies an affinity, not with his or her biological or socially agreed upon gender, but with the gender performed through the *kata* of *nihon buyô*. These visible corporeal and spatial layers of gender, transmitted to the audience by the invisible layer of the dancer's connection to the gender being portrayed, are a core aesthetic of *nihon buyô.* The gender signifiers are at the base of every movement the body performs and every costuming choice a dancer makes. The way in which the layers of gender blend and combine allow for a playful space of liminality where a dancer of *nihon buyô* can be both male and female at the same time.

Notes

[*] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 23rd Symposium of the International Committee for Traditional Music's Study Group on Ethnochoreology and was included in its proceedings.

[1] *Nihon buyô* is a term meaning literally "Japanese dance." It refers specifically to dances coming from the tradition of the *kabuki* theatre and the *geisha* world. Other terms include *kabuki buyô* or *kabuki odori*, meaning kabuki dance, and indicating lively movement, and the term *mai* indicating dance that uses slow, grounded movements, often in circular patterns. Since the most widely used and all-encompassing term is *nihon buyô*, I will use it throughout this article in order to include dances found in the kabuki theatre repertoire, dances choreographed in the same style using the same classifications of music, and other related forms such as *jiuta mai*. I will use the translation "Japanese classical dance" to distinguish it from *minyo buyô* (folk dances) or other more modern styles.

[2] Fujima Yûko (1929 - 2003) began studying Japanese classical dance with Fujima Sue when she was four years old. She taught for over fifty years and performed regularly in Japan and overseas until her death. In this article all Japanese names are given in the Japanese order with the family name first.
[3] I also returned to Tokyo regularly for training in the two years before her death and have continued to train with master dancer/teacher Fujima Shôgo.
[4] The Fujima School is one of the major schools/traditions of *nihon buyô*. All dancers with either *natori* (professional dancer) or *shihan natori* (professional instructor) status are given a professional name incorporating "Fujima" as their family name.
[5] The term *onnagata* refers to female form movement as well as the dancers and kabuki actors who specialize in female roles.
[6] Izumo no Okuni, the person credited with the founding of *kabuki*, was a female *miko* (temple dancer) who gained popularity in the late sixteenth century for her erotic dance/theatre performances in which she would play a male character paying a visit to a teahouse prostitute.
[7] There are exceptions to this in *jiuta mai* and dances choreographed for and by *geisha* to perform in more intimate settings. The basics are the same, but the female gender signifiers are not as exaggerated – the legs less turned in and the hand movements more subtle. The essentials are the same as they have the same aesthetic base.
[8] *Azuma Odori* is the name of the major performances done by the Shimbashi *geisha* at the Shimbashi Embujô (Shimbashi Theater in Tokyo). The *Azuma Odori* includes sections of *kabuki* plays, *nihon buyô*, using many styles of music and usually some specially-created plays or dances. In the 1950s it was staged twice a year with performances running for weeks. Currently, the performances are done annually over a few days in May.

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Fig. 1. Fujima Yûko dancing the *jiuta* piece *Yûkari no Tsuki*. National Theatre of Japan (Small Hall). Tokyo. 18 Jan. 2003. Photogr. © Fujiwara, Atsuko.
Fig. 2. Colleen Lanki (right) and Sueyoshi Risa (left) dancing the *Tokiwzu* piece *Kodakara Sambasô.* Meguro Citizen's Hall, Tokyo. 3 Mar. 2001. Photogr. © Fujiwara, Atsuko.

Counter-Narrativity and Corporeality in Kishida Rio's *Ito Jigoku*

Yasuko Ikeuchi

Kishida Rio (1946-2003), a playwright, director and screenwriter, first worked in 1974 for the experimental theatre laboratory Tenjo Sajiki (Peanut Gallery), headed by Terayama Shūji (1935-1983), one of the charismatic male leaders of Japan's *angura* (underground) theatre groups in the 1960s and 1970s. While working closely with Terayama, Kishida also developed independent theatre projects with other theatre companies beginning in 1977, and founded her own theatre company in 1984. The play *Ito Jigoku* [*Thread Hell*], which depicts working women living in darkness and silence as Japan establishes itself as a modern nation state through exploiting them, was awarded the prestigious Kishida Kunio Drama Prize in 1985. In *Ito Jigoku*, the possibilities of performativity in terms of the construction of female subjectivity are intensively explored. This exploration was made possible through countering and problematizing the dominant canons and discourses of modernity surrounding sexuality and the construction of female subjectivity and corporeality.

Introduction

Kishida Rio (1946-2003) wrote plays for Terayama Shūji's avant-garde theatre group Tenjō Sajiki (The Peanut Gallery) from 1974 onwards, allowing her to gain valuable experience from working closely with him. Though she became involved in her own theatre projects beginning in 1977, while continuing her work with Tenjō Sajiki, Kishida's growth as a playwright can, in large part, be attributed to the time spent in collaboration with Terayama. She had great respect for Terayama and his influence on her work is immeasurable. Kishida herself acknowledges this when she talks about never being able to step out of his immense shadow. In theatrical circles and in the media generally, she was seen as Terayama's disciple, and was even described as "the female Terayama," an intended compliment.

In this essay, I seek to verify the extent of Kishida Rio's contribution "as a woman" to the creation of new theatre under one of the most intensely individualistic male leaders of *angura*, or underground, theatre. I will examine one of Kishida's own dramatic texts, *Ito Jigoku* (*Woven Hell*, 1984), which was written after Terayama's death and received the prestigious 29th Kishida Kunio Drama Award in 1985, and I particularly want to focus on the dramatic world that Kishida was able to create for herself.

Kishida actually revised one of her collaborative works with Terayama, *Shintokumaru*, in the early 1990s.[1] As theatre scholar Tanigawa

Michiko points out, however, the difficulty here lies in not being able to distinguish clearly between their respective contributions:

> During Kishida's final years with Terayama, collaborative works such as Shintoku-maru: *Poison Boy, The Audience Seats*, and *Lemmings* were born; in these works, *it is not clear how much of the writing is Terayama's and how much is Kishida's*. Sharing Terayama's ability to devise striking alienation methods, she adopted a multi-dimensional, resilient pose. At the same time, beginning in the late 1970s, she commenced to work independently from but parallel to the Peanut Gallery. As Kishida put it, "*I obtained Terayama's permission to write (for myself) by saying I wanted to write about women*." (167, emphasis added)

While Kishida never referred to herself as a feminist, she sought to problematize the dominant canons and discourses surrounding sexuality and the construction of female subjectivity when she aspired to "write about women." Her work intersected with the 1970s women's liberation movement in Japan and the subsequent expansion of feminism in the 1980s to produce unique theatrical expression. Kishida utilized her theatrical apprenticeship with Tenjō Sajiki during the 1970s to devise her own theatrical motifs and expression, which then blossomed in the 1980s after she started writing about motifs dealing with women and the history of Japanese Modernism in the latter half of the 1970s.

In a panel discussion entitled, "How does Theatre Perceive the 'Imperial System'?," Kishida points out that for her personally the "imperial system" is inseparable from women's history, though she also notes the lack of interest in the "imperial system" shown by women playwrights after Akimoto Matsuyo (1911-2001):

> When I look at today's topic (of discussion), "the imperial system and theatre," I can't help thinking about the imperial system in terms of women's history. After Akimoto Matsuyo, women playwrights have shown far too little interest in the imperial system, and, personally, I don't know why that is. I've been dealing with the issue of women in Japanese history versus the imperial system since the 70s, so I find this vacuum (of interest) intriguing. For instance, there are five of us here today, and it's always like this, but I'm the only woman (laughs). (Kishida 18, my trans.)

In a sense, it is perhaps inevitable that Kishida would feel her work to be different from the work of other women playwrights due to her problematization of the imperial system from the historical viewpoint of women's

history as part of 1970s *angura* theatre. However, when one considers the question of "the imperial system and theatre" in light of when this panel discussion took place, in the year 2000, one wonders whether that "vacuum" or discontinuity is a phenomenon characteristic only of women playwrights. First and foremost women playwrights have, to date, been an extremely rare entity in Japan. Certainly the lineage of playwrights in the pre-war years, and even from the post-war New Theatre movement up until the *angura* theatre of the 60s and 70s, contains virtually no women apart from Akimoto Matsuyo and Kishida herself. Moreover, the fact that, despite having so few contemporaries, these two outstanding women playwrights chose to explore motifs dealing with the "imperial system" as a theatrical expression that questioned Japanese modernity is itself noteworthy.

In the following passage, Kishida describes how she came to write about women:

> I worked on Terayama's productions from the latter period of his life, and I obtained Terayama's permission to write (for myself) by saying I wanted to write about women, which is when I started writing about women, but then he disappeared from the picture, so I was left with the (motifs about) women, which then got tied in with the imperial system. (28-29, my trans.).

While modestly saying that she obtained Terayama's permission, her tendency, when discussing the topic of writing about women, is to sound as though this were something that only a woman could do or that she herself as a woman was obliged to do.

Beyond Matricide: Construction of Female Subjectivity

I shall now focus on Kishida's dramatic text *Ito Jigoku* in order to investigate what kind of dramatic world she was able to create for herself in relation to her redefining of Japanese modernity through a perusal of the imperial system in the context of women's history. Having taken this opportunity to reread the text and to review the stage performance,[2] I was reminded of the levels of counter-narrativity and corporeality evident in both the dramatic text and the performance. In *Ito Jigoku*, the possibilities of performativity in terms of the construction of female subjectivity are intensively explored. This was arguably made possible through her countering and problematizing the dominant canons and discourses of modernity surrounding sexuality and the construction of female subjectivity and corporeality. Kishida's approach was not unrelated to the concurrent women's liberation movement of the 1970s and the subsequent expansion of feminism beginning in the 1980s that sought to radically redefine sexual politics in Japanese modernity.

The setting of *Ito Jigoku* is the historical and specific geopolitical location of the Tokyo Muslin and Silk Manufacturing Company's Kameido Mill in 1939. By way of symbolically representing the historical position of women in the process of forming the modern nation state of Japan under the slogan "Rich Country, Strong Army" (*fukoku-kyōhei*), Kishida sets the play in what is called the *Itoya*, which operates as a silk spinning mill by day and a brothel by night, representing the double exploitation of women working at the mill, both economically and sexually, as low-paid workers and prostitutes. The master of the *Itoya*, together with the "recruiters" and "*Kurogo,*"[3] act as puppeteers, manipulating the women from behind with strings. This visualization of the operation of power in running the patriarchal silk spinning mill-cum-brothel reveals the play as directly exploring the possibilities of theatrically expressing how to "reinstate the oppressed voices and narratives" (Tonooka 118)[4] of the women from out of the "thread hell" into which they have been bound by the manipulative operations of power.

Using a different methodology from the realism of modern theatre, Kishida constructs this dramatic text from loose, discontinuous, episodic and fantastic scenes. The protagonist of *Ito Jigoku* is a girl symbolically named Mayu, which means cocoon. The female workers at the mill have similarly symbolic names, such as Matsu, Ume, Fuji, Hagi, Shōbu and Botan, which originate from the Japanese card game *hanafuda*, and also recall professional names given to prostitutes. The male characters, including the master and the recruiters, have only functional names such as Nawa (rope), Wara (straw), Tegusu (nylon tape), Himo (string), and Mizuhiki (gift-wrapping tape), reflecting the fact that they capture and manipulate the women. Or else they are represented as faceless, nameless "*nopperabō*," which refers literally to their blank, expressionless faces. These are extremely symbolic, allegorical characterizations.

Kishida's poetic and rhythmical dramatic language is evoked by the seasonal winds, spinning out the narratives of bodies sensitive to different scents. This is evident in the women's fragmentary words and narratives:

> Undulating wavering wind summer wind
> No drowsy sun
> Skin unbinding
> Swaying drowsy releasing
> Bones stretching, loosening
> Yes wrinkles melting away (Kishida, *Woven Hell* 31).[5]

Though the sound of their dialogue, like a sing-a-round, as the spinning wheels turn, is also stylised, it is accompanied by a vigorous, elegant motion as they work, which produces a feeling of the women's own autonomy, authority and solidarity. For example, there is a scene where the spinners

converse with fragmentary lines while increasing the tempo of their spinning wheels as if possessed.

> "Having made time go this much faster,"
> "That's enough. She'd have gotten away by now."
> "I feel somehow rushed."
> "My hands move of their own accord."
> "Turning the spinning wheel,"
> "As if someone said spin,"
> "Like an order,"
> "As if I said spin,"
> "Like a murmur." (Kishida, *Ito Jigoku* 50-51, my trans.)

With their voices overlapping, the women continue to turn their spinning wheels without really knowing why. The common defence of the women, which they refer to as being "suddenly capricious," comes not so much from clearly strategic, rational counteractions, but rather from sensing, through natural forces such as the wind, the danger for women who appear likely to be snared in the same trap, and takes root in what could be called corporeal knowledge in the sense that it is not knowledge attainable by scientific or analytical means. This knowledge develops from the pain and pleasure of historical experiences gained through their daily work and should not be regarded as being merely "feminine," essentially naturalized, or based on Cartesian body-mind dualism.

Another allure of this dramatic text and a high point of the performance are the new "life stories" that the women start telling at Mayu's instigation, in contrast to the "life stories" provided for them by the master of the *Itoya* and the recruiters for entertaining the brothel customers. These "life stories" that they begin to tell have the quality of counter-narratives, irrespective of whether they are remembered factual accounts or whether they are fictions newly thought up by the women. While it still appears as though the recruiters are manipulating the women into repeating their "life stories," cracks start to appear in the men's manipulation and the "life stories" begin to unravel. Moreover, the game of "enumerating" one's life stories takes on an excessive and redundant quality, like the devices for accentuating the narrative art of the courtesans in *kabuki*, and the men who are supposed to be doing the manipulating unconsciously end up being taken in by and acting out the women's life stories.

Their diverse life stories – ranging from narratives about heading out in the rain to commit double suicide with one's lover, and having inadvertently killed a dog put in a pickling tub after a rendezvous with a lover went longer than planned, to narratives about getting tattoos of plum blossoms, killing a meddling father with a curse, pushing a man into the sea from

a fishing boat, and cutting out the tongue of a man who lied – speak of the multifarious ways of killing, and far exceed the stories the men were expecting to hear. For example, the schoolgirl Sakura who becomes a prostitute after visiting the brothel brags, "Say, I've got one story for every day of my life, I'm 17 now, so that's 365 times 17, which is 6205 stories. That's how many life stories I've got" (83). And one of the life stories she tells is about poisoning a policeman:

> *Ha-ha-ha* … (demented laugh) He drank it. He drank the poisoned (Mizuhiki writhes about) drink, and died! (Mizuhiki keels over) Nearly two litres of blood drained from the body. . . . My white bridal hood and bridal kimono got covered in blood. . . . *Ha-ha-ha*, *ho-ho-ho*. . . . Tonight's the wedding celebration and the Doll's Festival, I killed him and drank the *shirozake*,[6] and tomorrow's a new day! . . . (Suddenly the laughter subsides, and defiantly) That's my life story. (84, my trans.)

The characterization of the schoolgirl as a provocative and rebellious prostitute is significant in terms of the play's corporeal motifs. The sexual double standard inherent in the gender/sexuality make up of modern society tolerates sexual indulgence in men, while compelling women to maintain their virtue and chastity by separating them into "mother" and "whore." However, the middle-class schoolgirl who "skips school" to go see the brothel is a rebel and nonconformist who willingly deviates from the expected image of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsai-kenbo*). The sexual double standard is thus problematized by adding the schoolgirl to the prostitutes, despite the differences in class, education and upbringing. While the schoolgirl ironically ends up joining the brothel, where patriarchal dominance is complete, she allows us to glimpse the antagonistic image of a prostitute who is not necessarily compliant.

Incidentally, the power mechanisms of patriarchy in this dramatic text are further complicated by the use of theatrical expressions with a Brechtian alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*). This relates to the daughter's memory of "her mother's betrayal," and leaves us wondering whether the mother really did talk the daughter's lover into a double suicide as a result of which only he died, or whether the mother was seduced by him and killed him inadvertently while fending off his advances. Mayu's vague memory is recreated twice as a play within a play by means of a puppet show. As Tonooka points out, this undermines Mayu's authority as the subject of her own memories and narratives (122). At the same time, Mayu's contempt for her mother and decision to kill her, despite not settling the truth of the matter, also suggests how strongly she is caught up in the logic of patriarchy. The power mechanisms that work to duplicate and obscure memories related to

subject construction are thus explored as theatrical expressions with an alienation effect, in this case in the form of a puppet show as a play within a play.

Visually, the confrontation between the mother and the daughter who has come to kill her is an extremely dramatic climax in which they "take hold of both ends of a single red thread and sit facing one another" (Kishida, *Ito Jigoku* 91). The condemned mother's response to Mayu's accusation of abandoning her reveals the position of mothers in the history of the family underpinning the modern nation state. Bound within the family tree as the bearers of children, "Mothers have no family register."

> Mother: I don't have (a family register). It's only the thread of generations of blood that's linked all the way up to you. And in the shadows of that blood stands an endless line of faceless fathers. Go on, look behind the façade!
> Mayu turns around automatically. Facing a *nopperabō*,
> Mayu: Who are you?
> Nawa: *An expressionless event. Go ahead, finish off what you've started! You should kill her. Kill her with your hatred.*
> *He pulls the thread. Mayu spins around. "Hannya shingyō"*[7] *chanting surges in like a torrent. Men appear, manipulating Mayu. Mayu is manipulated into "killing" her mother*. The music cuts off. Mayu approaches her mother lying prone like a pile of lint.
> (95-96, emphasis added, my trans.)

Kishida has the master and the men who pull the threads appear in the scene where Mayu directly confronts her mother. The master's lines and the stage direction show the master inciting the daughter to "matricide" and the daughter being manipulated by the men into "killing" her mother. The "matricide" which Mayu commits to punish her mother's "betrayal" executes the task (order) of the patriarchy, and the performance (execution) of the Electra complex is literally visualized. The Electra complex here refers to the confrontation and division between women born into the patriarchal power structure of the modern imperial system. Kishida focuses on the counter discourses and corporeal knowledge of women/daughters attempting to subvert the family system, the industrial system, and the systems for controlling sex and reproduction under a modern imperial system that drives them to commit "matricide". However, rather than ending there, the play transcends the "matricide" and enters a different dimension in which the subject construction of the rebellious women is explored. As a symbolic gesture, the final order from the mother(s) results in the cutting of the threads of patriarchal dominance by which the women were manipulated from behind. Rather than becoming the father's loving daughter, Mayu negates the Electra complex and conversely binds him into the thread hell.

If one considers that, in the pre-war period, the imperial system installed "little emperors" in every home, workplace and community, and created national subjects who swore loyalty under its dominance, the "faceless father" arguably represents, through the multitude of "little emperors," the invisibility of the emperor towering over them. *Ito Jigoku* presents, as a dramatic expression, both the domination of a "kingdom" by one "little emperor," in this case the master of the *Itoya* who "makes (the women) sell thread and sell themselves," and the women's subversion of this domination. The united front presented by these women, who are mothers, daughters, prostitutes and underclass workers, is built through toil, sweat, blood and a corporeal knowledge that "fills with wind." At the end, the calls of the women who sense the arrival of a new worker at the *Itoya* and their solidarity as they continue to spin of their own accord are vividly represented. "Mayu: Now everyone's their own master. No one's to be left out. Laughs quietly. The laughter spreads like a ripple throughout the spinners. A light comes on upstairs. A woman stands there" (played by the spinner Ame) (105, my trans.). This scene is perhaps a little too utopian, particularly considering that the narrative takes place at the Tokyo Muslin and Silk Manufacturing Company's Kameido Mill in 1939. Even if a rebellion by the women seeking to subvert the oppressive domination of the *Itoya* and implement self-management were possible, subsequent Japanese history suggests that it would have been nipped in the bud by the all-powerful imperial system and swallowed up in the brutal war that followed. Rather than being a closed, self-contained dramatic structure, however, by returning at the end to the beginning the play produces a circular effect of endless repetition whereby the women's present state is also merely transitory. At the end of the play, the somewhat familiar-looking newcomer (played by Mayu's mother, Ame), asks "Which way to the *Itoya*?" (105) and the curtain drops to the mournful and eerie sound of the spinners repeatedly telling her to "Go straight down" (106).

Here, we need once again to recall that during this period in which the fascism of the imperial system was raging, resistance was by no means absent in Japan and not all "national subjects" turned to patriotism. The portrayal of the past dominance of the imperial system as being perfectly consolidated runs the risk of oversimplification when related to the question of how we reread history. Above all, we must ask what forces of resistance and rebellion we are able to imaginatively and creatively nurture under the present conditions of domination and manipulation that are continued and renewed, and increase in intensity and complexity, despite the breaks marked by pre-war, wartime and post-war, and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Kishida's subversive play about "matricide" may initially appear to present a contrasting dramatic world to the Orestes complex-fuelled "matricide" depicted by Terayama, whose protagonists are boys driven to

rebel against the family and the family system by the love/hate relationship between mother and son. Terayama described the absence and destabilization of the father in postwar Japanese society in the following terms: "The absence of the father is for me something that defines this age. Some people see this as being the loss of something fundamental, but it all comes from the father's lack of authority. A kind of Orestes complex has, I feel, held sway over this generation. It would have been the same even if the fathers had come back rather than dying (in the war). The "family triangle" with the husband or father at the top collapsed when the imperial system collapsed" (Terayama 12-13). While the Oedipus complex and the family triangle have, in Freudian psychoanalysis, been formulated based on Greek tragedy as theories relating to the subject formation of the individual and the formation of sexuality in the West, Terayama, citing Freud, critically viewed the power relations of the modern Japanese family triangle in the prewar period in terms of the power relations of the village community and, by extension, the nation state. The mother and the family are clearly seen as the basis underpinning the modern nation state of the Japanese Empire with the emperor at its pinnacle (Ikeuchi 162-63).

However, many of Terayama's works depict the collapse of this "matricide" arising from the son's desire to kill his mother. In this sense, Terayama's dramatic world in which "matricide" ends in failure is not all that far removed from the criticism of the imperial system and the modern family by Kishida, who depicts the breakdown of "matricide" arising from the Electra complex or, in other words, the bond between daughter and mother having transcended "matricide."

Terayama recognized that the maternal ideology of women who, while victims of the pre-war system of the imperial nation, the war and the patriarchal power supporting this, also bore complicity for internalising and implementing the taboos, canons and discourses of the system, was being perpetuated in the post-war political order in mutated form, and he sought liberation from that suppression. Feminism in the 1970s advocated the right of self-determination, including abortion rights giving "women the right to choose," in opposition to state control of sex and reproduction. However, a conflict arose between disabled people and women over what disabled people saw as an attempt to justify abortion of abnormal fetuses. The fundamental logic of the criticism against eugenic ideology was nevertheless amplified for women with disabilities. Feminists and disabled women who took up the feminist cause were united in their criticism of eugenic ideology and shared the historical experience of standing against the revision of the Eugenics Protection Law. While feminism in Japan is remembered for never having discarded the concept of "*motherhood*" (Ueno 6), it was the deep ideological agency of 1970s feminism, which reevaluated *motherhood* and what it means to be a woman while "being upset in turmoil" (see Tanaka 1972, 1992), that

was of immeasurable importance to the liberation movement. Those women's commitment to their work and having and raising children shares the feminist ideology of utilizing the contradictory lives of women, children and the disabled that transcends male-centered ideas of able-bodied people strongly rooted in the rapidly expanding New Left movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Ikeuchi 281-82). Terayama's radical criticism of the modern family, the institution of maternity, ideology, and their historical characters overlaps somewhat with the re-examination and criticism of modern history and the modern family by the women's liberation movement in the 1970s. Interestingly, Kishida's theatrical texts focusing on women present a dramatic world that resonates with rather than confronts Terayama's radicalism.

Notes

[1] I analyzed the relationship between Tenjō Sajiki's *Shintokumaru* and Kishida's revised version in my book *The Birth and the Demise of the Actress: Performance and Gender.*

[2] I had the opportunity to see *Ito Jigoku* (dir. Takata Keitoku), produced by Project MOO, as part of the 2006 Series of Plays by Kishida Rio, at Setagaya Theatre Tram, on July 29, 2006.

[3] In traditional performing arts such as *kabuki* and bunraku, *kurogo* are assistants who appear on stage dressed in black with a black hood.

[4] As Tonooka (118-27) points out, the place and framework of women's speech are restricted, and the possibilities for theatrical expression beyond the framework of simplified counter-discursive practice need to be deciphered. I found Tonooka's paper very thought-provoking.

[5] From the original Japanese version of *Ito Jigoku*. There are two translations of Kishida's *Ito Jigoku*. I used Paddy O'Reilly's translation here because hers is the first, and the translation is based on the 1992 production of *Ito Jigoku* (*Woven Hell*). The other translation by Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei and Tonooka Naomi follows *Thread Hell* from 2001.

[6] *Shirozake*, literally white *sake*, is a sweet, milky *sake* now mostly drunk to celebrate the Doll's Festival on March 3.

[7] *Hannya shingyō* is the Japanese equivalent of the *Prajnaparamita* or Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.

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The Absence of Voices in the Theatre Space: Ku Nauka's Production of *Medea*

Eiichiro Hirata

Recent theatre studies have pointed out that the audience perceives the voice of an actor not directly but as 'absence', as a substitute for a 'real' voice in the Lacanian sense. Despite wide-ranging research on the voice and its 'absence', there is still a question that needs to be explored: what role does this 'absence' play for the actor's body-space, the theatre space, and the audience? A significant example for exploring this question can be found in the production of *Medea* by the Japanese theatre group Ku Nauka, in which the embodiment of each character is split into a male narrator, who vocalizes the text, and an actress who gesticulates it silently. Since each female character is divided into a male voice and a silent female body, the audience has to search for her 'real' voice. Based on the experimental performance style of early twentieth century European avant-garde theatre, Ku Nauka's *Medea* thus lets the audience experience two different aspects of voice: a loss of the 'real' voice and a utopian and contradictive search for it.[*]

Theatre-Voice and Absence

Since, as Peter Brook asserts, theatre needs only an empty space occupied by a performer and an observer to make a performance possible (9), the theatre space is therefore one of the most essential conditions for any kind of theatre. Through the structure of time and space, everything can be a theatrical expression. The theatre space, including the auditorium, enables more variable effects for voices than for other theatrical elements. When an actor gesticulates and vocalizes a text on the stage, his or her voice can appeal to the senses and perception of the audience more directly than simply by gesture. While the gesture and the text are instantaneously analysed through the recognition and understanding of the audience, the voice itself resonates in their bodies and often remains longer in the emotional dimensions of their memory without being interpreted immediately. Although the audience can block out an unbearably disgusting scene by closing their eyes, they cannot avoid the invasion of awful screaming into their ears. By resonating in the bodies of speaking actors and the audience, the voice unites the theatre space and thus removes the distinction between the stage and the auditorium.

Because of this physical and transgressive impact, there is a tendency in voice theory to consider it as closely related to the notion of presence. The present voice of a speaking person settles in the body of his or her listener (Mersch 212).[1] According to Doris Kolesch, however, the voice of an

actor is presented under the condition that the strangeness and absence of identity are present and articulated in his or her voice. Since the voice of an actor comes out through imitation and representation of the voice and language belonging to a character, "otherness," "luck" and "deprivation" (Kolesch 262) are inherent in the voice. Another aspect of the voice (i.e. its absence) is implicit in a theatre performance composed of imitation, representation and fiction, and thus we cannot discuss the presence of the theatre-voice without examining this complex function.

The theme of presence and absence in theatre and performance has been investigated both in previous performance and cultural studies (Auslander; Phellan 146) and in dance research (Siegmund). Philip Auslander underscores the contradictions in the arguments for the value of presence in performances and concerts by pointing out that digital coverage of a live event sometimes impacts viewers more effectively than the theatre performance itself (66-72). Gerald Siegmund takes the non-dancing-expressions in dance performances by William Forsythe and Meg Stuart into consideration and insists that elements of absence rather than presence are in the foreground (49-114). Thus, recent theatre and performance studies place more emphasis on absence than on presence, and Kolesch's argumentation for the absence of the voice in theatre is a part of this trend. Despite wide-ranging research on the voice and its absence, there are still some questions to be explored: when an actor says something on the stage, how does the absent aspect of voice impact on the actor and the audience? What impact does this absence have in the body-spaces of the actor and the audience and in the theatre space?

A relevant example for exploring these questions is *Medea*, performed by the Japanese theatre group Ku Nauka. In this stage production, which premiered in 1999, each character is embodied by a male narrator who vocalizes the text, and an actress who physically acts it out silently. By compelling the actresses to act solely through movement, the actors seem to deprive them of their independence, while at the same time robbing them of their voices. Throughout the performance the audience never hears the actual voice of a single actress. The real voices of the actresses are absent in the theatre space, as well as in their own bodies and in those of the audience. As described below, this extraordinary form of separation in *Medea* attests to the absent aspect of the voices, which can also apply to a standard theatre performance. Although this aspect is usually hidden in a staging filled with multiple voices, it can be identified in the theatre and body-spaces of actors and the audience if we focus on the process of how the voices are produced.

Vocally Doubled Bodies

The split of one role into two performers is an updated variation of the traditional Japanese puppet theatre, *bunraku*, in which a character is embodied in a puppet manipulated by several puppeteers and vocalized by a *gidayu* sitting on the left side of the stage. Since its formation in 1990, Ku Nauka has applied this variation in all its productions, such as *Antigone*, *Elektra*, *Macbeth*, *Mahabharata,* and *kabuki*- and *nô*-plays. While the separation in a *bunraku*-play often produces theatrically effective combinations, in Ku Nauka's staging it is emphasized as difference and contradiction. The group's narrators and silent performers have come to be known as "speakers" and "movers," respectively. For the group, the separation of movement and language/voice has been one of the most important strategies in realizing a theatre form *sui generis*.

Fig. 1. Mikari (Medea) and Kazunori Abe (Medea's *gidayu*, second from the right). Ku Nauka. *Medea*. Tokyo National Museum. July 2005. Photogr. Takuma Uchida.

In *Medea* each character, Medea, Jason, their children and Creon, is also performed by two performers. As Yoshiteru Yamashita has pointed out, the contradiction and (inner) conflict are more remarkable in this staging than the other performances from the theatre group (3). Unlike other plays, actors perform exclusively as "speakers" and actresses as "movers"; the former compels the latter to join the theatre performance and to move in accordance with their texts and voices. Just before *Medea* begins, the actors check out

and choose the female performers standing on the stage, as if they see them as prostitutes, and set up the stage as if they are the directors. Then they sit down upstage, reading their lines sonorously, and force the female performers in front of them to act silently in tune with their masterly elocution and the tone of their voices. An unfair, conflicting and dominant relationship exists between the voice and the silent body of each character.

Unfairness and conflict are the themes of both the original play and the production. In Euripides' play, the King of Iolcos, Jason, tries to divorce and exile his wife, Medea, with their children because, for political reasons, he wants to marry the daughter of Thebes' King Creon. Although Medea, as princess of Colchis, helps her husband to steal and bring home the Golden Fleece, he and Creon begin to fear her magical power and treat her as an artful barbarian who comes from an "uncivilised land." Their discrimination and dishonour, emphasized in their conversations with Medea, cause her to kill her own children in revenge, as well as Glaus, the daughter of Creon, at the end of the play. In Satoshi Miyagi's direction, Jason behaves arrogantly in a European, "modernized," imperial costume, while Medea wears an ethnic Korean costume. The problematic relationship in the play is developed through references to the conflict between Japan and Korea at the beginning of the previous century when the former annexed the latter.

Moreover, the director's intention relates this unequal relationship to the problem of the actors' voices. On the stool upon which Jason sits and condemns Medea with humiliating insults, a dog listening to the gramophone (the well-known logo of the Victor Corporation) is painted. The dog's attitude toward "his master's voice," which also comes from the catch-phrase of this logo, suggests that Medea (and the other actresses) should be obedient to the voice(s) of the actor(s). The actresses are silent throughout the Medea-performance; however, after stabbing all the actors and bringing the drama to an end, they begin to open their mouths and groan toward the audience while beating a drum. These groans, their real voices, which sound like a completely incomprehensible incantation, seem to imply that their emancipation has been achieved through shutting the mouths of the male performers.

The split in actors and actresses suggests the contradictory mechanism of voice production in a theatrical body space, as it reveals how the voice is produced in the body of an actor. Allegorically speaking the detached form of acting, which is meant to show two different functions of the voice within the same character, such as Medea and Jason, rather than two different persons, mirrors a 'voice-producing-body' (through the actors) and a 'voice-hearing-body' (through the actresses) of one person. While the actors produce the voice, the actresses listen to it and make movements. The difference of the bodies split in two voices is hardly recognizable in most parts, but is shown clearly in other scenes. One such exception occurs in an early scene where Medea converses with Jason. When Medea's "speaker"

Kazunori Abe reads out the line, "I always stay at home without seeing anyone, and people spread rumours that I use a charm, plot revenge and put poison into the well,"[2] her "mover" Mikari merely listens, although the text should come from her too. She looks even slightly frightened by the minatory tone of Abe's voice. While Abe and Mikari play the same person, they embody different situations of the 'voice-body' in the process of vocalization. This apparently unusual body-separation of a character in *Medea* can also apply to the process of speaking in a conventional theatre performance. The way in which the voice of the actor settles in the body of the actress exposes the difference between the split bodies for one actor. An actor would notice this hidden difference when later listening to his voice recorded in a performance and be shocked to realize how different it is from *his* own voice, which he perceived on the stage.[3] While he is conscious of the presence of his voice with his 'voice-hearing-body' on stage, the voice sounds different in his 'voice-producing-body'. These two differentiated voices are split within his body and are then embodied by the actors and actresses of *Medea*. This difference demonstrates that the presence of his voice disappears in his body. The actresses also make this absence of voice identification recognizable when their silent 'voice-hearing-bodies' accept the male voices which never match with the female bodies because of the gender-gap.

The lack of presence holds true with the (re)presentation of the voice of a character. Even if an actor represents a character as being congenial with his voice, it is already composed of the mixture of his and the character's voice. This heterogeneity is also obvious when the actors of *Medea* represent the female characters. In a theatre space, an actor makes a sound devoid of presence in both his and the character's voice.

The actor's voice has no choice but to function as a substitute for presence. The substitution causes the manipulation, which beguiles himself and the others (the other actors and the audience). This manipulation is also illustrated by the performers of *Medea*. The actors portray the subtleties of every character's feelings by controlling the accents, intonations and rhythms so that they can manipulate, like a puppeteer, the movements of the actresses. Their skilful, sometimes even too masterly, eloquence reveals the reality of the substitution in their voices: the vivid voice, which seems to impress with its presence is based on the fictional effect that eliminates the identity of their voices.

This fictitiousness can be clarified when considered alongside Jacques Derrida's criticism of phonocentrism. According to Derrida, in European philosophy the voice was thought to have an absolute relationship between idea and soul and is the establishing characteristic of *écriture*. On the other hand, *écriture* had been deemed the substitute for the voice or the sign that is missing in the nature of the voice. Derrida revealed, however, the mechanism by which the voice depends on the "technique" to "control"

others, and asserted that the enormous influence of the voice is based solely on an apparent superiority through "the unity of techne and phone" (Derrida 84, 86, my trans.). This unity ensures the capacity of the actors in *Medea* to manipulate the actresses and at the same time takes away the identity that suggests the corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*) of their voices. This strongly physical aspect which often emerges in vocalization without verbalization, such as in a scream, brings out the physical power of the voice itself.[4] The actors obtain a virtuoso voice in exchange for corporeality (*Leiblichkeit)*. The corporeal (*leibliche*) aspect of the voice is revealed to the audience shortly before the performance. The actors appear from behind the audience chatting loudly and bursting into roars of laughter so loud and rough that they assault the ears of the audience. This physical aspect of the voice appears only at this moment and is afterwards completely hidden behind the virtuoso technique of the vocalization. Not only the actresses and the characters but also the actors are devoid of their 'real' voices. The direction of the voice in *Medea* demonstrates that it can be presented in a theatre space only in the complex configuration of its absence, simulation and contradiction.

Ethical Demands on the Audience

We can now easily imagine that it is also impossible for the audience of *Medea* to perceive the presence of the voice because it obviously fails on the stage. Despite this impossible undertaking, the performers and the direction seem to urge the audience to achieve exactly this, so that the audience can rescue the actresses' 'voices'. Because of the play within a play, which takes place at the beginning of the performance, the audience assumes the role of passive observers of a problematic play in which gender discrimination seems to be tolerated. The play begins after the male narrators "direct" and essentially force the young women, dressed in kimonos from the Meiji era, to take up their roles for *Medea*. It ends after the women on stage kill the narrators with swords, thereby relieving themselves of their roles. The play within a play is not considered a fiction, but is represented as a real problem to be solved with the radical resistance of the women on stage. In *the* play, they must also assume the role of oppressed women and remain silent and obedient, exposing themselves to the eyes of many people (audience) while the narrators sit upstage, speaking and controlling them like puppet masters. The audience must have the feeling that watching the play itself is equivalent to condoning discrimination against women. Their passive attitude is actually criticized by the provocative actions of Mikari, who plays Medea silently. In the middle of the performance, she sips a cup of tea at the front of the stage, rinses out her mouth with the tea and then spews it out at one of the audience members sitting in front of her. From her mouth, she releases neither words nor voice, but only liquid. Provokingly, she seems to urge the audience to do

something more than just sit back; she urges them, namely, to help her recover her deprived voice.

The other actresses also seem to make similar demands on the audience with their silence, which strikes the audience as the absence of a voice. The feeling of absence drives the audience to close the gender gap; that is to say, to conjure up the female voice from the male-imposed silence. In other words: the silence has a causative effect. Similarly, a mummy in ancient Egypt evoked a "hallucination of the voice" in people who saw it (Macho 133). Walter Benjamin suggested that the audience of the ancient Greek theatre tried to hear (*urvernehmen*) the original voice of a dying tragic hero in his silence.[5] The silence in the literature of the German Romantics as well as Paul Celan and Samuel Beckett "has been consistently rediscovered and appreciated as a supreme form of the true speech" (Menninghaus 471, 473). Since ancient times, silence has aroused a voice supposedly born from the absence of speech. If the audience of *Medea* is driven to search for the voices stemming from the silent figures of the actresses, then a comparison can be made to the same historical tradition and the artistic effect of silence. On the other hand, it is impossible for the audience to hear such a voice. If they did, it would only be a hallucination and have nothing to do with the real voices of the actresses. They are stuck in the dilemma between helping the actresses recover their deprived voices and the impossibility of making their real voices heard.

Since there is no way out of this dilemma for *Medea's* audience, they are required to accept the contradiction of the voices on the stage as part of their own self-contradictory reception between identification and alienation. According to Annemarie Matzke, however, the audience of contemporary theatre, as evidenced in works of Robert Wilson like *Death Destruction & Detroit* (Berlin 1979) and *Hamletmaschine* (Hamburg/New York 1986), is asked not only to interpret the performance as objectively as possible, but also to explore the process of their perception experimentally (270). If the audience of *Medea* reflects upon its own confrontation with the dilemma between the demand for the re-presentation of the hidden voice and its impossible physical reunification, it would correspond with this unique task in contemporary theatre, which combines an alienation effect and an identification process. Thus the theoretical impact of this dilemma on the audience of contemporary theatre seems to be worth further exploration.

Referring to Emmanuel Lévinas, who argues that face-to-face conversation demands that conversation partners be considerate of one another, Hans-Thies Lehmann has pointed out that an actor's voice requires the audience to take an ethical attitude toward his or her "presence":

> The speaking person is the *present person* par excellence, a metaphor for the "other" (in Emmanuel Lévinas' sense) appealing to the

> spectators' sense of responsibility – not to a hermeneutics. The spectators find themselves exposed to the "meaningless" (*sinnfrei*) presence of the speaker as a question addressed to them, to their gaze as corporeal creatures. (Lehmann 148)

In this way, an actor's voice demands that the audience find a special answer to his presence. According to Dieter Mersch, who also cites Lévinas, a speaking person exposes their vulnerability to the other with his or her voice, and asks for an ethical response because of this exposure (Mersch 213, 216). The audience of *Medea*, who watches – figuratively speaking – the 'injured' bodies of the actresses deprived of their voices, is also confronted with the urgent appeal to recover their lost voice.

As mentioned above, the audience cannot overcome the dilemma between the ethical responsibility and the impossibility of hearing the silenced voices of the actresses. However, this dilemma itself is also worth exploring in the context of presence and absence, to which Jacques Lacan makes insightful reference. As is widely recognized, he classified the perception of the world into three categories: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real (unconsciousness). They are reflected in discourse, in art and in psychoanalysis, respectively. The Real ("le Réel"), which differs from reality ("la réalité"), is most closely related to existence itself. It cannot be perceived with language, concept or imagination, but appears in the form of absence. "A thing [the Real] exists only on the assumption that it is absent" (Lacan 392). Moreover, Lacan points out that sound and voice belong to the Real. "It [the Real] exists as noise we can completely hear" (388). Conversely, it "looks like the widely opened mouth of vacuity" in the order of the Imaginary (392). The Real comes from the mouth as vacuity in the voice. This open mouth corresponds to the bodies of the actresses of *Medea*, who remain silent while releasing vacuity from their mouths.

The Complex Theatre Space of the Voice

The discrepancy between the ethical responsibility and the impossibility of hearing the actresses deprived of their voices gives the audience of *Medea* insight into another reality of the theatre space: they realize that it is an illusion that convinces them they are hearing the voice of the actor just as it is; namely, they take its presence for granted. This illusionary effect applies to the audience of illusionary theatre, which often is not aware of the effect and therefore does not doubt the gap between presence and its impossible identification with the actor in physical terms. Since the style of direction in illusionary theatre is also based on the illusion of bridging the gap between the presence of the actor and the absence of a critical, reflective audience, it thus believes in sharing experiences. Without a doubt the audience wants to

believe that they experience the dynamic voice of the actor as vividly as their own. As previously mentioned, however, the voice in illusionary theatre is perceived only in a way that involves notions of absence, of gender gaps and alienation effects, and it cannot therefore guarantee the same experience of identification with the presence of the actor's voice.

Any theatrical illusion is also based on our general understanding of the voice in a theatre space. As explained at the beginning of this essay, we tend to deem the voice as transgressive since it easily crosses the border between the stage and the auditorium. Therefore, the presence of the voice is sometimes – at least much more often than that of a visual effect – argued in phenomenological body and theatre theories. While theatre uses the illusion of the present voice as an artistic strategy without any doubt as to its authenticity, the promoters of early twentieth century avant-garde theatre tried to transform the illusion in an attempt to realize new forms of theatre. They were influenced by Nietzsche's vision of theatre in which actors and audience can overcome their differences and construct a united space through the mutually resonating, overwhelming sound of the chorus (Dionysian power), and thus re-designed the theatre space following the idea of a utopian community. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for instance, inspired by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Georg Fuchs tried to mobilize all the emotions of the actors and the audience by emphasizing physical expressions and rhythmical sounds. Oskar Schlemmer, who referred to the Nietzschean Dionysus in one of his letters and statements (Scheper 8, 11), and his Bauhaus-colleagues delivered experimental performances in order to realize a so-called "total theatre." Antonin Artraud outlined a radical idea of a theatre where the audience's senses were supposed to be vehemently shaken and the difference between the fiction (the stage) and reality (the auditorium) eliminated. Those historical avant-gardists dreamed of uniting actors with the audience through audio-visual aids and physical impact rather than through illusion and representation. Although they did not explicitly refer to the transgressive effect of the voice, they believed in the overwhelming Dionysian power and mass experience of a choric voice.

In comparison to the utopian unity of the historical avant-garde, Annemarie Matzke argues that radical performances since the 1980s have often aroused confrontation and alienation (*Verfremdung*) between performers and the audience in a theatre space. Such performers have not only adopted the utopian unity of stage and auditorium, but have even expected their performances to fail so that the audience could experience a more complex relationship between the performers and themselves in the theatre space (Matzke 269, 273). Matzke takes as an example the production *On Ice* (1986), performed by Penelope Wehrli. The performance requires each member of the audience to take a seat within spitting distance of Wehrli, and does not start until everyone in the audience chooses a seat and sits with her face

to face as co-performers. The distinction between stage and audience is eliminated and replaced by relationship of equals, between the performer and the audience, which is made possible by the compulsory direction of the latter. Such a complex relation between the stage and the auditorium is also found in connection with the impact of the voice. In the theatre spaces of Einar Schleef and René Pollesch the audience sits close to the performers, and is attacked, threatened and confronted by the performers' voices. In *Mothers*, Schleef's 1986 adaptation of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and *The Phoenician Women*, in which the stage setting resembled footbridges, many members of the audience left the performance half-way through as they were unable to tolerate the terribly loud voices of sixty actresses over a prolonged period of time (Dreysse Passo de Carvalho 74). In *Insourcing the Home: People in Crap Hotels* (2001), written and directed by Pollesch, the audience was unable to comprehend the text because of the sustained attack of loud voices (Roselt 69-73). Thus the audience was not given the opportunity to interpret or judge the performance, but was instead involved in the noisy sound of shouts and screams. Through these compulsory and complex directions, audiences of the new German speaking theatre movement have experienced a role change from taking the passive attitude of sitting back and looking on, to actively participating or confronting something unconventional. The role change is one of the most important characteristics of the new theatre movement and its origin in art performances (Fischer-Lichte 40-44). The audience of this kind of theatre performance experiences a closer relation to the stage and the performers through the destruction of the illusionary reality (or 'illusionary authenticity' or 'disguised reality') which has been replaced by more complex processes of confrontation.

Both this performative role change of the part of the audience and the utopian unity of the historical avant-garde help in understanding the theatre space of the voice in Ku Nauka's *Medea*. The audience members are compelled to search for the deprived voices of the actresses and thus find themselves confronted with the necessity of a role change. Should this role reversal be accomplished, the utopian unity that is achieved through overcoming the difference between the audience and the actresses can be realized. Ultimately, the Japanese avant-garde theatre would correspond to the dream of the historical European avant-garde. The audience of *Medea* vacillates not only between an ethical attitude and the impossibility of hearing the present voice, but also between the utopian dream of the historical avant-garde and the complex process of confrontation inspired by the transgressive power of the voice in the new German theatre. Although this vacillation is neither perceptible to the eye nor the ear in the theatre space, it arises as an inner conflict within the bodies and consciousness of the audience.

Notes

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[1] It should be noted that Dieter Mersch refers to the presence of the voice in daily conversation, not in a theatre performance.

[2] The text is quoted from the DVD recording of the performance on 28 July 2005 that was broadcasted by NHK Television on Oct. 9th 2005.

[3] Doris Kolesch refers to the hidden difference between "the spoken voice" and "the heard voice" of the same person, which is made clear in the playback of an audio/video tape and an answering machine (262). Her comment on daily experience can apply to the difference in the vocalization of an actor.

[4] Susanne Foellmer points to the coherence between the impact of corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*) and its artistic effect in the grotesque dance of the expressionistic choreographer Valeska Gert (135, 136).

[5] Benjamin mentions directly that the audience of ancient Greek theatre tried to "find the language" in the silence of a dying tragic hero, but in another part of this book he uses the wording for "originally hearing" (*urvernehmen*) in the same context. Thus he suggests the coherence between language and voice in contrast to the silence (217, 287-88).

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Fig. 1. Ku Nauka. *Medea*. Perfs. Mikari and Kazunori Abe. Tokyo National Museum. July 2005. Photogr. © Uchida, Takuma.

Staging Culture – Staging Nature: Polynesian Performance as Nature and Nature as Performance in Hawaii

Sabine Wilke

This essay introduces a series of reflections with regard to the parallel framing of the concepts of culture and nature. I am taking two geographically related cases as a springboard for discussing the idea of culture and nature as staged phenomena. I explore how the notion of performativity can lead to a rethinking of the concept of authenticity in cultural performance and what it means to speak about staged nature. That landscapes are staged (i.e., manipulated by humans to have certain effects on visitors) is not difficult to acknowledge. The grounds surrounding Versailles are just as staged as the English Garden in Munich; but the modern zoo, the city park and the wetlands in Hawaii are also staged. These spaces all display the transformative power of performance. If nature is read through the lens of this paradigm, new ways of evaluating the history and construction of cultural spaces in scholarship on environmental issues are opened up.

I recently had the opportunity to spend a week on Oahu for a conference and decided to take a nature tour of Oahu's Windward coast and view the Polynesian Cultural Center in La'ie on Oahu's north shore. This back-to-back experience as an eco-tourist one day and ethnographic tourist the next led to a series of reflections with regard to the parallel framing of the concepts of culture and nature that I wish to discuss in this essay. I am taking these two geographically related cases as a springboard for discussing the idea of culture and nature as staged phenomena. I wish to make a contribution to an eco-critical discussion within cultural studies that problematizes the concept of nature as an authentic entity "out there" that exists without human intervention. As I hope to make clear from the parallels I draw between nature and culture, neither concept can be understood without the framework of their constitutive performativity, a concept I borrow from Erika Fischer-Lichte's work on performing cultures in which she shows that wherever cultures occur, collide and interact, performativity marks their constitution, organization and reflection (see *The Transformative Power of Performance* 15 passim). Recent scholarship on interculturalism and performance (see Marranca and Dasgupta, Martin, Zarrilli) has stressed this aspect of the organization of cultural identities. I am taking the geographical parallel between Polynesian performance and Polynesian nature to push for an extension of the concept of performativity to environmental discussions.

The shows at the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) are carefully orchestrated displays of traditional Polynesian cultures for entertainment, even though the PCC is at least partially framed in the rhetoric of education, cultural preservation, and educational and economic opportunities. In their anniversary publication, *All the Spirit of the Islands*, the PCC is framed as like "no other place on earth;" a place that "gives you rare glimpses into the traditions and lifestyles of island cultures from throughout the Pacific," where the eight different cultures (Samoa, Aotearoa [New Zealand], Fiji, Hawaii, Marquesas, Tonga, Tahiti, and Rapa Nui [Easter Island]) are "showcased" through exhibits and demonstrations in so-called "villages" (see dust jacket of Ariyoshi). Although none of the advertising brochures for the Center hides the performative nature of these cultural presentations, *All the Spirit of the Islands*, highlights its educational aims – the visitor's opportunity to "learn about the language and customs" of each of the cultures represented and sample an "authentic Hawaiian Luau" – and promotes the "swaying palms, mysterious green mountains alive with waterfalls, embraced by long stretches of sandy beach, and surrounded by turquoise seas that sparkle in everlasting sunshine" (3). In other words, a dream that gives every visitor – in exchange for a hefty ticket price – "a chance to travel through Polynesia in a single day, and participate in the celebration of centuries of Polynesian culture – no passport required" (Ariyoshi 3). The section on the history of the PCC gives some background as to its mission and we learn that modern-day Hawaiian students from Brigham Young University, Hawaii, (BYUH) mimic (after intensive training) pre-contact Polynesians, and in exchange receive an education at the Mormon institution. Apart from its rhetoric of "educational opportunity" the anniversary booklet also mentions the PCC's mission of cultural preservation. Students are grouped with elders, the "invaluable keepers of tradition" (Ariyoshi 7) who "pass on" their knowledge to the next generation, which is far removed from so-called traditional cultural practices. "Students are nurtured on their heritage" (Ariyoshi 7), meaning that since the culture they are demonstrating is no longer a lived heritage, it must be acquired artificially in training sessions before it can be displayed and performed as "authentic."

There is a fair amount of scholarly discussion among historians and anthropologists about the authenticity or fakeness of the Center's demonstrations. For example, in a 1989 article in the *Journal of American Culture* James Whitehurst asserts that at the Center a "serious effort [was] made to portray authentic village life" (5). In an early article on the functioning of the PCC and its connection to BYUH, Max E. Stanton calls the Center a "satisfactory fiction" and a model culture (194) that "selectively attempts to portray the best of those tangible, believable aspects of Polynesian culture with which the tourists can identify" (196) and which the Church condones. Stanton points to the selective choice of that which is portrayed, the emphasis

on material culture and performance arts, and the presumption of authenticity and historically and anthropologically “correct” content. In the end, however, Stanton succumbs to the ideology of the Center by applauding its multi-ethnic nature, the opportunities for “education,” the generation of income for BYUH and the community and the “reinforcement” of Polynesian ethnic identity (204). Craig Ferre, in his dissertation on the history of the PCC’s night show, develops a list of issues that need to be addressed if the Center is to be “improved” in its operation vis-à-vis the outside world. This list includes adjustments such as involving more Polynesians in the upper management of the Center, developing stricter guidelines for the cultural content of the night show, and recommending more in-depth anthropological course work for the performers. The literature that questions the ideological framework of the Center, however, points us in the direction of the need to highlight the concept of performativity that is at its core, a position that cuts right through the rhetoric of opportunity and preservation and leads us straight to focusing on the issues at stake for a discussion of cultural performance and its applicability to rethinking the concept of nature. Andrew Ross develops an overarching critique of the ideology that informs the PCC by pointing out that the so-called “traditional cultures are presented as if they were timeless” (44) – and timelessness, as well as the presumption of cultural change that comes only from outside, I might add here, is one of the main elements of colonial constructions of ‘primitive’ cultures, including the cultures of the Pacific (Sahlins viii). Ross wishes to critique the concept of Polynesia as the birthplace of modern ecological romanticism. He bases his criticism on the claim that “ever since the first European voyages, Polynesia has served as a paradigm for Western ideas about scarcity and abundance, poverty and affluence, identity and leisure, communalism and anomie” (28). No wonder then that the Polynesian Cultural Center is so successful: the very idea behind it (especially in its selective version) feeds right into a discourse on cultural preservation and fantasies about indigenous, sustainable environmental practices that were part of the very first accounts of Western travellers into the Pacific and still inform environmental discourse today.

To follow up on this thought, I would like to take up a discussion among environmental historians, or more precisely the debate surrounding the concept of “green imperialism,” in which the environmental historian Richard H. Grove alleges that the colonial experience is an essential component of the formation of Western environmental attitudes and critiques and that it has impacted European natural science from as early as the sixteenth century (3). Specifically, Grove claims that “the seeds of modern conservationism developed as an integral part of the European encounter with the tropics and with local classifications and interpretations of the natural world and its symbolism” (3). In a similar vein, the environmental critic Richard Kerridge holds that environmentalism “can be read, in many cases, as

continuation, in a postcolonial world, of types of sensibility formed in colonial conditions" (164). The basic thought behind these claims is that European voyagers encountered indigenous strategies of managing the environment and that these strategies were transported back to Europe and had a lasting effect on the development of the natural sciences in Europe. Mary Pratt calls this "transculturation," in reference to the process of how subordinated groups select from materials transmitted to them by a dominant culture (6). Through the perspective offered by Ross, we can now see that the postcolonial concept of transculturation, at least to the extent that it applies to ideas about environmental practices, is based on a long-standing tradition of European romanticizing and fantasizing about the tropics. None of these ideas informs the spectacle of undeveloped pre-contact life in Polynesia as it is portrayed at the PCC. Ross's critique of cultural preservation discourses in the Polynesia of the Latter-Day Saints applies to the PCC but also to the (literal and metaphorical) construction of nature in tropical Hawaii (and similar environments). The PCC is but one parcel in the larger machinery of ethnographic tourism, an industry that utilizes a modernized infrastructure for a pre-modern superstructure and presents a spectacle of undeveloped pre-contact life, a performance that is indebted to the Western aesthetic tradition of popular ethnic shows from the turn-of-the-century. Applied to natural environments, this practice is paralleled in ecotourism where tourists are presented with the spectacle of an allegedly undeveloped pre-contact nature, the endemic plants and animals of Hawaii – a nature, however, that is the result of Polynesian transformations of the island. Just like the Polynesian Cultural Center, ecotourism provides (low-paying service) jobs while allegedly preserving an environment by bringing people to it, a contradiction in terms that is painfully absent from many environmental discussions (see Weaver 31 passim and Fennell 15 passim).

Just as the Polynesian Cultural Center feeds fantasies about Polynesia as an ecological Eden, eco-tours employ pastoral narratives and enhance the touristic experience with an aesthetics of panorama, where natural scenes are presented from a panoramic perspective following the tradition of Western landscape painting established in the nineteenth century (most prominently represented by Thomas Moran's rendition of "The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone" or Albert Bierstadt's grandiose images of the American West) and referencing the use of the panorama in cultural performances at the turn-of-the-century (Byerly 86). Joseph Meeker has shown how these pastoral fantasies flourish in times of urban crises (54). In the world of the pastoral fantasy "life is polarized, presenting mutually exclusive alternatives between which a choice must be made" (71). There is the choice for the environment, meaning as it is in front of us, in its beautifully un(re)constructed way, or against it, which is tantamount to environmental destruction. Just as the PCC gives us a version of traditional Polynesian life without history, the

nature preserve and the fish pond hide the fact that they are created and managed by humans, that they are spectacles and not pieces of untouched nature "out there," and that as human constructions they are theatre. Like all dramatic performances, they can be analysed as enactments of human emplacement, as Larry Buell has recently reminded us (48-50) – hence the crucial importance of humanity's perspectives in environmental studies. All natural environments (including wilderness areas) are theatrical spaces and, by the same token, all performance spaces (such as the PCC) are physical environments. Bonnie Marranca shows in her work that all ecosystems are part of cultural systems and that natural history is part of the history of the world. She reminds us that the name "ecology" is derived from Greek ("oikos") for "home" or "a place to live." "[I]t is not difficult," Marranca points out, "to move from theatre to landscape. Each envisions a world in a place that reverses presence, and the fabulous confusion of nature and artifice, which is to say, reality and illusion" (48).

Natural environments are always linked to cultural (and aesthetic) systems. An understanding of performance concepts such as the idea of performativity developed by Fischer-Lichte enhances our understanding of how these environments function as part of our world. The concept of performativity needs to be stressed particularly in the context of wilderness zones, which tend to signal 'naturalness' and a lack of human involvement in their construction. That the idea of 'wilderness' is intimately tied to the evolving character of culture as human nature is a philosophical concept developed by Max Oehlschlaeger. In his history of the philosophical concept of wilderness he shows that in the Romantic reaction to modernism wild nature was idealized as an oasis free of the ills of civilization and free of history (111). Some of our modern ideas of wilderness preservation continue to hold on to this legacy of European Romanticism. The main point of his argument for our purposes is that wilderness is an idea developed by humans and not a structure that exists beyond humanity. In fact, as William Cronon has argued so pointedly, it is an artefact, a self-conscious construction, even a virtual reality. Cronon calls wilderness a "creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history" (69). He shows that wilderness often hides its unnaturalness behind a mask, and that it needs to be rethought as epic drama. Wilderness as wasteland (without history and without people inhabiting it) came to signify wild beauty that needed protection in the nineteenth century, and thus the Romantic notion of a sublime nature at the frontier was born: "[t]o gain such remarkable influence, the concept of wilderness had to become loaded with some of the deepest core values of the culture that created and idealized it: it had to become sacred" (Cronon 73). The sublime became a place where one might catch a glimpse of God, where mountains were constructed as cathedrals.

Cronon also shows how after the Civil War the American wilderness emerged as the last bastion of rugged individualism, and as the landscape of choice for elite tourism as a "highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization" (78). I would like to suggest that the emergence of wilderness is also tied to a specific aesthetic of landscape that paves the way for the aesthetic of panorama utilized later in the ethnographic shows of the turn-of-the-century. This class aspect of wilderness travel (popularised today in the tourist industry) needs to be linked to the history of displacement of native peoples to create unpopulated wilderness areas in the first place: "[n]ow they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's creation" (79). The lack of history and the lack of human population are important features of the idea of wilderness even today. Cronon concludes that "the dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living" (80). The wilderness area emerges not only as a human construct, as epic drama and as aesthetic idea, but also as a colonized space where human history was eliminated. Both the Polynesian Cultural Center as well as the nature preserve, the panoramic landscapes and fishponds exhibit these features of the wilderness ideology. Careful attention to the performative aspect of both experiences points us away from that ideology and towards a deeper understanding of the staged character of culture and of nature and their rootedness in an aesthetic of panorama. In an interpretation of one of the canonical works of Western literature, James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, David Mazel develops an understanding of the concept of wilderness as performance. He starts from a similar point as Cronon by pointing to the problem of an ahistorical concept of wilderness, insisting that

> the very idea of environment depends upon an exclusion that separates the environment from the speaker who is environed. The American environment in particular, at the beginning of its history, was constituted through the abjection of specific groups of human beings and through the violence of concomitant foreclosures – as when the lands and rights of native peoples were usurped in order to create first a nation and later a national park. Environmentalism has typically erased such abjection from its own history. (Mazel 105)

Mazel utilizes Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Butler has defined performativity (in the context of gender studies) as a process "of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary fixity, and surface we call matter" (qtd. in Mazel 105-6), a concept that relies on the idea of reiteration. Gender for Butler is a reiterative and highly

regulated practice that needs to be theorized as performance. Just as carefully constructed human performances (like the cultural demonstrations in the Polynesian Cultural Center) are essential to the dramaturgy of the (realist) stage that relies on a rigidly dualistic conceptualisation of space (the space of the performers and the space of the audience), carefully orchestrated 'performances' of nature are essential to the dramaturgy of the wilderness experience. Both spaces, as Adam Sweeting and Thomas C. Crochunis have shown, rely on this dualistic conception of space, where the audience is encouraged to observe events "as though they simply unfold on their own" (326). On the realist theatre stage that may be a drama by Ibsen, while on the wilderness stage that may be a sunrise, the sighting of a deer, or a beautiful flower in bloom, but the performance principle is similar. Both are space-based conceptions that depend on the dual nature of the concept of performance as an active and intentional process as well as a sudden occurrence or contingency, a spontaneous event (see Fischer-Lichte et al. 15 passim).

The parallel Sweeting and Crochunis draw between theatrical spaces and natural spaces definitely brings home the concept of cultural and natural staging, and it is all too fitting that, in conclusion, we should now turn to notions of performance in an attempt to theorize cultural and natural spaces. Through Butler we are reminded that gender constructs are performative in the sense that they are reiterated in a highly regulated fashion – they are not arbitrary. 'Femininity' and 'masculinity' are performed daily by all of us in a variety of contexts. Butler turns to the theatrical example of drag performance in order to explain the concept further. Performativity rests on the process of (re)iteration, but nothing guarantees that these reiterations actually result in exactly the same product. There is always the possibility that the process of reiteration will result in a slightly (or not so slightly) different mode of subjectivity. Chris Balme paid several visits to the Polynesian Cultural Center in the 1990s and analysed the cultural demonstrations in the villages in terms of Dean MacCannell's concept of "staged authenticity," highlighting their nature as performances. Staged authenticity is nevertheless a staged performance and as such "a potentially subversive process by virtue of the ineluctable slippage between script and realization and between perception and object" (Balme, "Staging the Pacific" 54; see also Balme, *Pacific Performances* 32 passim). This idea brings us to a much deeper level of understanding of what is going on at the Center in terms of cultural presentations. According to Balme, who focuses specifically on the Samoan chiefly monologue and Tongan drumming, these performances "are engaged in a playful deconstruction of the tourist gaze with its expectation of authentic Polynesian culture . . . [For Balme,] the deconstructive performances in the Samoan and Tongan villages manipulate different culturally coded spectator positions" (54). The Samoan performance is a monologue by a "chief" who is playing with audience expectations about him, his body, his skills and his

role in the village; the Tongan performance is a drumming show that uses audience performers and makes fun of them. I am not sure I agree entirely with Balme on the subject of audience expectations, but he is correct in pointing out that "authenticity" is the official PCC philosophy endorsed in the brochures and is reinforced by the aesthetic dramaturgy of the Center. The fact that both performances are comical (in the sense that the joke is on the audience) indicates a subversive quality of these shows for Balme. According to him, both performances "are cast in a double mode of resistance: on the one hand they practice subtle forms of resistance against the official PCC philosophy of staged traditionalism. On the other hand, strategies of resistance against the tourist gaze operate under the guise of comic routines" (58) and create a reflexive citational mode that mimics Euro-American projections onto Pacific people. The tourists become the spectacle. Frank Salamone also employs the concept of subversion in his reading of the presentation of the body in performances at the Polynesian Cultural Center. According to Salamone, however, the subversions mainly take place backstage where individual performers use their bodies to fight back and assert their independence from the Mormon regime and hence their cultural uniqueness, since open rebellion is clearly out of the question (see 63ff). I am not, however, entirely convinced by the argument of subversion. First, I do not think the expectations tourists bring to this place are that homogeneous and follow entirely along the lines intended by brochures and advertisements. Some visitors may fall for the advertised ideology of authenticity, others may not. Second, a subversion that is not noticed is hardly a successful subversion. But the argument about the lack of control over performative utterances and the endless possibility of play is valid and needs to be recognized.

In conclusion, how can the notion of performativity lead to a rethinking of the concept of authenticity in cultural performance and what does it mean to speak about staged nature? That landscapes are staged (i.e., manipulated by humans to have certain effects on visitors) is not difficult to acknowledge. There is a long tradition of landscape art in European cultures that can be cited here. The grounds surrounding Versailles are just as staged as the English Gardens in Munich. But so is the modern zoo, the city park, the wetlands in Hawaii as well as the highly-managed wilderness areas. When German cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer claimed, back in 1925, that the experience of modern travel had become homogeneous and that nature preserves (*Naturschutzparks*) needed to be created in which the traveller was able to experience the exotic (66), these parks were all spaces that would display a Western performative aesthetics. Such an aesthetics here would reveal the transformative power of performance, as recently framed by Fischer-Lichte, and thus ultimately the power of Western biopolitics. It could even allow for reading nature through the lens of this paradigm, and therefore open

up new ways of evaluating the history and construction of cultural spaces in scholarship on environmental issues.

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III.

Corporeal Mediations: Visualizing the Body as Private and Public Space

Moving through Fashion in Nineteenth-Century France

Sima Godfrey

Since the 1850s, when Charles Baudelaire made explicit the link between *la mode* and *la modernité*, theories of fashion have focused primarily on its temporal rhythms and commodification of novelty. Returning to that same historical place and time when fashion asserted a central role in the modern cultural imagination – mid-nineteenth-century Paris – this article looks at the relations between fashion and space, and more specifically the way that fashion mediates the (social) body in space. In particular, the article considers changing silhouettes in female fashion from the 1840s to the 1880s, their impact on the way the female body negotiated space both indoors and out of doors, and the moral and aesthetic debates they generated.

In nineteenth-century France, perhaps more than at any previous time, the movement of social bodies in space – both public and private – was mediated by fashion. Indeed, long before Roland Barthes declared '*la Mode*' a system of communication shaped by discourse and subject to semiotic analysis, the social negotiations of French culture fashion had functioned as a singularly powerful system of visual signification. Fashion – whether dictated by sumptuary laws, as during the *ancien régime* in France, or determined by a new class of consumers in the post-revolutionary era – provided the public with a lexicon of images from which each person might define the contours of his or her body and draw his or her own "identity kit" to borrow the phrase from Erving Goffman (120). Moreover, it provided that same public with the visual keys to reading the bodies of others who shared their space. Just as a variety of social forces frame fashion, as Joanne Entwistle reminds us in *The Fashioned Body*, dress and adornment are the visible means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity.

Under the *ancien régime*, strict edicts regarding acceptable dress had produced a reliable code for maintaining and reading the status of individuals and their place within the social hierarchy. As stated in the Edict of 1514, all common people and non-nobles were outlawed from assuming "the title of nobility, either by their qualities or dress" (Roche 54).[1] Other edicts specified fabrics and adornments forbidden to the bourgeoisie: damask, velvet, taffeta, satin, flesh-coloured hose, valuable jewels, and so on. In short, a series of sumptuary laws helped to ensure social immobility – especially in popular and rural milieus – and assured the visual correspondence between costume and social position as individuals negotiated the space of the public sphere. In the words of Daniel Roche, "fashion became a principle for reading society

and morality, without any rift to separate man's dress from his general condition" (Roche 56).

For nineteenth-century citizens, the revolutionary repeal of the sumptuary laws of 1794 thus represented the final liberation from a class-based dress code and, consequently, a democratisation of dress. At the same time, it also dismantled a relatively stable system of visual signification that had been constructed around difference and dress. To illustrate this point with a familiar example: by the second decade of the nineteenth century, men's clothing had embarked on the path to austere non-differentiation that would mark the bourgeois triumph of the infamous *habit noir* (what fashion historian John Carl Flügel called "the great masculine renunciation"). In Roche's words, "A masculine – and thenceforth colourless – society attracted attention to itself dressed in 'proper' suits, declaring its attachment to notions of decency, correctness, effort, reserve and seriousness" (62). For a significant segment of France, it seemed the social world had, as it were, suddenly switched from colour TV to black and white. For members of a class whose bodies had lost their exclusive claim to noble appearance, as for others who sought to distance themselves from a bourgeois mainstream, the circulation of free-floating signifiers in black suits was viewed with dismay. Some simply lamented the colourless monotony on aesthetic grounds; others deplored the symbolic display of social uniformity on political grounds. Whereas in the 1830s, Théophile Gautier represented this former complaint, Balzac was the eloquent spokesman for the latter. This is Gautier, writing in 1837:

> The suit of clothes that we wear today is so very ugly that it is impossible to use it to any good advantage; how can one expect people to perform heroic actions in a dress coat and trousers? . . . It is a weakness of extreme civilisations to reduce things to their most simple expression; . . . black and white, which are the negation of colour, are the only two nuances admitted. What a sad result. (Gautier, "De l'Application de l'art à la vie usuelle" ["On the Application of Art in Everyday Life"] n.p.)

Balzac, for his part, writing in the aristocratic journal *La Mode* in 1830, addressed the social confusion that had been produced by the democratisation of dress. In the uniform world of nineteenth-century frock-coats and trousers, an individual – that is, a superior individual – could distinguish himself and his peers only through nuance: "Today, these nuances have acquired genuine importance; for now that our manners have tended to level everything out . . . nuances alone allow the well-bred to recognize each other in the midst of a crowd" (Balzac, "Des Mots à la mode" ["On Fashionable Words"] n.p.). Whereas the distinction of *ancien régime* fashion was based on access to conspicuous luxury by members of the noble class, male

distinction in the first half of the nineteenth century would be based on intangible principles of taste and elegance that demanded the most discerning eye.

Elegance was broadly defined as a way of life, a fashionable art form in which the body itself was the main feature and the nineteenth-century dandy, inspired by "Beau" Brummell, its most celebrated actor. Quoting Brummell, in an imagined interview, Balzac explains, "Man dresses himself before acting, speaking, walking, or eating; those actions which belong to fashion, to deportment, conversation, etc. are nothing more than consequences of our dress" (Balzac, *Traité de la vie élégante* [*Treatise on Elegant Life*] *74*).

Provocative as Balzac – or Brummell – may appear in this statement, it summarises a new sensibility in post-revolutionary France that informed dress, and more specifically, fashionable dress, with the extraordinary power to shape people's identities through their outward appearance. As Balzac's young Rastignac, hero of *Le Père Goriot* [*Old Goriot*], quickly learned in Paris, the fastest way up the rungs of the new social order was in an impeccably cut suit of clothes, or for a woman, in an impeccably adorned *toilette*. In France from the 1830s onward, while men's dress remained sober in its simplicity, women's costumes evolved into an increasingly extravagant affair, with tight waists and large, bell-shaped skirts. By the early 1850s, when Napoleon III came to power, those skirts, signs of Second Empire ostentation and display, had swelled into ever larger domes with the support of numerous petticoats stiffened with bands of braided horse hair – *crin* in French (hence the name crinoline). Describing a large circle around their wearer, "the simplest taffeta dress needed no fewer than seventeen yards of material. . . . A woman could hardly get into her carriage . . . and her husband had to sit on the box outside" (Richardson 236-7). The displacement of men by the enormous frocks contributed to the widespread satire, largely composed by men, of the latest trends in women's fashion (see fig. 1).

As the decade proceeded, women's fashion, presided over by the Emperor's wife, Eugénie, a fervent devotee of Marie Antoinette, literally commanded ever larger spheres of space, symbolically reflecting the relative success and sphere of influence of husbands or lovers. Even as men's clothing eschewed any obvious display of conspicuous consumption, for society women, sumptuary spending remained an imperative duty. In December 1853, the *Moniteur de la mode* published, to great excitement, the picture of a court dress measuring two metres across with a train of one and a half meters. Mademoiselle Pauline, a linen seamstress, became famous for her multiple petticoats which could inflate a skirt to four and a half meters across. The effect was dramatic but movement was cumbersome. However, the inflation did not stop there.

Fig. 1. Honoré Daumier. - *Saprelotte!* Illustration from *Le Charivari.* 9 Sept. 1857. Noack Collection, Ancona, Switzerland. Daumier Register 2973.

By the time skirts had reached their apparent apogee in size, means were invented to expand them even more with artificial crinolines resembling cages, and consisting of concentric wire or watch-spring hoops suspended on strips of material.

> Monsieur Tavernier, the inventor of the “cage”, that curious metal skirt, is said to have been inspired by the iron and glass structure of the Crystal Palace, erected in London by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Whether or not that was so, Tavernier was considered a man of progress, since apart from considerably lightening the skirt by eliminating the numerous petticoats, his frame could be expanded almost without limit. (Simon 51)

In some instances, it became impossible for a man to give his arm to a woman. As Philippe Perrot notes:

> Reigning elements of the feminine wardrobe and symbols of society, the crinoline . . . in [its] textile exuberance and radical

> impracticality, reduced a woman to the role of a dazzling idol, which distinguished her absolutely from men and distanced her physically from their universe. (106-7)

Already in 1855, Raoul de Lamorillière had protested:

> This ballooning out keeps husbands at a distance – perhaps this explains [women's] coldness these days. . . . A mother has become an impregnable tower to her children who have to climb up her flounces as though they were ladders when they want to kiss her. (qtd. in Perrot 231)

While some saw the enormous hoop skirts as wilful barriers to maternal and marital affection, others found them sexually provocative. Therese Dolan notes how "the crinoline … functioned as a sartorial form of sexual teasing," simultaneously inspiring and frustrating male desire:

> The swaying gait of the wearer often provided titillating glimpses of her legs. . . . For evening wear, a plunging décolleté revealed as much flesh as allowable on the upper portion of the woman's body, acting as a lure to that which was so abundantly concealed and forbidden on the lower. (Dolan 620)

With the subsequent changes in the contour and outline of the skirt, the movement of women and their swaying gait was also transformed. In particular, a columnist in *Le Figaro* noted, this new crinoline "engendered a particular way of walking which involved little thrusts of the stomach that were quite voluptuous" (qtd. in See 94).

In the poem "Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés" ["With her Pearly, Undulating Dresses"] Charles Baudelaire, author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*], celebrates this voluptuous movement:

> Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés,
> Même quand elle marche on croirait qu'elle danse (210)
>
> With her pearly, undulating dresses,
> Even when she walks, she seems to be dancing. (my trans.)

In "Le Beau navire" ["The Fine Ship"] he further compared the woman's carriage to the movement of a beautiful ship:

> Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
> Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,

Chargé de toile, et va roulant
Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux et lent. (234)

Walk, and your wide skirts swirl at every step,
as if a fine ship had put out to sea
under full sail, riding the waves
to a gentle rhythm, indolent and slow.
(Baudelaire 256)

Not everyone, however, was as impressed as the *Figaro* columnist or Baudelaire with the seductive and imperious presence commanded by women. As it extended women's physical sphere of influence, the oversized crinoline was, as noted, a quick and easy target for caricature in France and abroad.

Fig. 2. Honoré Daumier. *Manière d'utiliser les jupons nouvellement mis à la mode.* Illustration from *Le Charivari*, 16 Apr. 1856. Noack Collection, Ancona, Switzerland. Daumier Register 2759.

By 1858-1860, the fashionable lady had become so gigantic that further expansion was now literally impossible if she was to move about at all. And so the mountainous skirt of 1860, at last unable to expand any further for purely navigational reasons – yet determined to survive – retreated rearwards while the front of the dress became flatter and the back more voluminous, thus replacing the 'magic circle' around the woman with an oval.

This transformation and inflation of women's clothing and body shape during the Second Empire coincided with a social transformation, inflation and reshaping that did not escape the eyes of critics. With aesthetic reference to the all-pervasive crinoline Octave Uzanne, the nineteenth-century cultural and fashion historian, decried the ugly, misleading deformation of women's bodies. But what Uzanne deplored most about the social pervasiveness of the extravagant crinoline was that it contributed to a ballooning confusion of classes, signalling the triumph of bourgeois parvenus. In his words, "*puffism* invaded all social ranks, vanity ruled, luxury became vulgar and garish," (Uzanne 200) and *cocottes* – or courtesans – paraded alongside society ladies in the Bois de Boulogne, often outfitted by the same celebrated couturier, official dressmaker to the Imperial Court, father of French *haute couture*, the "autocrat of Second Empire taste," Charles Worth.[2]

For male moralists of the time, the fashion trend towards the enormous – and enormously costly – dresses connoted a distinctly disturbing and subversive quality. Some, like Attorney General Dupin in a speech delivered to the French senate in 1865, "On Unrestrained Ostentation in Women," openly worried about the unnatural influence of high fashion on women of the lower classes:

> We have heard of courtesans who parade in public places. Yes, one such woman will be riding in a magnificent coach, drawing glances from everywhere. What does high society do? It looks on, it copies, and it is these *demoiselles* who dictate fashion to society ladies; it is they who are copied. And this is the example that high society sets. (qtd. in Meugy 69)

Cora Pearl was one of the most famous of these 'rags-to-riches' *demoiselles*, a courtesan of ignoble origins whose enormous wealth – garnered from the dukes and princes who were her lovers – allowed her to rival the Empress herself in her fashions. At a time when only the wealthiest of women could afford to be outfitted by Worth, purveyor of coronation clothes for royalty around the world, it was at Worth's salon, on the rue de la Paix, that Cora Pearl outfitted herself in the fabulous dresses that became part of her legend. As spectacular as these dresses were, however, their appearance was still less stunning than what they signified. For not only did Cora Pearl buy her dresses from Worth, she ordered ermine cloaks and ivy-trimmed gowns (a

preferred motif of the Empress) just to show that she could afford exactly the same clothes as the Empress Eugénie. In short, with the courtesan and the Empress commanding equal space physically and sartorially, Cora Pearl re-told ironically, menacingly perhaps, the fable of the Empress's new clothes.

Poets, unlike Senators, viewed the extravagant fashions and adornments of Second Empire women somewhat differently. In 1858, Théophile Gautier, poet, novelist, short story writer, critic and creator of the ballet *Giselle*, published a small pamphlet entitled *De la mode* [*On Fashion*]. In it he addressed those artists who refused to present their models in contemporary dress because modern fashion, they maintained, fell short of the 'classical' ideal. Gautier eloquently defended the general standards of contemporary fashion and then added:

> But the crinoline, you will say: those circular skirts, those hoop-sprung dresses that one repairs like a clock . . . when it falls out of gear – is it not hideous, savage, abominable, contrary to art? . . . We are not of that opinion: women are right to maintain the crinoline despite the jokes, the caricatures, the vaudeville, etc. . . . Women are right to prefer these generous, imposing, powerful skirts that unfold before the eye. . . . This mass of rich fabrics creates a pedestal for the chest and the head. . . . A young woman, in a low décolleté, arms bared . . . with billowing trains of antique moiré, satin and taffeta behind her, with her double skirts and multiple flounces, seems as beautiful and as finely costumed as can be; we do not very well see what Art could possibly have to reproach her with. (Gautier, *De la mode* 29-32)

In other words, while the moralists complained of the unnaturalness and impracticality of the crinoline, it is that very impractical unnaturalness that Gautier celebrated in the name of Art: the entrancing image of woman, torso gracefully poised on a beautiful pedestal like a classical statue, her skin powdered to give it the look of marble. As for the blurring of social hierarchies, the only hierarchy of importance, he insisted, was aesthetic. Gautier was, after all, the Romantic champion of 'art for art's sake' who had militantly defended the beautiful over the useful and declared in 1835:

> Nothing that is beautiful is indispensable to life. If you did away with flowers, the world would not suffer in any material way. And yet, who would wish there not to be flowers? I could do without potatoes more easily than roses. . . . What use is the beauty of women? Provided a woman is medically fit and capable of bearing children, she will always be good enough for the economists. (Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* 23)

And Gautier was clearly not throwing his lot in with economists.

In short, for Gautier, the fashions of the Second Empire, in their very extravagance, transformed women from natural, material bodies, biologically designed for reproduction, into beautiful, idealized, aesthetic objects, immune to the moral outcry of the time. Charles Baudelaire, a great admirer of Gautier, similarly appreciated the effects of women's fashion as a way of embellishing an otherwise ugly, fallen world. In his famous essay of 1863, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" ["The Painter of Modern Life"], he characterizes his exemplary artist, Constantin Guys, as a dandy whose business it is to extract from the ever-changing display of women's fashion, glimpses of an ideal beauty:

> If a fashion or the cut of a garment has been slightly modified . . . if waists have been raised and skirts have become fuller, be very sure that his eagle eye will have already spotted it from however great a distance. . . . It is much easier to decide outright that everything about the garb of an age is absolutely ugly than to devote oneself to the task of distilling from it the mysterious element of beauty that it may contain. (Baudelaire 11)

Fashion, Baudelaire declares, should be considered as the permanent and repeated attempt to improve upon crude nature; it should thus be considered "a symptom of the taste for the ideal" (11). As an ambivalent, lapsed Catholic moralist, Baudelaire read in the naked, physical body of woman the temptation of baser instincts in man's nature. Unlike the so-called natural tastes of social moralists, therefore, what Baudelaire most appreciated about female appearance was precisely the extent to which it was adorned and transformed from material body into a beautiful reverie by artful enhancements and fantastic toilettes – the strong suit of Second Empire fashion, so to speak.

> Woman is without a doubt a light, a glance, an invitation to happiness . . . but she is above all a general harmony, not only in her allure and the movement of her limbs, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast iridescent clouds of fabric in which she envelops herself. . . . Where is the man . . . who has not in the most disinterested of ways enjoyed a skillfully composed toilette? (30-1)

Baudelaire, like Gautier, thus inverts the arguments of moralists who denounced the extravagant fashions of the day. Whereas the moralists deplored the crinoline for denaturing women, their bodies, their roles and the space they occupied, the poets celebrated that same fashion that denatured, remodelled and aestheticized woman.

However much poets and artists championed women's fashion, in the eyes of social commentators throughout the nineteenth century the changing shapes of women's dresses were consistently interpreted as threatening the very moral fabric of French society. But what of the women who moved through French society in those dresses? While the discourse denouncing crinolines was invariably moralistic in tone, the dangers women faced were more than just moral. For the crinoline was inflammatory on several levels, not the least of these being a fire hazard.

Moving indoors as well as outdoors in large hooped skirts was risky business especially at a time when homes were heated by a large hearth. Among the many victims of such hazards were Oscar Wilde's two half-sisters, Emily and Mary, who died in November 1871 when, while waltzing past an open fireplace at a country ball, their crinolines caught fire (Mulligan). While all women wearing crinolines had to be wary of such dangers, whether dancing or not, the risks for professional dancers were especially high.

Emma Livry, the Paris Opera's star ballerina, was the most famous victim of a crinoline fire during the Second Empire. She had been honoured by the Emperor and Empress, immortalised in poetry by Gautier, and featured in an Offenbach ballet commissioned for her, *Le Papillon*. Critics noted that she was ethereal and diaphanous. "She skims over the ground, the water and the flowers, apparently without touching them. Floats like a feather and falls like a snowflake" (Minn, "Emma Livry").[3]

At a time when the opera stage was still lit with gas lights, a ballerina's shimmering and diaphanous bell-shaped costume was particularly vulnerable. Accordingly, in 1859, an imperial decree required all theatrical costumes to be flame-proofed and treated in a solution of borax and boric acid, a technique that had the secondary effect of bleaching the colour out of the fabrics and altering them (Matthews David 18). As a star dancer, Livry did not wish to wear these ugly treated costumes, so in a letter written to the director of the Opéra in 1860, she insisted "on dancing at all first performances of the ballet in my ordinary ballet skirt and I take upon myself all responsibility for anything that may occur" (Beaumont 25).

Something did occur. In 1862, at a dress rehearsal for the ballet, *La Muette de Portici*, a rush of air fanned a gaslight while Livry was waiting in the wings. The light gauze of her tutu caught flame instantly, rising to three times her height. She rushed out onto stage screaming in terror, fanning the flames even further. *Le Monde illustré* captured the spectacular nature of the accident in a drawing that was widely circulated (see fig. 3). One of the firemen on duty that evening rushed to extinguish the flames with a blanket, but Livry had already suffered burns to seventy percent of her body. She lived for another eight months in terrible pain, her burnt skin bandaged in the same gauzy fabric that had contributed to her accident, but medical science could

do little for her and she passed away in 1863 at the age of twenty-one (Guest 36).

Fig. 3. *Théâtre de l'Opéra. Accident arrivé à Mlle Emma Livry pendant la repetition de "La Muette de Portici."* Illustration from *Le Monde illustré.* 29 Nov. 1862. Reproduced in Cyril Beaumont, *Three Dancers of the Nineteenth Century*. London: C.W. Beaumont, 1935. 36.

Outside the world of dance, and independent of the dangers women might face, the crinoline style, intimately associated with the inflated display of the parvenu wealth in the Second Empire, slowly began to go out of fashion around 1865. When the Second Empire collapsed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, the crinoline had disappeared, to be all but replaced by the bustle or *tournure*. And yet, even as the exaggerated crinoline had provoked unprecedented moral and aesthetic disapproval, this new shape was not without its detractors. Charles Blanc, director of the École des Beaux-Arts and author of the magisterial *Grammaire des arts du dessin* [*Grammar of the Art of Drawing*], ends his 1875 treatise *L'Art dans la parure et dans le vêtement* [*On Art in Adornment and Dress*] with a cautionary note. Whereas the unrestrained luxury of the Second Empire may have corrupted social manners to the point that it became difficult to distinguish an honest woman by her dress, the subsequent turn of fashion in his view did little to improve the space occupied by women in French society. For the gathering of the hoop skirt to the back, he declared, accentuated the woman's

backside in such a way that it prevented her from remaining seated and removed all previous impediments to her walking. Clearly, he explains, this new style was designed to be viewed in profile. "What is a profile?" Blanc answers,

> a profile is the silhouette of a person who does not look at us, who passes us, as if to escape us. The new fashionable outfit became an image of the rapid movement that would carry off female guardians of the domestic hearth. We still see them today . . . trotting on high heels that propel them forward even more. They hasten their pace and slice the air . . . devouring the space that devours them. (Blanc, *L'Art dans la parure et dans le vêtement* [*On Art in Adornment and Dress*] 374-75)

After four hundred pages of minutely chronicling the rules of fashion and adornment from antiquity to present, this is how his treatise ends, racing off into space on the heels of unnatural mothers and fickle, bebustled, women.

Just as critics of the previous generation had mocked the enormous dresses that impeded women's movement, the new fashion that replaced the oversized crinoline was equally censured for facilitating women's movement and sending them into the streets. Either way, the women who embraced these fashions were condemned for not embracing their proper role as wives and mothers. In short, as they negotiated the public and private space of Second Empire France, the hoops women wore under their skirts were exceeded only by the metaphorical hoops they were made to jump through.

Notes

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French are my own.

[2] Aside from the spectacular visual impact the enormous dresses made, Worth's fashion creations had strategic appeal for Napoleon III, who appreciated the lengths to which the metres and metres of silk brocades that Worth's gowns dictated both encouraged the French textile trade and quelled labour unrest. It was said that for one particular gown, Worth had required fourteen hundred metres of lace from Calais. The Empress referred to these as her "political dresses" (de Marly 21).

[3] Minn does not provide an exact citation for this quote, which can be found in the third paragraph.

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Fig. 1. Honoré Daumier**.** - *Saprelotte! si les femmes continuent à porter des jupons en acier, on fera bien d'inventer, pour leur donner le bras, des hommes en caoutchouc. (Réflexion d'un mari qui a toujours eu un mauvais caractère et qui commence à prendre en outre, un mauvais pli).* [Damn it! if women continue to wear steel petticoats one will be forced to invent rubber men in order to give them an arm. (Thoughts from a husband who always had a bad character, and now starts to have a bad back)]. *Le Charivari.* 9 Sept. 1857. Noack Collection, Ancona, Switzerland. © Daumier Register 2973. <http://www.daumier-register.org>.

Fig. 2. Honoré Daumier. *Manière d'utiliser les jupons nouvellement mis à la mode.* [Another way to make use of the new petticoats that have lately become fashionable.] *Le Charivari.* 16 Apr 1856; Noack Collection, Ancona, Switzerland. © Daumier Register 2759. <http://www.daumier-register.org>.

Fig. 3. *Théâtre de l'Opéra. Accident arrivé à Mlle Emma Livry pendant la repetition de "La Muette de Portici."* [Theatre of the Opéra. An accident befalls Miss Emma Livry during the rehearsal of "The Mute Maiden of Portici."] *Le Monde illustré*. 29 Nov.1862. Reproduced in Cyril Beaumont, *Three Dancers of the Nineteenth Century*. London: C.W. Beaumont, 1935. 36.

Reading Bodies: Female Secrecy and Sexuality in the Works of Renoir and Degas

Kathryn Brown

This paper examines images of reading bodies as spaces in which nineteenth-century assumptions regarding gender distinctions are tested and transgressed. By staging an interplay between two types of reading (image and text), works by Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas depict challenges to gendered reading practices and show how the body can function as a means of securing physical and intellectual privacy. As a result, traditional distinctions between public and private spaces are tested and the fashionably dressed female body is recast as a dual symbol of convention and transgression. It is argued that visual ambiguities triggered by depictions of secretive women readers undermine the ability of the spectator to impose a coherent framework on the works' content. Attempts by the spectator to perform a voyeuristic role are shown to fail as the works defy placement of the female body within familiar social categories.

In his essay on reading, Roger Chartier claims that the act of reading is not just an operation of the intellect, but that it "brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself and others" (8). Given that solitary, silent reading is an essentially private activity that can take place in all manner of locations, it may seem odd to think that reading involves the body. In fact, in his history of reading, Paul Saenger describes an increasing intellectual involvement with texts at the specific expense of the physical. He argues that the development of silent reading, as a visual and intellectual experience as opposed to a physical one, was made possible by the introduction of word separation on the printed page: "The importance of word separation by space is unquestionable, for it freed the intellectual faculties of the reader, permitting all texts to be read silently, that is, with eyes only" (Saenger 13). According to Saenger, word separation on the page made the body less relevant to the reading process because texts no longer had to be read aloud in order to assist in the creation of sense. These views offer two contrasting ways of thinking about silent reading: one that gives primacy to the eye and intellect and one that emphasizes the body.

In this paper I will argue that these two aspects of reading are complementary and that they motivated important concerns regarding conceptions of women readers and their bodies during the nineteenth century. By analysing the depiction of the reader's body in certain works by Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas, I will show how visual art was used to thematise ideas concerning gendered reading during the nineteenth century and to reveal anxieties not just about what women read, but, more importantly, about

how they read. I shall focus on works that depict the female reader using her body to create a private space in which to read. I shall argue that the moment of intellectual privacy involved in the act of reading is mirrored by the way in which women used their bodies to create seclusion and to distance themselves from potential observers. This leads to a reconsideration of the relation between women and notions of physical and intellectual interiority. The depiction of the reading body raises questions not just about the interior of the reader's mind, but also about the interior of the reader's body. I will also argue that the structure of these works specifically invokes a notion of performance by extending to the spectator an invitation to play a role in relation to the visual fiction. In order to overcome the desire to understand what the reading women are doing in the private spaces they construct, the spectator is invited to perform the role of voyeur in relation to the depictions.

In Renoir's *Green Reader* (*La liseuse verte*) of 1894 (fig. 1), the reader is depicted with her back turned to the spectator with the result that she is shown using her body to create a private space in which to read. We are not able to see what or where the woman is reading as details of the broader scene are omitted. Furthermore, we are not given any clue as to the woman's response to the reading matter. Instead, the force of the painting is derived from the physical signalling of the reader that she does not wish to be observed. Instead of a retreat into a separate physical space, Renoir's reader retreats into her own body in order to secure her privacy. The intellectual privacy involved in solitary, silent reading is matched by a desire for physical privacy that, in this case, can only be generated by the use of the body.[1]

If, as Chris Shilling has suggested, the body is "our vehicle of being in, experiencing and creating the world in which we live," Renoir's work shows that the body is also a means of staging a relationship with the imaginary world of texts (69). In recent years, relationships between the body and written texts have come under increasing scrutiny, including analyses of parallels between actual and imaginary perception, the animation of texts through intellectual and physical identification by the reader, and the use of texts to structure or unsettle readers' responses to their own physicality.[2] Renoir's works form an important piece of evidence for these analyses as they focus attention on the body of the female reader both as an emblem of familiar social structures (in the conventional dress worn by the reader) and as a manifestation of individual privacy (by the way in which the reader uses her body). In light of the fact that women were accorded only limited citizenship and property rights during the nineteenth century, the depiction of women using their bodies to create a private physical and intellectual space becomes particularly poignant and the very concept of privacy all the more fragile.

Fig. 1. Auguste Renoir. *Green Reader* (*La liseuse verte* 1894). Oil on canvas. 26.5 x 21 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay. Photogr. J.G. Berizzi. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, N.Y.

The bodies of Renoir's female readers are clearly linked to the world of nineteenth-century visuality and fashion.[3] Both the clothing of the readers and their reading material (often an illustrated journal) set the privacy of silent reading against conventions regarding public presentation of the fashionable female body. Generally, Renoir's female readers are dressed in a

socially acceptable manner and are not depicted in moments of self-abandon.[4] Anne Higonnet has noted that by contrast with other centuries, during the nineteenth century women's and men's costumes were heavily differentiated, clothing transgressions closely monitored and "readily used in images of conformity and subversion" (309). This point could well be applied to Renoir's readers who are shown as conforming to contemporary fashion and who are, like the reading material in which they are absorbed, attractively presented. Against this background the question arises whether Renoir's readers represent a form of femininity that conforms to nineteenth-century notions of women as essentially decorative and unthreatening or whether the way in which the women read unsettles this image.

Tamar Garb has analysed Renoir's depictions of the female form, in particular his late studies of nudes, in the context of nineteenth-century representations of a feminine ideal. She suggests that Renoir sought to align the representation of women with their "natural" destiny as mothers, wives, and homemakers, and that painting was the medium through which he could elaborate this fiction (165). I agree with Garb that Renoir's works may be said to operate with female stereotypes that reflect male ideals of difference and desirability. However, I suggest that Renoir's readers introduce key ambiguities into this ideal. While the representation of the women's dress is unthreatening to the conservative notions of femininity identified by Garb, the hiding of the women's reading material and the use of the body to establish a moment of privacy unsettle the transparency required of a moral emblem. On the one hand, Renoir's readers have a conventional appearance in so far as they are not depicted as ostensibly flouting standards of bourgeois respectability in their fashionable dress. On the other hand, however, this conventionality is undercut by the way in which the readers act secretively and engage in something personal to them. I suggest that depictions of the use of the body to construct a space of private withdrawal threaten the ideal of nineteenth-century femininity because the representations violate the principle that the woman reader must have nothing to hide.

In this regard, Renoir's works contrast with depictions of female readers by Henri Fantin-Latour.[5] In the nineteenth century, Fantin's readers were viewed by critics as embodying the feminine virtues of modesty, honesty and domestication in a way that transformed religious imagery into secular, bourgeois ideals of womanhood. Describing Fantin's *Reading* of 1863, nineteenth-century critic Théophile Thoré, for example, states:

> A young, blonde-haired girl, wearing a modest, brown jacket and grey skirt, is seated against an even, neutral background and is depicted from the knees upwards. No accessories distract the reader, nor those looking at her. The book is held in both hands, foreshortened, the open pages bathed in light. Her small right hand, lying in

> this light on the pages of the book, is delicious. What attention! How well she reads and how she reflects upon what she is reading! And what breeding, despite her plain clothing! And how just, harmonious and tranquil are the colours! What a happy woman, with her grey woollen skirt and her little white collar. (384)

Thoré emphasizes the subdued colours of the work and the absence of background in order to inform the spectator's judgment of the moral and class status of the sitter and her activity. Like the colours of the "neutral" background, the woman's clothing is described as "modest," "plain" and sober. The commentary contains reiterated diminutives in relation to the reader's body: her "small right hand" and her "little white collar." The perceived propriety of the woman's reading matter has a physical echo in these diminutives. There is nothing threatening about the physicality of this woman reader and she remains, in Thoré's view, within socially acceptable physical and intellectual bounds. In Fantin's *Reading*, clothing becomes a means of signalling the reader's propriety and functions as a figure of physical and moral containment. Thoré also notes that the reader holds her book with both hands. Enhancing the sombre morality that Thoré identifies in the scene, this focus on how the woman holds her book may suggest the identification of implicit religious themes in the work derived from the woman's physicality (i.e. holding the text as a type of prayer book). For Thoré, the manner in which the book is held enhances not just the relationship between mind and text, but also between mind, body and book. Unlike Renoir's readers, this reader conceals nothing.

The combination of the woman's dark clothing, her lowered gaze, the absence of any distraction and the physical and intellectual attention the woman pays to her book are the basis of Thoré's evaluation of the moral propriety of the scene and his conclusion that the woman is "happy." The "happiness" of the reader as fantasized by Thoré is not based on an engagement with the world around her, but on a supposed quiet contentment in withdrawal. In this way Thoré has no difficulty in placing this reader as a representative of the feminine ideal in the prevailing moral and social framework.

In contrast to Fantin's works, Renoir's readers are characterized by an inherent duality: the woman reader as a conventional type (in terms of dress) and as an individual who has something to hide (in terms of the way in which the body is used). The body itself becomes a dual symbol of convention and transgression. Renoir's depictions of women using their bodies to create privacy ties in with certain preconceptions about women that were prevalent in the nineteenth century, namely that women were, by nature, mysterious. As Octave Uzanne, for example, notes in a deflationary remark at the conclusion of the *Modern Parisienne*, a work that purports to be a taxonomy of women who inhabit the French capital, women are "by nature

mysterious and elusive" (230). While reinforcing women's 'otherness', conventional views that assumed women to be secretive and psychologically opaque also formed the basis of graver concerns about potential challenges to the accepted social and sexual order.

In her discussion of the role of women in the nineteenth-century household, Laura Mulvey suggests that it was the role of the mother to guarantee the privacy of the domestic home by maintaining its respectability (69). For Mulvey, however, the domestic interior becomes like a set of Chinese boxes culminating not in privacy, but in secrecy: "Hidden away, invisible and unspeakable, at the point where the private becomes the secret, is the sphere of sexuality" (70). It is this very withdrawal from ostensibly private spaces into secret ones that lies at the heart of Renoir's works discussed above. The privacy asserted by the readers defies complete surveillance both physically and intellectually and is, thus, potentially transgressive of social norms. Just as the women readers retreat into a separate intellectual and imaginative space, so too they retreat into the space of their own bodies.

This physical and intellectual opacity also operates to prevent the spectator from fully understanding what is represented in the scene. The spectator is presented with visual information, but the retreat of the reader into her own body and the concealment of the written text prevent the spectator from fully decoding the visual signifiers in the work. It is this structural aspect of the works that triggers the spectator's role as voyeur. In an attempt to overcome the gaps in understanding the detail of the visual fiction, the spectator is invited to perform a role in relation to that fiction. However, any such performance results inevitably in frustration as there is a level of signification in the fiction that is permanently denied to the spectator.

The link between the reader's mind, body and text, and its implications for the role of the spectator, is more striking in certain works by Edgar Degas. In Degas's depictions of female readers, the relationship between reading and the body is made explicit in different ways, such as the appropriation of text as a quasi-lover (*Reader Lying Down*), the adoption of a reading pose consistent with the working body (*Dancer Resting*) or the explicit disruption of conventional female posture in public (*The Ballet Class*).[6] The work I want to focus on for the purpose of this paper is a monotype from the 1880s entitled *Woman Reading* (*Liseuse*) in which the nexus of female physicality, sexuality, and secrecy comes to the fore in a striking and ambiguous manner (fig. 2).

In this work a woman lies curled up, naked on a sofa as she reads. Her body is hunched and she has her back turned to the spectator as she leans into her reading matter, hugging it close to her face. Next to her is a bathtub. It is unclear whether she has already bathed or whether she intends to bathe when she has finished her reading. While the presence of the tub may be considered a justification of the nakedness of the reader, it is also relevant to how

spectators would have placed this particular image of a woman reader. As Eunice Lipton has shown, Degas's bathers were considered to be prostitutes and the presence of the bathtub in the images provided a significant clue in the formulation of that deduction (168-69). However, whether it is thought that the work depicts a prostitute or not, the nakedness of the subject and the presence of the bathtub serve to enhance the link between female physicality and sexuality in the work.

The work establishes a further interplay between the bathtub as an image of hygiene and the overwhelming visual blackness of the scene. The black ink is applied heaviest in the background, but this also extends to the body of the woman, in particular her back, such that we rely on selected illuminated parts of her body and the reading material to pick her out from the surroundings. What we are presented with, therefore, is a moment of intellectual privacy and physical secrecy that is set against the publicity of the woman's nakedness and, if we assume that the scene is located in a brothel, the physically sexualised space in which women's bodies are bought and sold. The open sexuality of the brothel is contrasted by Mulvey with the repression of the sexual in the home. Mulvey locates the brothel as a "marginal area outside the ordered opposition between public and private, between consumption and production, between male and female" (70). Mulvey's point is well taken for the brothel may be viewed as a social space in which private pleasures are fulfilled. However, the boundaries of that space are constantly threatened not just by overtones of the public marketplace, but also by the surveillance of public authorities. Sociality (both between the female workers and between the workers and their clients) and the pursuit of private pleasure (both of clients and of women pleasuring themselves) remain precarious and permanently under threat from public scrutiny. Against these concepts of private pleasure and the public gaze, the *Woman Reading* investigates a further form of privacy, namely that of the woman herself.

A visual link is established between the woman and the bathtub by the echo of the form of the woman in the curve of the tub. This is created by the way in which the top of the woman's shoulders and thigh are illuminated in the darkness. The line of the woman's spine and the curvature of her form contrast with the angularity of the settee and the mirror and direct the spectator to the similarly curved, but only partially seen, bathtub. On the one hand, the reader appears vulnerable in that she turns her back to the spectator. On the other hand, the secretive nature of her position and the fact that she is reading in the dark signal a seeking of privacy. Anthea Callen has argued that the anatomical distortion of the woman's body renders it dog- or monkey-like and that, accordingly, the figure is associated with bestiality and promiscuity as opposed to physical ideals of femininity (98).[7]

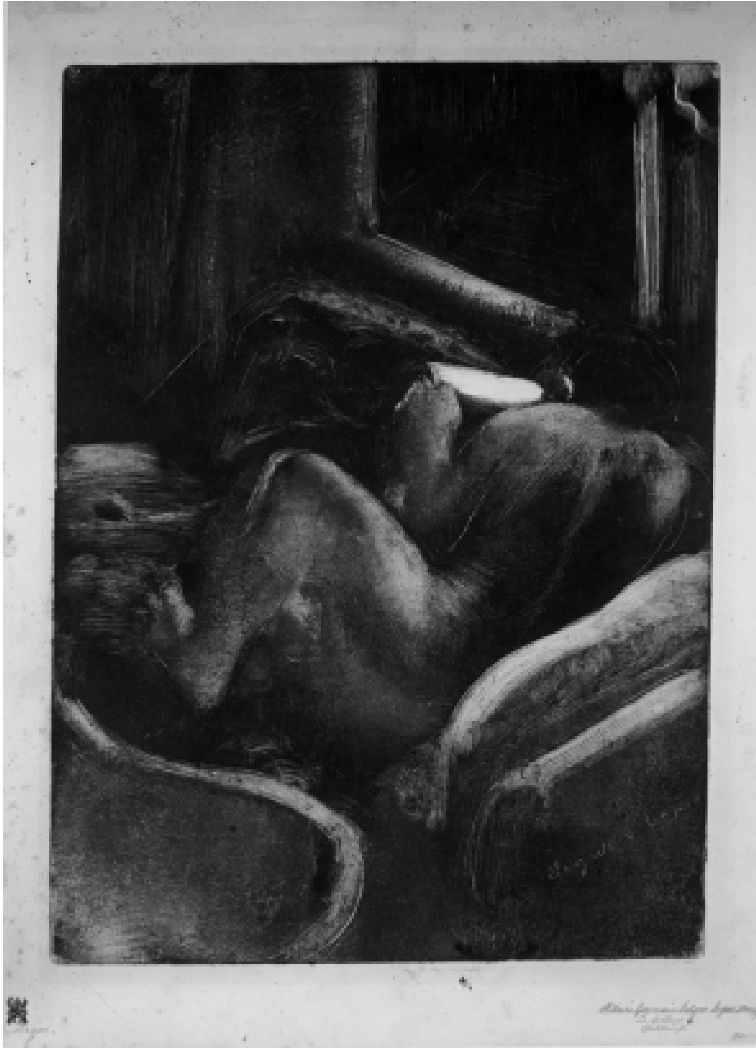

Fig. 2. Edgar Degas. *Woman Reading* (*Liseuse* c. 1885). Monotype (black ink). Plate 38 x 27.7 cm. Sheet 44.3 x 32.5 cm. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection. Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

While I agree with Callen that the physicality of the reader is emphasized in the work, her analysis fails to give due weight to the fact that the woman is reading. This aspect of the depiction is set against the animal-like portrayal of the woman on the grounds that reading is a cognitive experience. On the one hand, physicality is central to the work (particularly if it is thought that the woman is a prostitute), owing to the nakedness of the subject and the presence of the bathtub. On the other hand, reading renders this physicality incongruous, as the act of reading is difficult to place in the narrative of the work.

The deviation from anatomical norms makes it more difficult to contextualize the woman than the women readers in the works of Renoir. If Degas's reader is beyond certain acceptable nineteenth-century social and, perhaps, moral boundaries, it is something in her very physicality that places her beyond those limits. The visual distortion of the human figure, verging on androgyny, and the unconventionality of the woman's pose are matched by difficulties in ascertaining the location of the scene. Whereas Fantin's *Reading* of 1863 may be said to exploit the absence of context to enhance the spectator's focus on an idealized portrayal of the female body, Degas' testing of both context and normative physicality disorient and call into question the boundaries of female sexuality and the viewer's response to it. As with Renoir's works, the spectator is invited to play the role of a voyeur in connection with the scene in an attempt to see the woman and to find out what she is reading. However, any satisfaction to be derived from that act of voyeurism is ultimately thwarted owing to the composition of the work.

In Degas' *Woman Reading* the distortion of the human figure and the unconventionality of the woman's pose call into question the role of the spectator as voyeur because the scene itself is not played out within an easily defined context. If the work does invite a voyeuristic gaze on the part of the spectator, it provides little fulfilment and few answers.[8] Owing to the darkness of the image and the physical position of the woman, we do not glimpse the woman's face or genitalia and her reading material is hidden from us.[9] Kate Flint has suggested that a voyeuristic response to a transgressive image of women readers typically leaves the spectator with a sense of control (322). In the case of Degas' reader, however, I suggest that this process is deliberately subverted owing both to the difficulty of placing the woman in the work and the way in which the work's visual construction constantly calls into question what it is that the spectator actually sees.

During the late 1870s Degas publicly exhibited pastels over monotype that featured nudes as their subject, but as Richard Thomson notes, Degas also gave away certain dark-field monotypes to other artists or collectors. This leads Thomson to suggest that the works may have been given away as erotic imagery for a private male *cabinet* and that, as such, they are reminiscent of eighteenth-century erotic prints (87). In the case of

Woman Reading, this argument is strengthened by the fact that the lower right hand corner contains a dedication of the work by Degas to his friend, Ludovic Lepic. Yet, even if the subject of the work reflected some special meaning between creator and recipient, its erotic language remains decidedly covert. The intellectual privacy of the act of reading, together with the exertion of physical privacy, invite the curiosity of the viewer, but deny sensual satisfaction. In Lipton's view, it was precisely the capacity of Degas's images to disrupt gender conventions that served to unsettle the viewer and to provoke anger on the part of nineteenth-century audiences (185). One might go on to argue that it is this very unwillingness of *Woman Reading* to satisfy the viewer's gaze, in favour of highlighting the unashamed physical and imaginative self-satisfaction of the central figure, that gives the work its real force.

The uncertainties contained in Degas' *Woman Reading* undermine the spectator's assumptions when approaching the image. The most important part of the image in this regard is the blackened mirror or painting that is located just above the reader's body. It is within this particular frame that the ink has been applied most thickly such that the spectator has no possibility of deciphering what is reflected or represented. The spectator's gaze is explicitly nullified as the frame is emptied of any sense and vision denied. The spectator's performance of the role of voyeur is, accordingly, a failure.

In different ways, Renoir and Degas examine how the body may be used to create a secret space for reading, thereby creating a direct link between the body of the reader, the private intellectual space of reading and the reading material itself. At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned two different ways of thinking about solitary, silent reading: Saenger's claim that silent reading is essentially a visual and intellectual exercise and Chartier's claim that reading "brings the body into play" and establishes "a relationship with oneself and others." The works I have discussed illustrate the fusion of these two points in the depiction of the reading body. In the works of Degas and Renoir reading becomes the nexus of questions about the physical and the sexual, the manner in which the body can be used to create privacy and, perhaps most importantly, the degree to which the body itself is a private and, ultimately, a secret space.

Notes

[1] A similar point can be made about the later work *Young Girl Reading* (*Jeune fille lisant* 1897), oil on canvas, 40.5 x 28.5 cm, private collection. Just as the reader excludes others from her private thoughts, so too she screens out other bodies by turning away and hiding not just her reading material, but also her response to it.

[2] See, for example, Naomi Segal, Lib Taylor and Roger Cook, eds., *Indeterminate Bodies*; Elaine Scarry, ed., *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*; Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*.
[3] See also, for example, *Young Woman Reading an Illustrated Journal* (*Jeune femme entrain de lire un journal illustré* c. 1880–81), oil on canvas, 46 x 56 cm, Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art, which is structured so as to show that the reader is absorbed in the fashion pages of the publication.
[4] Perhaps the closest we come to such abandon is the depiction of the reader in *Woman Reading* (*La Liseuse* 1900), oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo. In this work the woman is shoeless and her blouse has slipped from her left shoulder.
[5] Henri Fantin-Latour, *The Reader* (*La Liseuse* 1861), oil on canvas, 100 x 83 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; *Reading* (*La Lecture* 1863), oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, Tournai, Musée des Beaux-Arts.
[6] Degas, *Reader Lying Down* (*Jeune fille allongée lisant un album* c. 1889), pastel on paper, 99 x 67 cm, private collection; *Dancer Resting* (*Danseuse au repos* 1879), pastel and black chalk on wove paper, private collection; *The Ballet Class* (*La Leçon de danse* 1881), oil on canvas, 81.6 x 76.5 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
[7] For a conflicting view, see Lipton, *Looking into Degas* (181), where the author considers the positions assumed by Degas's nudes not as dehumanizing, but rather as an invitation to the spectator to empathize with the woman's experience of her own body.
[8] The lack of eroticism in Degas's brothel monotypes is a feature of the works that critics have focused on during the past twenty years. See, for example, Charles Bernheimer, "Degas's Brothels: Voyeurism and Ideology"; Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye*.
[9] Richard Thomson notes that in most of Degas's dark-field monotypes the women's genitalia are hidden or shielded and that as a result, the spectator's gaze is focused on the task of personal hygiene resulting in a necessarily open-ended interpretation. See Richard Thomson's *Degas: The Nudes*.

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Fig. 1. Auguste Renoir. *Green Reader* (*La liseuse verte* 1894). Oil on canvas. 26.5 x 21 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay. Photograph J.G. Berizzi. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 2. Edgar Degas. *Woman Reading* (*Liseuse* c. 1885). Monotype (black ink). Plate 38 x 27.7 cm, Sheet 44.3 x 32.5 cm. Rosenwald Collection. © Washington: National Gallery of Art.

Corporeal Topographies of the Image Zone: From Oskar Kokoschka's Murder of Metaphor to Georges Bataille's *acéphale*

Rainer Rumold

Oskar Kokoschka's turn-of-the-century play "Murderer the Women's Hope" (Vienna, 1907) and his illustrations are paradigmatic for a view of the human body shared by Surrealists and post-Surrealists in the Paris of the late 1920s which undercut the central perspective and narrative *interpretation*. The idealist vertical image of humanity, which culminates in the privileging of the head and the face as the site of human identity, is under attack. Such privileging of the vertical over the horizontal is a function of the subject-centeredness of Western cultural symbolism, which extends from sexual to political icons. The avant-garde responds by liquidating concepts and metaphors as mere conceptual grids and replaces them by the grafting on of an audio-visual tactile experience of the human being in its corporeal materiality. Kokoschka's iconoclasm is viewed as the inception of a series of experiments in decomposing the grid of this vertical zone. Its scope is inherently beyond a Freudian psychoanalytical model.

"I see something you don't see!" With this refrain from an age-old children's game I would like to approach the problematic of Oskar Kokoschka's view of the image – because he himself often cited the youthful magical spell for the unique vision of his own work (*Schriften* 24, my trans.). The sense of its provocation, understood in the context of the turn-of-the-century, could, of course, also apply to the then-nascent psychoanalysis or the rising medium of film, which Walter Benjamin later addressed as a medium that brings to view the "visual unconscious" ("The Work of Art" 236f). The paradigmatic shift of aesthetics around 1900, which Friedrich A. Kittler has analyzed in his groundbreaking work on literature and the media as a specialization of the senses, has hitherto mostly been discussed as taking place in the newly evolving technological media, such as the typewriter, the gramophone or film. I will here focus instead on an increasing *specialization of the senses* already *within* the traditional medium of the arts.

My paradigm is avant-garde theatre and painting from turn-of-the-century Paris to secessionist Vienna and the dissident Surrealists of the late 1920s as a self-reflective turn of literature and art into itself as *a medium*. Such a self-reflective turn takes place at the very edge of questioning the reproduction of the symbolic order on the basis of experiencing its underlying materiality (word, marble or paint). I am here reviewing instances where a medial boundary zone is encountered and explored with a thematic focus on

the human body within an institutional frame of art, albeit that of the avant-garde operating with the effect of shock. This means that such radical anti-art positions as Antonin Artaud's compulsive turn against the "columbarium" of signs (Nietzsche 882) to the performance of an excess of bodily immediacy, which is to explode the stage and involve the audience in a shared total experience of life, are outside my purview. As for the French perspective, I am more interested in the self-ethnographic, critical documentation of the body, such as in Bataille's Parisian journal *Documents*. In other words, my focus here is on developments that begin to dissolve traditional definitions of the body as a system of cultural signs in terms of an outside versus an inside and continue to do so today. This is the very issue which the aesthetic subject raises about its own boundary vis-à-vis the object. In so doing, artists and thinkers also take positions against the idealist-rationalist metaphoricity of an *above* or *below*. They turn against the verticalist *Weltanschauung* of Western tradition which has placed a premium on the face and head as the apex and culmination of the significance of the human image. In this kind of thwarting of things, a type of visual "defamiliarization" effect comes into play, which broadly defined compels us to review our normative perception and, as the Russian futurists theorized, turns our attention to the material base of signification processes. In the history of painting this move is part of a *Copernican turn*. Moreover, such an anti-metaphysical project of the avant-garde between the wars brings with it a *re*-ligious dimension that turns against the religious icons of Western humanity in turning, instead, toward a neo-Gnostic vision of the human body-mind world.

Experimentation with verticality and the horizontal as basic forms of the monocular central perspective in the linguistic as well as visual work of art appears to be a special property of secessionist painter and expressionist poet Oskar Kokoschka around 1910. In his painting *Die Windsbraut* [*Tempest Bride*] (c. 1914), for example, the focus is not the icon of man vs. the icon of woman but on an underlying corporeal unity expressed in the medium of coalescing colours and traces of brush strokes. Widening the historical lens, however, one can detect a more or less hidden line reaching from Vienna back to the sculptor Auguste Rodin in Paris and forward to the Paris of the late 1920s, to André Masson and Georges Bataille. Thinker and painter respectively, these latter turn programmatically against the culturally-dominant and powerful icon of the verticality of the human body, with its apex the *head*. Instead Bataille's journal *Documents* (Paris 1929-30) investigated, for instance, the slippery corporeal base of a cultural pariah such as the stinky, slimy "Big Toe,"[1] or the fluidly evanescent contours of "spittle," a chief paradigm of what was presented against the Western tradition of form in photographs and commentary as the *informe* (382). Thus, one speaks against a rationalistic meta-physical metaphor of *above* and *below*. Moreover, there are these strange, rhizomatic, twisted lines in

Kokoschka and much later in André Masson, recognizable as something between plant-like veins, nerves or ganglia-type nets which threaten a dissolution of the subject's central perspective. Or they at least undermine the representational contours constructed by the central perspective. Such rhizomatic phenomena thus appear to expose the body as something without a centre.

The function and meaning of verticality and the horizontal becomes the subject of a decisive review of the central space-and-form problem of our normative perceptions. These are constructed via the polarity of the dimensions of length, width and height. The avant-garde habitually examines and critiques this functional episteme in terms of fundamental human experiences, including sexuality and gender relations. In daily experience, we are not conscious of the spatial in its three-dimensions, as a Kantian *a priori* frame of sensuous perception. Thus our perceptual *guidelines* will of course contain further unconscious relations. Our norms of hierarchy, authority, human domination of animals, the subject's exploitation of nature, the administration of and submission to power, *down* to our valuation of sexual desire and more, are tied to the centrality of these coordinates through which the subject carves up space.

Fig. 1. Oskar Kokoschka. *Der irrende Ritter* [*Erring Knight*]. 1915. Oil on canvas. 89.5 x 180 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

The armoured male figure, for example, which Oskar Kokoschka here with his *Erring Knight* (fig. 1) slants provocatively into an awkward position, has had a central position in European history of yore and was gaining in currency in modern art and thought from the Italian futurists to Ernst Jünger's proto-fascist utopia of the super-erect soldier-worker. It is a figure of the traditional will to maintain the difference between male and fe-

male, between a body clearly contoured upright outside *versus* an inside that in its composition from fluid and secretions is seen as intimately connected to the "abject" of the feminine experience (Kristeva 7). A central theme of German medieval legends and epos is the warrior's primary duty to his king and his male military tasks and a warning against an excess of cohabitation with the feminine – the prohibition against a "sich verliggen," meaning to "lie around to the point of a loss of a knight's identity." However, Oskar Kokoschka's *Erring Knight* provocatively deterritorializes the habitus of male vs. female, looks rather alive and well, albeit a bit puzzled himself by failing the male code. By comparison, even in the development of advanced abstract *expressionist* art, for example, the valuation of the vertical over the horizontal constituted the episteme of what Gilles Deleuze calls a "code" of internalisation, however purely expressed in terms of an optical space (85). For example, the verticality of Wassily Kandinsky's idealist didactic model of a "pyramid of learning," as sketched out in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* meant a turning away from the tangible material world at its base into the "spiritual realm" of art at its apex.

Dynamics opposite to the tradition of idealism are at work in Kokoschka's early paintings, sketches and plays, productions of the word, specifically in his early iconoclastic "rapid theatre" play "Murderer the Women's Hope" from 1907, on which I will briefly focus here. In the course of a battle of the sexes (*Geschlechterkampf*) taking place on stage, which also contains aspects of a love dance of sorts, the woman (*das Weib*, archaic) penetrates the male with her knife. The man (*der Mann*) succumbs, severely wounded. As Deleuze will later write about Francis Bacon, with Kokoschka the façade of the body is already being broken up, so that it becomes visible as flesh (Deleuze 40). In due course, however, the male recovers, is again in possession of his *aufrechte Gang* (upright gait). Upright posture in our culture is seen as a moral attitude (in the sense of *aufrichtig*/honest). Vertical gait (*aufrechte Haltung*) is thus a metaphor for a prejudice obviously connected to a *male* moral disposition, here expressed in terms of the regained *erect posture* of the male who previously had been wounded and prostrated by the woman. The concluding scene goes beyond the traditional story line of a *battle of the sexes*.[2] In a reversal, the male goes on a rampage cutting down every man and everything around him (à la *Rambo* made in Vienna), a provocative staging of a radical indictment of the patriarchal code that threatens the very existence of its culture.

Are we thus dealing with the presentation of a psychoanalytical *Urszene* of Eros and Thanatos in the Freudian sense – framed in Otto Weininger's ideology, as described in his bestseller *Sex and Character* (1903)? At this point the question also arises whether such a psycho-physiological orientation would not perhaps derive from Paris, namely from Rodin's work with the human body, influential in turn-of-the-century Vienna.

Or, in the sciences, from Jean Martin Charcot, as Sigmund Freud witnessed the psychiatrist at work in Salpietriere. For Charcot, the body is a zero mark to begin with. As a scientist he knows quite well that in the final analysis we see only what we are ready to see, what we have been taught to see or what a scientific model makes us see. What was then addressed as *hysteria* is a case in point. *Hysteria* literally means uterus-derived, the uterus being an organic space from which, after all, the female *and* the male come to life. In Paris one understood the problem of 'hysteria' as a condition of the nervous system, whether the subject was male or female. However, once back in patriarchal Vienna, Freud repressed such a materialist point of view, as it were, in order to classify *hysteria* as a typical female story accompanied by penis envy and the Oedipus complex, his main protagonists in a verticalist narrative.

Obviously, Kokoschka's sketches and paintings differ fundamentally from those paintings by Gustav Klimt which represent a Freudian type of liquidation, the beheading, meaning the *castration* of the male by the female, as in *Judith I* and *Judith II* (1901 and 1907)**.** These paintings retell the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes as an example of female *hysteria* and reproduce the *grand récit* of the thanatos versus eros drive (reproduced also as such in Richard Strauss' one-act opera *Salome*, first staged in 1905, two years before the playlet). By contrast, in his play with the pointedly sarcastic title "Murderer the Women's Hope," Kokoschka subjects the cultural icon of the *aufrechte Gang* to a sarcastic revision, sarcastic in the literal sense of the Greek term, a tearing apart of the flesh. We are reminded that *Zerfleischung* with *Fleisch* (flesh) etymologically comes from *fließen* (to flow). The playlet and its sketches, in fact, represent the painter's form of penetrating and bringing into view the unconscious of the body in terms of the very materiality of his craft, the liquidity of paint and language as sound. In Kokoschka's autobiography we read that he despised Freud's thought as a crudely schematic form of a metaphysical narrative of sexuality.[3] His paintings, sketches and plays make such an aversion palpable.

Significantly it is not so much the play's final scene but a special poster advertising the performance that scandalized Vienna (see fig. 2). This poster evokes yet simultaneously blurs the contours of a medieval mystery play's allegorical encounter of *Death with Man*. Going beyond the forms of a medieval Central European grotesque, Kokoschka here very tangibly begins to defamiliarize our "image of man." If he does not dissolve it, he at least begins to undercut the ontological fallacy of fixating on the image of the female in opposition to the male, as if gender images existed in and of themselves (Belting 47). Here we find an implicit questioning of the territorial definition of the iconic dualism of man vs. woman, not so much in terms of reversing the conventional role of the dominating male to that of the dominating female, but more significantly toward the fluid relations of flesh and skeleton, or life and death.

Fig. 2. Oskar Kokoschka. *Drama-Komödie*. [*Drama-Comedy.*] Poster, 1907. Lithograph. 118,1 x 76,2 cm. Digital image. 2009. MoMA, New York / Scala, Florence.

Moreover, the facial features of the bloody red flesh of the male figure are quite indistinguishable from that of an animal. In short, the dualism *man* vs. animal is also being reviewed and challenged here. Put another way, conventional theatre's dramatic images which comprise the narrative plot, psychological motivation of characters and the action of traditional plays and paintings are deconstructed in favour of a fluid complex of *dramatis personae*. This complex is one of corporeal *theatrical* images, which are images of seeing (from Greek: *theatron*, meaning "place of seeing"), images of illumination rather than mere illustration.

Clearly, neither Kokoschka's visual images nor his verbal images, his language on stage, are a vehicle for a *psychoanalytical* discourse. Nor do they yet quite constitute a revulsion against the word as preying on the body in the sense of Artaud's "theatre of cruelty," his desperate, self-destructive turn toward an unmediated body-mind experience. While Artaud suffered the word like a knife in his own flesh, Kokoschka's reaction to the conceptual word in his depiction and presentation of cruelty is marked aggression toward the audience. Yet there is another dimension in his work, the more distancing effect of an image-based language critique (*Sprachkritik*), a questioning of the *culture of the word*. Such questioning is primarily a matter of the visuality (*Bildlichkeit*) of the corporeal as a critique of metaphor, which thereby also undercuts Freud's *grand récits* (his interpretation of dreams and Oedipus stories). The image is valorised over the word everywhere in Kokoschka's plays, essays and public addresses which *in toto* are (written) documents of his "school of seeing," intimately tied to his *Sprachkritik*. For instance, he often uses an archaic biblical language, as in a presentation from 1912, "Von der Natur der Gesichte" ("Of the nature of faces," here understood as "visions"): "mir geschah nach dem Worte" ("it came upon me according to/after the word") (*Mein Leben*, 339). Here the implicit emphasis, however ambiguous linguistically, is on "nach" (as "after" rather than as "according to" the word), on a post-symbolic step forward rather than a nostalgic return to any Adamic language**.** Furthermore, in the lecture "Bild, Sprache und Schrift" (Image, Language and Script) from 1947, he still turns centrally against "words and definitions" as a substitute for "what has been forgotten to see and to experience" (363). Thus the text of "Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen" ("Murderer the Women's Hope") – when viewed and spoken on stage – in the extreme becomes a sequence of corporeal gestures and dissonant screams returned from repression, an *event* – *after* the word as concept. This text may allow for what we call "the spiritual," even "the sacred," to show itself at the margins rather than being forced upon us as part of the symbolic order. Nevertheless, in contrast to Artaud's later radically Gnostic rejection of "literature as the corrupt, fallen activity of words" (Sontag l) and his attempt to go to "Speech anterior to words" (Artaud, *Selected Writings* 220), in Kokoschka's play there are still incongruously traditional references, which

point for instance to the drama as an allegorical conflict of a male "sun" (*Sonne*) of reason vs. a female "moon" (*Mond*) of irrationality.

Fig. 3. Oskar Kokoschka. Illustration for "Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen [Murderer the Women's Hope]." *Der Sturm* 21 (1910): 163.

In spite of its primitivist gesturing, this play cannot be viewed as a return to a realm before language. By no means a matter of regression, the play instead attempts to *flesh out*, as it were, the repressed corporeal base of communication. In the same sense, Benjamin writes of Karl Kraus, the most acerbic Viennese cultural critic at the time, as being possessed by a demon, the demon which takes revenge on the "conceptual phantoms" (Nietzsche 887) of modernity. Benjamin finds Kraus aggressively poised against the abuse of language as stereotype in a mordant form, where "in a subordinate clause, in a particle, indeed in a comma, fibrers and nerves quiver; from the obscurest and driest fact a piece of his mutilated flesh hangs" ("Karl Kraus" 251). For Benjamin, Kraus is thus a quasi *murderer* or, more exactly, as he writes, a "non-human," indeed a "cannibal" (260). In other words, Kraus is of Oskar Kokoschka's tribe (in fact, Kraus was a great supporter of the early Kokoschka). Speaking in the epistemological terms of the early Nietzsche essay "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im auβermoralischen Sinne [On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense]," we are here dealing with a linguistic turn from conceptual metaphors to stimulants of nerves, images and sounds (879, my trans.). In short, traditional notions of what constitutes an image (visual or verbal) are being undercut in such a manner that we perceive in Kokoschka's illustrations of the play and in its revitalization of language as image and sound a recording of corporeal *nervous* processes, traces of visceral reactions or, in popular language, "*gut* feelings," which have a pre-conceptual cognitive energy. Such traces of visceral reactions are the essence of the very psycho-physiological process of writing and painting as much as they constitute the basis for apperceptions. In rhizomatic fashion these undercut the central perspective of a *vertical*, meaning autonomous, subject. They are thus hardly any longer symbolic images**.** After all we are dealing here with a kind of *Nervenkunst* (art of nerves), or the "nerve art of the young Vienna," in the well-known words of Hermann Bahr. Surely the *culture of the ornament*, the façade of ancient regime Vienna, had become transparent and could no longer be covered up, as it were.

The complex of physiological and aesthetic issues addressed above presents itself as a matter of "clinical aesthetics," as Deleuze writes much later about Francis Bacon (44). Thus in Kokoschka's early expressionist work, the façade of the head, face and body is being broken up until *something* becomes visible as *flesh* (see fig. 3). Not only the technique of film, as Walter Benjamin will note circa twenty years later about the x-ray vision of "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction," but already this type of avant-garde painting at the turn of the century penetrates the body of the human being like a surgeon. Obviously, with Kokoschka's sketches, the boundary between inside and outside, the painter's "natural distance from reality" that Benjamin speaks of in his artwork essay (233), is already being dissolved into a "visual unconscious" **(**Elkins 500) through a quasi Roentgen-

gaze,[4] which does not register the skin as an outside.[5] We are here confronted with *Gegen-Ständen* (ob-jects), meaning some *thing* standing toward/against a subject before and after consciousness, before and after the sign. Such haptical relations of the "eye," "*eine Art Tastsehen*" (a kind of tactile seeing) (Bahr 83), cancel out the separation and distance of the subject from the corporeal nature of the object. Thus the materiality of the body is always already a medium in which the invasive manipulations of the natural sciences and the aesthetic approach to an object intersect, in terms of a basic psychophysiological *aeisthesis*, here a type of specifically quasi-clinical body-focused aesthetics. The central role of form in Occidental aesthetics since antiquity is also thereby undercut. This transgression of the formed image of man results in a fundamental questioning of its cultural co-ordinates or, in the extreme, a liquidation (as making fluid) of the signifying tradition of form into Bataille's *informe,* as I seek to show below.

Already with Rodin at the turn of the century, the invasive turn against the verticality of the head has become a decisive procedure which brings the human body again into eyesight, into the light of the eye – even though this still occurs in the ambivalence of his occasional allusions to the torso of classical sculpture. Rodin's erotic sketches, frequently exhibited in Vienna around 1900, are thus a key for our examination of Oskar Kokoschka's "'Ich sehe, ich sehe, was du nicht siehst!'" (*Schriften* 24). Yes, there was a significant Paris-Vienna connection. In the first exhibit of the Vienna Secession in 1899, Rodin became something of a hero (Comeni 38); in 1908 120 of his sketches were exhibited in the Gallery Heller (there had previously been an exhibit in Prague in 1902). This connection, of course, is the more direct one because the relations of his erotic sketches to those by Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka are not only that of the shared erotic subject but, for the latter two painters, are obvious in the common technique of decentring the position of the corporeal figure on the canvas. The common denominator here consists of the phenomenal laying bare of the corporeal as a medium. Ultimately the corporeal as a medium represented fuses with the materiality of paint and the canvas as the medium of presentation. For example, the motifs of the *Fallen Angel* and of Icarus were ubiquitous at the turn of the century; we find them in works of the painter Max Beckmann or the poet Gottfried Benn. Yet, in a series of Rodin sculptures the fixed symbolism of the male fall from the vertical to the horizontal gradually erodes. A waning interest in the symbolically articulated drama and moral of this story as a parable of human (male) hubris makes possible a focus on and exposure of the body, its coming to the fore beyond a readily perceived narrative grid (as an underlying abstraction). The schematics of seeing in the vertical/horizontal frame are thus being loosened and lifted to the extent that the eye of the artist discovers, and uncovers, shaping "free marks" in the physical. These spots are "free" because they are "by chance" and do not serve any cultural

prefiguration of meaning; they appear as purely "manual marks" (Deleuze 76f.). As such, as physiological markers, they are also *theatrical images* in the sense of presenting a process of seeing. Something concrete happens here and comes to awareness: the physiological base of seeing and of the seen escapes the grip and grid of our symbolic world. Rodin's sketches, therefore, do more than intensify the movements that are already in his sculptures.

Fig. 4. Auguste Rodin. *Two Female Nudes, Semi-Recumbent*. [*Deux femmes nues a demi-allongees*]. Undated. 22.8 x 29 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris. D 5192.

In one of Rodin's sequences of female figures, for instance, the nudes' semi-recumbent position reveals them as a fleshly mass (nearly identical with the *blotch* of the water colour). Or, in another sketch, the iconic gender differences between a male and female figure in an embrace are erased on the surface of the watercolour's medium of paper. These are "gestural drawings" (Berman 14), the signs of which *signify the unsignified* of the body as *flesh*, as mass rather than as form. However, these drawings are not formless as they show something while demonstrating their mediality simultaneously in the *spots of chance,* spontaneous lines and clots of translucent colour which appear to have displaced the outside of the skin (as if by x-ray vision).

In his 1902 essay on "August Rodin" Rainer Maria Rilke, in Paris at the time and the sculptor's secretary, stated the most essential fact concerning this phenomenon: "He sketched an infinite series of never seen, always missed gestures; and it happened that the force that came from them was uncanny. Relations of movements, which had never been seen and recognized as a whole, present themselves and they receive all immediacy**"** (Rilke 173f, my trans.). For Rilke, Rodin is painting the "uncanny" then, the "*Heimliche*" (furtive), which is the original "*Heim*" (home) that has become the "*Unheimliche*" (uncanny). His sketches reveal the formerly repressed, the "invisible" (Kokoschka's "I see something you don't see"). The body comes into view with Rodin's erotic sketches, showing itself in gestures and traces, in the exploration of the corporeal that extends programmatically to Francis Bacon (for example, Bacon's "Heads" and his infamous Pope portraits beginning in the late 1940s) and beyond.

André Masson's images and Georges Bataille's *Documents* texts of the *acéphale* in the late 1920s went one step further than Oskar Kokoschka in turn-of-the-century Vienna, namely, they significantly departed from the traditional close-up portrait of humans as the measure of all things. They began to carve up the body at the head, dissecting it in the medium of painting as well as in photography, not only breaking it down into parts but into its presymbolic *informe* of bodily fluids like spittle. In other words, as Jacques Lacan, a close long-time observer of surrealist productions, would later say, one goes beyond the "mirror image" the emerging self has produced for its identity in uncovering an underlying "corps morcelé" (736). One can see that the conventional understanding of art is being transgressed *in extremis*, but in spite of the radicality of a corporeal *aisthesis* of excess, the surrealist painter Masson, of course, does not want to liquidate *art*, while the dissident surrealist thinker Bataille remains obsessed with an idea, the image on the edge of the *informe* as the ultimate transgression of form and the plunge into the beyond. What the early Oskar Kokoschka shares with the later Parisian developments is that the aesthetic experience is to be liberated from its cultural stencils and burden as a "spiritual" absolute, namely an institutional

"spirituality" as packaged in the aura of aesthetic autonomy (like a relic in a glass dome). As an antidote to the tradition of a Christian denigration and sacrifice of the body and meta-physical philosophical idealism, against all odds and by most extreme means, a neo-pagan aesthetic culture can be said to resurrect rather than sacrifice the body. We are witnessing, of course, a latter-day resurrection of its own, as the return of the body from repression paradoxically seems to take place by way of cutting up the body. However, as opposed to Georges Bataille's compulsive vision of exploding the boundaries of the image between representation and the experience of the real, what is cut up in Kokoschka's early work are the Western *iconic representations of the body*. This very excess of violence as a reaction to repression through representation once again brings the complexity of the body into our vision, as the violence, albeit shocking, remains aesthetic and is thus therapeutic. Such a process is cognitive-semiotic and quasi-Gnostic in the sense that it brings to our consciousness the manifold archaeological layers of the cultural meaning and contexts of an image, here of the human figure, while ultimately relativising interpretation as a subjective metaphor, as a temporal and conceptual abstraction based on dualisms. Freud, for example, interpreted the conflict between Eros and Thanatos more or less in the gendered terms of his patriarchal age. Moreover, he still conceptualised the *battle of the giants,* of Eros and Thanatos, in the classical dramatic, as it were, spatial terms of a conflict between the main protagonists of our Judaeo-Christian culture. Thus with Hitler *ante portas* in 1931– filled with worry – Freud asks which of the contestants will prevail (111f). By contrast, for the painter and playwright Kokoschka, Eros as the potential of "women's hope" is – as already stated in the title of his 1907 play – indissolubly intertwined with the male murderer; and he intuits such entwinement as always already encoded within the body as a medium for which dualisms are external.

Notes

[1] See Georges Bataille's provocative article "Le Gros Orteil [The Big Toe]," accompanied by Boiffard's photographs of this underrated body part.

[2] As for Kokoschka's tortured relationship to Alma Mahler, it should be noted that the playlet and its illustrations were produced before his great erotic and personal trauma. Only afterwards does he transform his biography into a "bio-graphy," into something that is grafted and marked by his life experiences; however, this occurs in terms of a reversal, of a return to more representational sketches which show the male, the painter's eyes blinded, altogether dominated by the female ("Zeit-Echo" 297, 299). After this turning point, Kokoschka started to commit himself to the commissioned painting

of portraits of the ladies of Viennese high society, employing a certain tactility of seeing, but well within the contours of the social genre**.**
[3] See, for instance, Kokoschka, *Mein Leben* 63, 67.
[4] Roentgen technology had been put into practice only in 1885.
[5] Cf. James Elkins, "Differenzen zwischen Innenkörper und Auβenkörper," with largely unsubstantiated references to Kokoschka at the beginning of a development toward Francis Bacon.

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Fig. 1 Oskar Kokoschka. *Der irrende Ritter* [*Erring Knight*]. 1915. Oil on canvas. 89.5 x 180 cm. © Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Estate of Karl Nierendorf, by purchase. 48.1172.380.

Fig. 2 Oskar Kokoschka. *Drama-Komödie* [*Drama-Comedy*]. Poster, 1907. Lithograph 118.1 x 76.2 cm. Digital Image. 2009 © MoMA, New York / Scala, Florence.

Fig. 3 Oskar Kokoschka. Illustration for "Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen [Murderer the Women's Hope]." *Der Sturm* 21 (1910): 163.

Fig. 4 Auguste Rodin. *Two Female Nudes, Semi-Recumbent* [*Deux femmes nues a demi-allongees*]. Undated. 22.8 x 29 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris. Inv.-No. D 5192. Sketch 87 of *Auguste Rodin: Erotic Watercolors.* Ed. Anne-Marie Bonnet. New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang-Verlag,

1995. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2009.

Somatechnics and Makeover Reality TV:
The Symbiotic Viewer/Participant Relationship

Beth Pentney

Using the newly-developed theory of somatechnics (Sullivan), in which the constituted, lived engagement of body/technology are figured as inextricable, I explore the practices of elective cosmetic surgery as they are reflected on North American makeover reality TV, in order to highlight what I see as a symbiotic relationship between viewers and participants in programs such as *The Swan* (Fox) and *Extreme Makeover* (ABC). By examining the narrative structure of makeover reality TV and its tropes, along with online viewer responses to makeover reality TV and examples of alternative discourses in makeover culture, my essay attempts to answer the question: how does the technologically-mediated relationship between viewer and participant come to be known, and what does that relationship mean in the context of a 'makeover culture'?

The goal of this essay is to apply the burgeoning theory of somatechnics to the varied practices that encompass elective cosmetic surgery when it is broadcast on North American network television through a genre that has become known as Makeover Reality TV. In so doing, I argue that a theory of somatechnics effectively disengages with circular arguments feminists and media critics have had regarding female cosmetic body modification, which often rely on an idealized image of a pre-cultural body, and/or from the position that women are the complicit victims of a manipulative patriarchy. Using a framework of somatechnics, I explore the practices of elective cosmetic surgery as they are reflected on North American Reality TV series such as *The Swan* (Fox), *Extreme Makeover* (ABC), *I Want a Famous Face (*MTV), *Dr. 90210* (E!) and *A Personal Story* (TLC), in order to examine what I see as a symbiotic relationship between viewers and program participants. The concept of the inextricability of body and technology, developed in a theory of somatechnics, acts as the kernel through which I formulate a discussion of how viewers and participants in makeover reality TV contribute to the normalization of elective cosmetic surgery, and continually erect and reconfigure cultural markers of acceptable body modification, healthfulness and individual success. In the process, I discuss concepts of power, conformity and authenticity as they are complicated by this shift in theoretical analysis.

Notable feminists writing about cosmetic surgery in the 1990s, including Susan Bordo, Sandra Bartky, Kathy Davis, Kathryn Pauly Morgan and Naomi Wolf, tended to frame their arguments using dichotomies of coercion and resistance, where women who elected to undergo cosmetic

procedures were seen to be manipulated by a larger force or institution (media, patriarchy, heterosexuality, medicine), or were encouraged to transcend that force through individual action stemming from critical feminist consciousness (and a rejection of medical intervention for cosmetic purposes). Similarly, a long tradition of cultural studies scholars writing about media audiences often framed their arguments about viewers as potentially active and resistant to a media text's ideological messages, in response to earlier theories in communications and film theory that positioned viewers as passive and impressionable (Hall, Fiske and Hartley, Jenkins). Indeed, feminist television studies made its mark in cultural studies in the early 1980s by developing scholarship that disputed women's passivity both as viewers and characters of popular television, in response to psychoanalytic feminist film theory which placed women in the role of passive object to the voyeuristic and active male subject (i.e. Laura Mulvey's now iconic "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"). While it would be misleading to suggest that the above authors were limited to such simplified reasoning, a general trend of both academic disciplines has been and continues to be the tendency to identify and hold up as progressive any instances where 'resistance' is said to have occurred, whether it be through non-traditional cosmetic surgeries that respond to and arguably destabilize Westernized beauty norms, or non-traditional viewer responses to and interpretations of television texts.[1]

The Somatechnics Project is an interdisciplinary, international network of scholars and researchers who work in the area of body modification. Nikki Sullivan, Director of the Somatechnics Research Center at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, has contributed to the development of a theory which, unlike many feminist theories of embodiment, does not operate from the assumption that bodies and technologies exist outside of, or separate from, one another. Rather, her position acknowledges, much like the work of postmodern feminists Donna Haraway and Anne Balsamo, that bodily-being "is always already technologised, and technologies are always already enfleshed" (Sullivan, "Somatechnics" para. 7). The impossible separation of the body and technologies is brought to the forefront in the study of somatechnics, and this moves beyond the obvious collision of skin and metal witnessed in medical implantations or subcultural body modifications. Instead, somatechnics encompasses the "inextricability of soma – the body – and technics, techniques, technologies and technes [which are] at the heart of a set of politicised and critical interrogations of subjectivity and bodily being" (Cadwallader and Murray 260). While proponents of this theory ally with post-modern feminists who argue that no body is pre-cultural (and therefore the unaltered or 'natural' body is a myth), somatechnics also demands careful interrogation of the socio-structural systems upholding everyday technologies of thought, including how institutions such as law, medicine and education come to shape the body both literally and figuratively. According

to Susan Stryker, a leading American scholar in transgender theory and one of the central figures involved in the development of this theoretical framework, the term somatechnics was developed with the intent to "critically reframe practices of body modification" (2). In so doing, Michel Foucault's notion of biopower is reenergized and particularized in the examination of concrete material embodiment.

Foucault's now-familiar description of biopower in the *History of Sexuality (Part 1)* exposed the strength of dominant systems to control bodies, both individual and social. Biopower's effectiveness exists in its positive, productive measures of conformity in order to produce obedient, willing bodies that work for the State. Foucault's position suggested that subjects are shaped by the normative bodily practices of everyday life that are imbued with meaning, and that control over people is more effectively attained through productive measures rather than rigid or direct physical force. The shift from an era of sovereign power over bodies and the right to death in the West during the eighteenth century, to "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" in the nineteenth century marked a "rupture," or a point of epistemic change according to Foucault, whereby "there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (140). This was achieved during what Foucault refers to as the classical age in the West (136), through the "rapid development of various disciplines" as well as through political and economic intervention and involvement in population control and demography (140). The rise of capitalism and industrialization depended on biopower, and the result was a modern subject who proclaimed unequivocally a right to life, while simultaneously giving that life to the machine of production, and adhering to the norms established in order to make the machine run smoothly (and productively) (cf. 144).

Foucault claimed that control of the individual and collective body by the State occurs at the micro-level through familial and social morals, ethics and codes of conduct, and through macro-level systems and institutions at the same time. Throughout his career he also made concessions for individual subversion of power by conceptualising the translation of state power over the body (in the form of inscription and internalisation of norms) into resistant power, so that the system is turned against itself in the form of the individual body ("Body/Power" 56). Much of the criticism levelled at Foucault's collection of work on power and the subject often comes back to concerns that his work tries to both assume a model of power that is capillary-like and always shifting, and a model of power that is top-down and State-enforced. A theory of somatechnics provides a method for working through this problem. Stryker describes how somatechnics can innovatively approach power and subjectivity in relation to body modification practices, when she states: "It is the bodily juncture between the material corporeality

and sovereign power (what Agamben calls the problem of 'bare life') that somatechnics seeks to elaborate in concrete detail" (5).

Some interesting examples of this juncture between material corporeality and sovereign power have emerged from the work of somatechnics scholars in the form of comparisons between state legislation and criminalisation of female genital mutilation (FGM) versus cosmetic genital surgery (Sullivan, "The Price to Pay" 399); between state legislation of self-demand amputation versus other "medically unnecessary" (but culturally and medically sanctioned) procedures such as circumcision, intersex surgeries and elective cosmetic surgery (Sullivan, "Integrity" 326); and between suffering and normativity (Cadwallader 377). What these comparisons highlight is that some forms of body modification are overlooked, rationalized, validated and accepted as normal, while others are perceived as criminal, immoral, unnecessary and barbaric. By exposing what are often arbitrary distinctions between strikingly similar transformative bodily practices, we can begin to point to some of the problems inherent in a system that makes value judgments from a continually Eurocentric "perceptual frame" (Sullivan, "Integrity" 327). After all, is requesting that a surgeon remove a functioning, non-diseased limb fundamentally different from asking the same surgeon to remove pounds of fat, or parts of a nose? Is FGM different from the removal of an intersex infant's "oversized" clitoris? Sullivan describes this process of analysis as a study of our perceptual frames; or "the ways in which various somatic technologies (and the relations between them) – which are at once arbitrary, historically and culturally contingent, and politically and ethically significant – come to matter" ("Integrity" 327). She points out that in the case of Australian state legislation against FGM, white optics "establishes and polices boundaries and borders between 'us' and 'them' [between modern Australians and barbaric ethnic others], between proper and improper bodies" ("The Price to Pay" 400). Thus, what is deemed "medically necessary" is determined by cultural, political and historical values and is anything but a universal reality (399).

Underpinning the ways that body modification is legislated and understood in the cultural imagination are the treatment of suffering, designations of "authenticity" and normative bodies. Suffering is a "technique of biopower that produces normalisation" (378), according to Jessica Cadwallader, where the differences between "treatment" and "enhancement" are judged based on perceptions of normalcy and suffering and legitimated based on beliefs about what is a reasonable amount or cause of suffering. The alleviation of suffering through body modification (say, leg-lengthening surgery for dwarfism), does not require responsibility on the part of others to change norms and expectations. Instead, norms are reproduced in alleviating suffering, "covering over the processes by which certain bodies are deemed abnormal in the first place" (382). Thus, the perceived illegitimacy of a

cosmetic surgery patient's suffering (compared to 'real' suffering) assumes there is some natural suffering to a natural wrong (and a naturalized norm, which ignores the culturally-based creation of norms) (cf. 385).

With all this in mind, I am interested in the attempts made by the cosmetic surgery industry to legitimise the suffering and alleviation of suffering of (mostly) women for whom cosmetic surgery is considered the solution, specifically in the context of makeover reality TV, and the ways in which viewers are integral to the process of legitimisation through technologies that encourage interaction and discussion. In the early part of the twenty-first century a proliferation of network programming crystallized around body modification within a clearly neoliberal framework, in the form of 'extreme' dieting, exercise and cosmetic surgery. Shows such as *The Swan* (Fox), *I Want a Famous Face* (MTV), *Extreme Makeover* (ABC), *A Personal Story* (TLC) and *Dr. 90210* (E!) emerged together and reflect a paradigmatic moment in North American culture, where exposure to non-scripted, non-fictional mediated cosmetic surgery procedures rose dramatically. This heightened exposure created an opportunity for the normalization and transformation of popular meanings associated with cosmetic surgery, towards something akin to preventative medicine, longevity and neoliberal ideologies of good citizenship, such as self-governance and self-discipline (Ouellette 232).

Much of the popular and academic criticism written about the phenomenon of makeover reality TV and its participants tends to highlight the problematic bodily disciplining that reflects cultural beauty standards at any cost (see works by Covino, Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, Heyes, Weber). Participants in shows such as *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are perceived to be inscribing indicators of cultural capital including youthfulness, class status and "healthfulness" onto their bodies through cosmetic procedures within a televised narrative encouraging individual action and self-regulation. By associating the suffering that leads to the seeking out of cosmetic surgery with a lack of 'self-esteem' and childhood trauma, makeover reality TV is faulted for avoiding any consideration of underlying class, race and gender inequalities that might lead to the suffering that is associated with small breasts, a large nose or excess fat. Instead, alleviating suffering becomes a cure in itself. While I energetically agree with these observations and arguments about makeover reality TV, I am concerned about what is often ignored in this type of media analysis, that is, the parameters through which these shows come to be known in feminist scholarship, particularly as they tend to congeal around well-worn definitions and ideas of power and conformity, resistance and manipulation. A theory of somatechnics opens up space for questions such as: why can't the women undergoing cosmetic surgery be subversive or resistant? What is the responsibility of feminism to makeover reality TV? Do viewers of makeover reality TV undergo body

modification in the process of viewing televised cosmetic surgery (if we extend our definition of body modification, do we ever stop modifying)? How does the technologically-mediated relationship between viewer and participant come to be known, and what does that relationship mean in the context of a 'makeover culture'?

Feminist scholars have spent much time analysing cosmetic surgery and its relation to gender, sexism, and cultural expectations of beauty (see works by Bordo, Covino, Davis, Gimlin). My interest here is in what I see as a symbiotic, embodied relationship between makeover reality TV viewers and participants. With the theoretical concepts of somatechnics leading the way, I want to denaturalise what has become a routine, accessible and banal practice, that is, viewing cosmetic surgery on television. If somatechnics demands that we eliminate the "and" from "body and technology," such that embodiment is inextricably linked to the techniques through which bodies are constituted, then the relationship between the viewer of and the participant in makeover reality TV is less disconnected or separate than we might at first assume. The traditionally assumed distance and division between viewer and participant, between screen and set, is disrupted if we consider the viewer as an embodied and technologically-mediated subject.

The Swan and *Extreme Makeover* are probably the best known examples of the makeover reality TV genre and are extensions of an earlier makeover show phenomenon that occurred throughout the 1990s on daytime television talk shows. These new shows administer multiple cosmetic surgery procedures and intense diet and exercise regimes to its (typically female) participants under isolating conditions over a prolonged period of time. After months of seclusion, pain and body-work, contestants are revealed to their friends and families and celebrated for their transformative achievements. The "reveal" functions as the climax of most makeover shows, though *The Swan* also incorporates competition between the contestants through a beauty pageant finale. As Brenda Weber contends in her article on *Extreme Makeover*, the belief in personal success fostered by the makeover show stems from a celebration of the American Dream, the ideology that anyone can succeed if they only work hard enough. Not surprisingly, this model of success is achievable primarily through a commitment to consumerism, where the makeover is just one tool in the arsenal of the perpetual struggle against aging as it is etched onto the body (Weber para. 9). For the participant in makeover reality TV, the body is discursively rendered as text, or palette, upon which one can create one's self to reflect one's 'inner' self more accurately (paradoxically, individuality is found embodying conformity). Both participants and body modifiers (be they surgeon, dietician or fitness coach) participate in this discursive rendering, and the body-as-text is central to the underlying ontology of the show. The transformation of bodies from ugly, ordinary or aged is deemed successful on several intersecting levels, where

bodily transformation is associated with happiness, social mobility and heterosexual potential. Thus, the body-as-text on makeover reality TV exemplifies "the extent to which bodily transformation (in its many and varied forms) is integral to (the politics of) everyday life" (Sullivan and Nourry 323).

Without exception, contestants of *The Swan* are introduced appearing haggard and prematurely aged: the female body is marked by childbearing, manual labour and economic struggle. The women are routinely depicted as working-class, emotionally unstable and in need of romantic heterosexual love. Their confessed self-hatred (which introduces the viewer to the bodies on display in a narrative structure of victimhood) is usually related to a painful childhood filled with bullying or parental neglect, or a life of hardship that has stemmed from financial instability and overextended care-taking duties. These victim narratives, dictated by the contestants and supported by secondary testimonials from friends and family, provide access to the abject female body, for both the *Swan* team of experts and the television viewer. The shame, fear and grief displayed at the outset of each woman's story is purged through the ritualised display of each violated body as it is cut, healed and then shaped throughout the three-month process. This process marks a narrative cue that the victim position will shift from the inside (psychological) to the outside (physical), and, once the bruises heal, the participant will no longer be defined by her psychological vulnerability. Instead, along with her physical beauty, the participant's inner transformation will reveal her ability to be a "self-enterprising . . . good citizen" (Ouellette 232). Responsibility is transposed from the *Swan* team to the individual contestant, who is expected to "step up" and be accountable for her future. If she does, she is rewarded with a spot in the pageant; if she does not, she is ritually ousted from the flock for not having given herself over fully to the transformation. The contestants must gingerly manage the paradox presented by the series: a spirit of self-reliance and determination is expected, as well as a willingness to let the *Swan* team determine what is "best" for each woman's body, mind and spirit.

The framing of the participant's body on makeover reality TV as a palette, or a body-as-text, is also a body-in-(televisual) (con-)text, creating a level of meta-performativity that parallels the meta-somatechnic practices of the viewer. Not only does the participant's modified body perform notions of proper femininity, age and size through techniques and technologies which aid in its construction and maintenance, the body-as-text performs this from within a televisual genre. This body-in-text exists to be engaged with by viewers and cannot be separated from the "before" image that structures the drama of the reveal, the "after" (Weber para. 35). As such, viewers are essential for the participant as they ensure her existence via the technology of the television screen. Participants' bodies are thoroughly scrutinized and

fragmented by the makeover show experts and, parasitically, by the viewer. Physical "flaws" are identified, circled and prodded. The penetrating gaze (of expert and viewer) is justified by the failure of the contestant to meet socio-cultural body standards; thus, abject body signifiers negate the right to privacy.

This ritualised public exposure places responsibility (and blame) on each participant for her bodily failure, which extends to her failures in life (either in love, finances or her career). The process of physical transformation is initiated on makeover reality TV with pre-alteration images, which position the participant's body inside a technological framework; on both *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover*, the pre-surgery segment locates the female body on a computer screen, where digitised arrows identify and magnify flaws to be corrected in a simulated 3-D fashion. The image presents the body head-on, as a scientific and universal human diagram, and is distinctly opposed to the sexualised, fetishised image of the female body that emerges only after the women undergo surgery and healing. The viewer is asked to engage in this moment as an objective witness to the necessity of each participant's body work through the presentation of an image that inserts the human form into a space of 'new technology'. Thus, the eye of the camera extends the reach of the viewer whose physical engagement with media technology creates the space for the participant to be transformed.

This symbiotic embodiment of viewer and participant occurs most clearly at the end of each episode of *The Swan,* as participants and viewers simultaneously witness the newly-altered body for the first time through parted velvet curtains which are drawn back to expose a huge, ornate mirror. Sharing this experience with the participant, who has had all reflective surfaces covered or removed for the duration of the body modification procedures and healing, provides the viewer with a moment of embodiment as the camera positions the viewer as though he or she *is* the reflection of the participant whose eyes gaze with surprise and delight at the new body/viewer. The meta-somatechnic practices of the viewer at this moment of revelation run parallel with the meta-performative practices of the participant, who is at once body-as-text and body-in-text. The viewer's embodied engagement with and through media technology, the extended eye, occurs for the purpose of witnessing cosmetic body modification in process, but the viewer is constituted as such by the technology which frames his or her sight. Just as there is no makeover reality TV participant without a viewer, there is no viewer without the technology to both broadcast the image and to perform the body modification that is to be put on display. Moreover, the viewer is positioned by the camera in ways that limit what can be seen or known, such that any response offered by the viewer (in favour of the body modification, in disgust or opposition) is always already contained by the image provided through the medium. Here, viewer and participant simultaneously reflect somatechnics as

the constituted, lived engagement of body/technology through different but related technological and embodied means. What this specific example shows us is a new way to begin interrogating the popular reception of makeover reality TV, through an awareness of the inextricability of soma – the body – and techne in shaping our experiences with televised cosmetic surgery.

I would like to move past the moment of viewing body modification and being viewed in the process of body modification on television. The relational body-spaces of viewer and cosmetic surgery participant in makeover reality TV extend well past the instance of screening. As a mediated event, the body-space of the participant is permeable, and the body is opened up and made a spectacle both on and off camera. The space of the body is transformed, while also being set in a time-space by the video recording; at once reviewable and permanent in the medium of television but also fluid in the "after," that is, the post-surgical body which ages and shifts and changes once the production ends. In post-production media coverage[2] participants continue to be defined by the person they no longer appear to be, the "before" image (and whether or not they can manage to avoid creeping back towards the image of the former body and its failures of beauty, health and good citizenship). As a result, the event of body modification has date-stamped the participant's personal history and public persona in a way that demands continued scrutiny and physical judgment, and in the process the body is and remains culturally constructed.

A particularly salient example of this cropped up in *People Magazine*'s interviews with *The Swan* Season One pageant contestants two months after the finale, exposing the problematic dichotomy of fantasy and reality exemplified by the women's new bodies. We are told:

> Along with some residual numbness from her tummy-tuck and liposuction, [Beth Lay] came home with a faint mental scar: "I'm afraid of the scale." She's up by 5:30 every day for an hour of cardio and is working with a nutritionist to reduce her body fat to 18 per cent – and shrink her enlarged breasts. ("Maybe the surgery made her a little too self-conscious," says her husband . . .). (Gliatto 85)

Participant Kristy Garza and her husband

> both wish they could afford couples therapy: "I want us to figure out a way we can live together with the new body peacefully" she says, but can't afford it. She wishes too, the show would translate into some greater payoff: "I've been on national TV," she jokes, "but I'm scrounging around for money to pay my light bill." (86)

Dawn Goad similarly expresses concern that her transformation has not provided financial benefits:

> Life after The Swan is "pretty average, to be honest," says the homemaker and mother of three. . . . "Everybody's like, 'I saw you on TV,' but no one is like 'Hey, I'll give you a $60,000 job.'" . . . Goad thinks the contestants could have used some career advice and better beauty tips from the Swan team. "They sent us home with an upkeep sheet, but I can't afford $40 bottles of shampoo." (88)

Together, these three quotations exemplify what Stryker refers to as "the bodily juncture between the material corporeality and sovereign power" that a theory of somatechnics attempts to trace (5). Extracted from the fairytale presented on makeover reality TV, these women cannot maintain the spectacle of status and taste to match their physical signifiers of celebrity and wealth, which disassociates the contestants from their bodies. Thus, Beth literally cannot feel a part of her body, Kristy refers to herself as "the body," while Dawn and Kristy complain about their persistent financial burdens despite their celebrity-bodies. The women expected their highly-publicised body modifications to provide some relief with respect to their psychological and financial burdens. Ironically, they reveal their disappointment in this regard in one of the most popular celebrity magazines in America. A schism occurs in the "perceptual frame" at the heart of makeover culture in this moment, where the simple equation of beauty = success is disrupted, and the participants call our attention to the technes, or the "means in and through which bodies are constituted, positioned, and lived" (*Somatechnics Research Center*).

In contrast, viewers' body-spaces are private and domestic, leisurely and closed off from public scrutiny. They are engaged in acts of consumption, of judgment, as mediated witnesses. But what is the effect on the viewer's body-space? To desire and seek out surgical body modification, like that which is presented on screen? To distance oneself from the modified body on screen? To be a disengaged viewer, hostile or critical? My hypothesis is that the viewer defines his or her body, in relation to the mediated body, using technologies that both ensnare and encompass the viewing subject. I will outline two quite different examples of online activity in order to address the questions and hypotheses posed above. One example comes from the popular trend of fan web forums and online discussion boards associated with makeover reality TV shows. The other, while not directly associated with a makeover reality TV show, reflects the ubiquity of makeover culture as well as a unique instance of body modifiers using humour to challenge and disrupt the popular narrative options available to women participants of makeover reality TV, which most often defines women as victims.

Online web forums dedicated to discussions of makeover reality TV are numerous and highly trafficked. They tend to attract both fans and detractors, and include topics which range from support for the participants and cosmetic surgery questions, to relationship troubles, employment concerns and personal stories of grief and loss. Hosted by network websites such as Fox and ABC, search engines such as Yahoo! and Google, and on popular television websites like *Fans of Reality TV* and *Television without Pity*, online web forums provide a wealth of material for critical analysis. Message boards dedicated to shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* support complex systems of online dialogue and partnership in the context of anonymous spaces.

In a strand of dialogue about the moral and emotional implications of cosmetic surgery performed on *Extreme Makeover*, a contributor to a web forum hosted on the site *Fans of Reality TV*, with the user name forte2play, employs the individualistic and psychological discourse often spouted on makeover shows, simultaneously critiquing the modes of culture that demand conformity and opening up the dialogue to others:

> I realize that there are all kinds and sizes of people in this world that love themselves just as they are. Regardless of size or shape and I so admire these people. They truely [sic] are the most beautiful people this world has. But regardless of how much I admire these people I can't seem to except [sic] my body, I never have and it's [sic] held me back in so many areas of my life that it is just down right [sic] sad. An excuse, maybe. So for all of you that don't agree with all this madness my heart goes out to you and I really admire you for just being and loving yourself. You are all beautiful people who are passionate and loving. Why else would [you] be here supporting all of us. And like all of you have said, the people in it for vanity will truely [sic] always be disappointed with life and will never find happiness. Myself, I love life now I just want to have a normal self image so I can find the strength to get out more than I do and show my son all the beautiful things in this world (not the “beautiful people”). (forte2Play)

This response reveals the writer’s ambivalence about beauty, normalcy and self-acceptance. Such people recognize the possibility of beauty in others who do not meet the standard established in the media, they acknowledge and promote the support of others in the web forum community and yet they are unable to resolve the persistent sense of abnormalcy.

The relationship between body and society is problematized in this post, as the speaker desires personal satisfaction through surgery and yet hopes to lead by example for her son in order to reveal the beauty of the

world as opposed to the (seemingly insincere or inauthentic) beauty of people. This example is especially poignant in demonstrating the muddy boundaries of empowerment and subordination expressed through the discourse of embodiment found in makeover culture. The technologies of thought which circulate within makeover reality TV help forte2play describe her experience of embodiment, and yet they also arguably dictate what can be said in the context of body modification. The body-space of forte2play comes to be known through this discourse and is made meaningful through the convergent technologies of television and internet in this instance.

Another interesting example of somatechnics practices reflected online emerges from within makeover culture but does not specifically refer to viewers of makeover reality TV. This example is no less relevant, however, because it exists (and can only exist) as a result of the normalization of cosmetic surgery that makeover reality TV has fostered. As Virginia Blum asserts, we are all a part of a "postsurgical culture," whether or not we undergo cosmetic surgery or procedures, since makeover culture has become ubiquitous and associated with notions of healthy aging and bodily upkeep (44). Interestingly, this next example reflects a refusal on the part of contributors to enact the ideological power roles of expert and patient so prevalent in makeover reality TV. The website and internet community *Yes They're Fake! Plastic Surgery Patient Education & Support Network*, founded by Marianne Guarena, presents multiple narratives in the form of testimonials, chat groups and general information on cosmetic surgery procedures. The group's annual celebration, affectionately called "Boobapalooza," is perhaps the best example of the community's attitude, and while it exists alongside the makeover culture discourse found on *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover*, it also represents a contrast in that the women celebrate their decisions to have cosmetic surgery in a way that does not require them to begin by confessing their self-hatred or relationship problems (the standard narrative entry point in makeover reality TV); nor does it focus heavily on the power of the cosmetic surgeon and his benevolence (another common trope of the genre). Instead, the processes of researching, undergoing, recovering from and sharing the experiences of cosmetic surgery procedures are narrated from a position of self-determination and informed decision-making. By not positioning women who undergo or desire cosmetic surgery as victims, *Yes They're Fake!* rejects the disempowered role of women repeatedly featured on makeover reality TV. Instead, women rely on each other for support, advice and information. Moreover, the name of the organization and the title of its annual event, *Yes They're Fake!* and "Boobapalooza," deny the cultural secrecy that has, in the past, silenced women through shame and fear of exposure of cosmetic surgery and the associated accusations of inauthenticity. *Yes They're Fake!* uses humour to acknowledge what feminist critics like Donna Harraway and Anne Balsamo have been saying for years, and what

somatechnics scholars have also come to rely on: there is no longer a natural human body-state; we are all part human, part machine; we are all cyborgs. Thus, misgivings about the inauthentic body or the technologically-altered body are pointless. *Yes They're Fake!* exposes and plays with this post-modern tenet.

Here, a theory of somatechnics can help feminist media scholars move towards a more fruitful analysis of contemporary body modification and the technologies through which we come to know the bodies of others and ourselves. By recognizing our own place as viewers (and perhaps as participants), and the somatechnic balance we ourselves are engaged in when thinking about and witnessing mediated body modification in the genre of makeover reality TV, our research can better engage with the relational and complex elements with which bodies come to be known through everyday practice and lived experience. The examples used in this essay were meant to highlight the inextricability of body and technology, and the technologies of thought which construct our understanding of reality in a cultural context where body modification has become a routine and normalized practice (or, at least it is routine and normal within a North American mainstream media context).

Notes

[1] French performance artist ORLAN is regularly featured in the context of non-traditional cosmetic surgery (cf. Davis "My Body is My Art"). On non-traditional viewer response and interpretations, see Camille Bacon-Smith's and Henry Jenkins' respective studies of female fans of *Star Trek* in 1992.

[2] Some of *The Swan* participants have appeared in *People* magazine (cf. Gliatto), on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and in local newspapers (cf. Cassidy).

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IV.

Controlled Interfaces: Imaging the Body as Research Object and Artistic Space

The Body as Object: From Body Image to Meta-Body

Robert Pritchard

The use of the body or body image in an artistic context provides varying levels of support or opposition to artistic messages, especially when presented in a spatially-aware context. I describe my use of the body or body image in three of my filmic, musical and interactive performative art works, and discuss the philosophical, technical and spatial considerations that inform the creation and presentation of each. The examples include two- and three-dimensional works that use real or imaged bodies, as well as acoustic, electro-acoustic and mixed sound. I then present my work-in-progress with a specific meta-instrument – a gesture-controlled speech synthesis system – and explain how this meta-body is used in artistic performances.

The body influences my art in three ways. The first deals with the imaged body in both concrete and abstract forms, the second focuses on the real body and how I have used it in a manner somewhat unusual within concert music performance, while the third involves the virtual body and the use of synthetic speech controlled by physical gestures. In each of these discussions I relate how the placement of the virtual or real body in the presentation space affects our perception of the performance and the artistic messages.

By taking this approach the discussion moves from the imaged body to the physical body and then to the meta-body, a path that takes us from the known through to the unfamiliar. Here, the unfamiliar is the meta-body, which is a body 'beyond' the current human form that has abilities beyond those of our current physical body. My work in this and related areas goes back twenty years and has included pressure and myoelectric sensors on dancers, custom sensors for responsive sound performance, sensors for controlling video processing, position trackers and our University of British Columbia's GRASSP and DIVA systems for voice synthesis in a performance.[1] As defined by Jean et al., "A computer-mediated interaction results in meta-instruments, which use algorithms for music generation so that a particular gesture of the performer can have practically any musical result" (428). The meta-instrument I work with is a meta-body, a system that allows the user to talk and sing using Cybergloves® and gestures to control sound synthesis software routines.

My art is based on extensive training and practice as a composer with the belief that my responsibility is to provide the most satisfying sonic experience possible by controlling sound and the perception of time. Limiting myself to controlling these two parameters is a practical approach, since

these are things that I know I can affect. On the other hand while I am aware that part of the satisfaction experienced in listening to my music lies in an emotional response, I cannot directly or consistently control the specific emotional response of all listeners: there are as many possible emotional responses as there are people.[2]

Meyer and Kivy both address the issue of emotion and music with Meyer proposing a compromise between formalism and expressionism in which the pleasure of an intellectual understanding of a musical work is combined with the pleasure of an emotional response caused by the formal relations of a work. Kivy presents and defends a position of "enhanced formalism" in which music possesses expressive properties, but not necessarily emotions. I tend to agree with both of these approaches for they resonate with my experience of my own and others' sound art, and they allow for the combination of an intellectual and emotional response to art. This response is part of what I feel when I am writing what I consider to be 'good' music.

The expansion of my sonic art to include the physical or imaged body introduces new elements into performances within the physical and virtual acoustic space. These new elements are related to how the sonic and visual experiences are presented as well as to how they are received due to the audience's expectations and previous experience. Presentation – over which I have some control – can involve physical or virtual space, single or multiple sound sources (human or electronic), and changing sound locations through real or virtual (panned) movement. On the other hand an audience's prior expectations and previous experiences are extremely difficult to influence or counteract; the creative artist can only hope that at some level there will be an empathetic response to what is presented and represented by the physical or imaged body.

For me the use of the real and virtual body are not in opposition, but are points on a plane: the physical body, the imaged body and the virtual or meta-body occupy different areas of this plane, but they also merge and blend at their respective boundaries. The decision as to which one (or ones) to use in an artistic work is not based on which is most attractive in itself, but on which will best support the artistic ideas that I wish to explore and express. To illustrate this I will discuss three of my pieces: a short film, one of my interactive works, and a choral work. I will then move on to a discussion of my work with advanced technologies and body gestures.

Crisis

Crisis[3] is an example of how my work with sound and my awareness of space has a powerful influence on my use of body images. As part of the breast cancer documentary *17 Short Films about Breasts* this piece objectifies the body in a manner that is both thought-provoking and highly

discomforting. Cinematographer Cathryn Robertson, who produced and directed *17 Short Films about Breasts*, asked me to create a short film using images of the female body that she had videoed, and she wanted an approach resulting in a feeling similar to my interactive work *Strength*, which I discuss below. She also planned to have this scene segue into an intimate bedroom scene of two people sleeping illuminated by candles.

Robertson had asked me to create a film that was sensitive and intimate, a celebration of the body and human spirit, something that would flow smoothly into the following scene. However, after I had begun work on my film a critical moment occurred when Robertson asked me to include "battle words" from cancer survivors. These were technical and emotional words that recurred during several of her interviews with cancer survivors, as each woman discussed her response to her diagnosis and treatment. The effect of these battle words on me changed the intended impact of my film from comforting to disturbing.

Accordingly, I hired two female singers to record the words and, as one often does when gathering source material, I recorded far more material than I intended to use, asking each woman to whisper, speak and shout the collection of words in three different ways. I also recorded long, soothing tones sung by one of the women and a variety of breathing sounds. Using these new materials I layered the vocal tracks of the battle words, separating their entries so they formed a dense musical canon, and then mixed in the sung tones and breathing. The effect was chilling, and provided an idea for the visual component. Something that had struck me while viewing all of the tapes from Robertson's shoots was the frailty of the human body in comparison to some of the medical equipment. The marking, objectification and dehumanisation of the body reminded me of meat charts at a butcher shop, and I adopted this metaphor for a new shoot. Using grease paint I divided a model's body into segments, printed the battle words inside each division and then shot stills with harsh lighting, freezing each moment and objectifying the body even more. The effect is powerful, and makes the audience quite uncomfortable with each viewing.[4]

Here part of the art lies in creating an empathy with and an understanding of what the body and mind undergo when being exposed to cancer. That empathy is most strongly generated by the audio. When listening to the soundtrack alone one still understands the main idea of *Crisis*, but viewing the images without sound removes most of the emotional impact. Lacking sound, the purely visual artwork becomes clinical, rather than emotional, and it fails to move us as strongly. This difference reflects my approach and my training, firstly as a composer and secondly as a filmmaker. However, the addition of the body images to the sound track results in a startling, discomforting experience, one where the emotional sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

Spatially, the two types of media used in this work are presented in two dimensions. The visuals are present in a standard screen projection that we experience as an image on a flat, vertical plane. The sound emanates from a two-dimensional arrangement of sources, with the speakers located equidistant from the screen's centre and, ideally, equidistant from the viewer, resulting in a perception of two point sources of sound located at specific coordinates. This two-dimensional arrangement is so familiar to us that we readily accept it as a norm, welcoming the presentation of sound and image in this configuration.

As a result the work is received as a unified and intimate experience of audio and visual elements. However, the actual methods of production are quite contrary to that. At no point in the production of this work were any of the singers and model present at the same time. The use of multitracking in the recording studio creates a false experience of space, for we make the ear imagine that all individuals are present and performing simultaneously. Additionally, the ear is led to believe that we can hear one person's voice as if they or we are simultaneously at several locations, resulting in vocalisms ranging from a distant, strident shout to an intimate, breathy gasp. An even greater spatial misrepresentation occurs in that a single person's performance can occur on multiple concurrent tracks of sound, as if multiple copies of themselves are present and performing together. Writing on contemporary sound recording, Wurtzler refers to this practice as resulting in "the creation of a copy for which no original exists" (100).

A similar effect occurs visually through multiple layers of images being presented. The overlaying and merging of images allows us to view different parts of the body simultaneously, yet it is physically impossible for the human eye to be that close to the surface of the skin and see that much of the body. It is as if the viewer is in several locations at the same time, resulting in multiple concurrent viewpoints, and we experience a virtual intimacy through the proximity of the camera's lens and the surfeit of images.

Despite the spatial distortion of audio and visual elements we accept the spatial and temporal discontinuities. Multitracked voices become a choir of sound, and the layered images merge as if we are in a dream state. This is not surprising, since these techniques are mainstays of the commercial recording and film industry, and we are all quite familiar now with the results. However, it is worth noting anew how such spatial discontinuities become transparent and seemingly 'natural' to us when experiencing two-dimensional media.

Thus, the materials gathered in my many hours of work in multiple spatial and temporal dimensions are compressed into two spatial dimensions and a single timeline. This overlapping, mixing and compressing creates an interesting confluence of materials, regardless of the actual content. On the other hand, there is a distance between the art and the audience, caused by

the presentation of two-dimensional art in three-dimensional space. In the next section I discuss one approach to creating a greater engagement with the audience by moving into three dimensions for a performance.

Strength

Strength[5] is a concert work involving a live musician and projected images within a responsive environment. It is – among other things – an acoustic exploration of the registral extremes of the alto saxophone, coupled with sampled and processed live sound. Its sonic materials include pitched modal and/or chromatic passages and pure *acousma* or electro-acoustic sound. The pre-recorded sounds inhabit the front stereo channels, while the real time processed saxophone sounds are diffused by computer through four channels, circling and moving around the audience. The written score is not extremely difficult in terms of the rhythmic and tempo demands, but the use of the extended range makes it a challenge for performers to play in a musical and fluid manner.[6]

Visually *Strength* represents an exploration of the nude male form, using high contrast side lighting, tight close ups, slow motion at five percent normal speed, multiple layers of images, and water, roses and petals against the skin. Cathryn Robertson shot the video and I did the direction, sound and video editing, and post-production.[7] Spatially *Strength* mixes the dimensions used in presentation, with the video images and some stereo audio appearing in two dimensions, while the live performer and multi-channel audio processing are three dimensional.

Like many of my pieces *Strength* deals with questions of life and death, with references to Christian mythology and classical Greek sculpture. Here the body and water represent life, though the body also represents impermanence and the water represents time. We see time slowed down, flowing over the body and searching out all its curves and creases, its beauty and imperfections. The recurring breathing sounds throughout the piece support the idea of life, especially those created by breathing through the saxophone. However, these sounds stand in contrast to the harsh sampled and processed machine sounds that create a sense of sterility and inexorability.

The closing section of *Strength* references the opening visuals and saxophone line. The close-ups of the feet now have individual rose petals dropping into view, symbolising decay and death, and the final shot begins with a reflection of a petal hovering above the flow of water over slate. As the petal falls it fades, seemingly absorbed by the water but never hitting the stones beneath. This shot is accompanied by processed breathing and rain stick sounds, but we now hear the breathing as long breaking ocean waves rather than as individual breaths. These final sonic and visual gestures reference death and transfiguration, or the absorption of the soul by the divine.

Overall, the objectification, abstraction and spiritualization of the body in *Strength* through close-ups, time shifts and multiple layers allow the listener/viewer to experience a celebration of the human body. Although I reference Christian and classical Greek mythologies, the emphasis is on the immediate experience of image and sound, with each supporting the other. It is important to note that the musical aspects of this work were determined before the visual: I began this work primarily as a musical expression, adding the visuals in response to the musical gestures, and I am confident that a purely sonic performance of the piece can stand on its own as a viable artistic experience.

Within the work itself there is spatial transposition as the viewer is led upwards and around the male body, with the flow of water emphasizing the visual and surface-level changes of depth. In the creative processes leading up to the finished work the same spatial and temporal distortion used in *Crisis* was used in the audio and video processes of *Strength*. *Strength* has the added elements of spatialization in that the live performer occupies part of the stage, and the live sound is processed and distributed through a four-channel surround-sound system. The performer is placed closer to the audience than the large projected images, and both her presence and her location shift the presentation from two dimensions into three. This use of a live performer fixes the whole performance temporally and spatially, for unlike a film or video available in DVD or online format, a proper performance of *Strength* must take place in a concert environment, occurring as a group or communal experience in a fixed space for a fixed time.

Sonically the audience hears the recorded soundtrack for the images in a stereo diffusion emanating from both sides of the screen. In the absence of distance and direction cues, stereo sound is perceived as two-dimensional sound, and as such it matches the video dimensions. In contrast to this, the saxophonist's direct sound comes from the stage while the computer-processed sound of the saxophone is diffused through the surround-sound system, providing a three-dimensional shifting reference point whose timbre and location contrast with the live sound.

As a result, the audience must choose where to focus visual and sonic attention – the flat screen of images vs. the activities of the live performer or the direct sound of the performer vs. the processed sound. In most performances the audience constantly shifts between the choices, resulting in different experiences for different performances. In order to emphasize the sonic aspect of the work the opening section of *Strength* and parts of the closing section have no images; the presence of a large screen and projection system sets up expectations of large images, and the denial of projected visual stimulation ensures that the audience focuses on the sound of the live performer as well as the pre-recorded samples. Elsewhere in the work there is no sound processing or no diffusion through the surround-sound system, thereby

focusing attention on the visual images and the performer's physical activities.

While the performer's presence and actions contribute to the perception of the piece, it should be noted that the majority of the performer's physical activities are a by-product of producing sound with a manually controlled musical instrument, especially those gestures performed by the fingers on the instrument. These gestures may enhance the performance experience for the audience but the gestures are not the result of an intention to communicate more than the musical experience. Those gestures that do occur take place within a restricted area, both in terms of stage location and in terms of the three-dimensional space around the performer. The next work that I discuss breaks out of these restrictions, by using gestures and the space around the performers to communicate musical and non-musical ideas.

Three Songs of Life

Three Songs of Life[8] is dedicated to the memory of a friend who died of breast cancer. Written for women's choir, hand bells and gestures, its three movements or sections take the listener/viewer through discovery, anguish, confusion, denial and – finally – acceptance. The texts are taken from different sources, including my own writings, conversations by patrons of a campus coffee shop and the Bible. In each section the singers are required to execute gestures that include brushing away hair, rocking back and forth, cupping a breast, or placing a comforting hand on the singer next to them. The final gesture in the piece has the performers lock eyes with an audience member and with one hand reach towards that person while singing.

By using motion as an integral component of the piece I broaden the music concert experience to include visual, dramatic elements, using the body to force the audience out of the normal comfortable choral experience. Indeed, the cupping of breasts, the locking of eyes and the reaching out are intended to create an uncomfortable intimacy between everyone involved, a reflection of the discomfort and anguish created by the disease. Thus, in performing this work the body has a more active role in projecting and supporting musical emotion through gestures, rather than being a passive object under review or else ignored.

Spatially, the use of synchronized and unsynchronized gestures emphasizes that the choir is not merely an organization for the production of sound but, rather, is comprised of individuals who occupy and use space for communicating an artistic experience. The simple, mundane gestures that are executed take on a greater meaning since they occur in 'stage space', a location where all gestures are read for meaning and content. Locking eyes with and reaching out towards an audience member at the end of the piece not only expands the stage space, it invades the private space of that listener/

viewer, forcing him or her to decide whether to accept, reject, avoid or consider the messages and emotions expressed by that member of the choir. In this way the physical distance between performer and audience is eliminated, and the exploration of those messages and emotions becomes a shared or communal experience.

In discussing *Crisis*, *Strength* and *Three Songs of Life* I have moved from two-dimensions into three, beginning with a two-dimensional work that is purely electronic in delivery and ending with a three-dimensional work that is purely acoustic. In so doing my examples illustrate how I have used the body to support and convey my artistic ideas about spatiality and performativity, but another area of my artistic work involves the use of sensors for controlling speech and image synthesizers. While working in this area, my use or view of the human body 'as object' changes to focusing on bodily abilities, as technology augments and/or replaces those abilities in artistic performance.

DIVAs

One of the research projects in which I am currently involved is *The Visual Voice: Digital Ventriloquized Actors*[9] (DIVAs), taking place at the *Media And Graphics Interdisciplinary Centre* (MAGIC) at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with electrical engineer Sidney Fels and linguist Eric Vatikiotis-Bateson. This project is based on my past research involving *Gesturally Realized Audio, Speech and Song Performance* (GRASSP).

As mentioned above, I refer to the GRASSP and DIVA systems as examples of meta-bodies. Other such systems include those by performance artist Stelarc who embraces and promotes a radical augmentation of the human body through technology. Whereas my approach to the meta-body maintains a physical boundary between the human and the technology, Stelarc believes the body to be "obsolete" and encourages the objectification of the body through the addition of sensors, instrumentation and interfaces, moving us towards a cyborgian society. While recognizing that Stelarc's philosophy is an outgrowth or reflection of us all as we accept dialysis machines, cochlear implants, pacemakers and computer-controlled prostheses, I prefer to celebrate the 'natural' abilities of the expert performer, creating a meta-body that expands the possibilities of the human without using invasive technology. Part of this approach references the work of Machover with hyper-instruments, but the meta-body that I am helping to develop holds the possibility of a human controlling synthetic sounds and images of multiple personalities, performed locally or networked globally. Thus, in a manner similar to that of Stelarc and Machover, the spatial influence of the body in performance can be expanded to encompass a world of audiences.

In terms of specifics, GRASSP and DIVAs are performance environments where a user can improvise speech and song by wearing Cybergloves® and position trackers. The GRASSP environment makes use of a formant-based speech synthesizer, which is controlled by mapping the finger angles of the performer to specific phonemes. The DIVA project has continued to use this method but has been developed into a wearable, mobile system (Day Fraser, Fels and Pritchard). Concurrent with this work another University of British Columbia research project – *Artisynth* (Fels et al.) – has created computer models of the human vocal tract, lips and facial features for use in medical research. The DIVA project intends to make use of the Artisynth results and synthesize speech by using the finger angles to control the *Artisynth* articulatory processes. Because the *Artisynth* project includes virtual faces, the DIVA speech synthesis will also include projected facial animations in performance. All of this will result in a single performer simultaneously performing with real and synthetic voices and faces.

In performance a DIVA, as a performer of multiple tasks, is quite active, with a significant amount of arm and finger movement required. It is soon apparent that the vertical height of the right hand controls pitch, and the hand's location in the horizontal plane is related to vowel production. Less intuitive is the role of all the fingers in their gloves, but the average person soon recognizes that there is some connection between changing finger positions and changing sounds. Importantly, though, is the recognition that in order to talk, the DIVA must 'own' the space around her, for the empty space around her is what allows her to speak. If that space is filled in or occupied by other bodies or objects, they constitute 'noise' that interferes with the production of the DIVA's language and the communication of the artistic work. Thus, a DIVA must have unrestricted access to all of the space within her arms' reach: to deny her that access is to deny her a voice.

An important difference between the GRASSP project and *The Visual Voice* project is that a DIVA is capable of being fully mobile. That is, the user is not constrained by cables or data feeds connected to research lab computers or monitors. Not only does this allow unfettered access to all parts of a stage in performance, it means that a DIVA can also be involved in the world outside the concert hall and the research lab, taking part in communal spatial interactions that most of us take for granted.

Through our research with the DIVAs we are able to expand the emotional and communicative abilities of a live performer: for instance, an individual can simultaneously present a character's outer voice and inner thoughts, either as solo speech or as conversation, or both. Future developments will enable a user to also control sound location, video processing and kinetic sculptures mimicking or opposing the performer's own motions. In my piece *What Does a Body Know?*[10] I explore the text as well as the interaction of the human and synthetic voice, both of which are generated by the

physical body. As listeners/viewers we experience the timbral, gestural and emotional conflicts of the two voices, and the experience raises questions about the identities, messages and roles of each. Are we to view/listen to the performance as an expression of a single person, or do we hear this more as a 'duet', but a duet with only one mind involved in the actual performance? Through investigating and answering such questions I hope to create artistic performances that allow for new combinations of sounds and body movements to support new concepts of artistic expression within the visual and acoustic spaces in the physical and virtual domains.

I do not view this creation of a meta-body as artificial or contrived. When I presented the results of some of my work at the 2007 conference of the Vancouver Institute for Song Interpretation a singer asked, "But where is the soul in this voice?" For me, GRASSP and DIVA use a technology that enables us to expand our range and types of communication, and thus they can be compared to a violin, or oboe, or pipe organ: they are extensions of the body just like any other musical instrument. The body and its capacity to create gestures are fundamental to this work, and there is no attempt to bypass our capacity to make large and small motor movements. Instead, those abilities are embraced and bodies in both the physical and virtual/synthetic realms are accepted.

Summary

The human body informs my art in a variety of ways. It holds an attraction as a significant element in human communication yet it is usually ignored in the concert hall. The sound and look of the body can speak directly to the audience, and its electronic abstraction and representation in close-ups when coupled with close-miking can create an immediate intimacy. On the other hand, the physicality of the human body in close proximity in the concert environment can create discomfort in the audience member. My exemplary works discussed here demonstrate the variety of ways in which the body influences my art by allowing me to explore and manipulate our preconceived and discovered expectations of body image, gesture and sound in two and three dimensions, both closely and at a distance. By working in this manner I am able to communicate in different ways and on different levels.

In a parallel manner, the work carried out by the DIVA project and researchers such as d'Alessandro et al., Kuratate and Kinoshita, Birkholz and Jackèl, and Cook should allow me to celebrate the body experiences involving gesture, speech and song in previously unknown ways, and to express new artistic messages. For me, there is a promise that within a few years the body as object (in accordance both with Plessner's concept of having a body[11] as well as being the object of the gaze) and the body object (the

concept of being a body or even a meta-body) will be united in my art: I hope that will be as satisfying for audiences as I expect it will be for me.

Notes

[1] The research projects *Gesturally Realized Audio, Speech and Song Performance* (GRASSP) and *The Visual Voice: Digital Ventriloquized Actors* (DIVAs) are collaborations with electrical engineer Sidney Fels and linguist Eric Vatikiotis-Bateson at the *Media And Graphics Interdisciplinary Centre* (MAGIC). GRASSP received support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SHRCC). The *Visual Voice* research project is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada. Project information can be found at <http://debussy.music.ubc.ca/pritchard/> under "Research" and at <http://www.magic.ubc.ca/artisynth/pmwiki.php?n=VisualVoice.HomePage>.

[2] This fact and the various questions surrounding music and the expression or stimulus of emotion have been discussed by many, e.g. Hanslick, Robinson and Radford.

[3] *Crisis* can be viewed at <http://debussy.music.ubc.ca/pritchard> under "rep. works".

[4] For me the effect strikes close to home, as cancer has been present in my extended family.

[5] An excerpt of *Strength* can be viewed at <http://debussy.music.ubc.ca/pritchard/> under "rep. works".

[6] Recent research has shown that in order for a saxophonist to generate pitches in the highest register, the entire vocal tract must be "tuned" to support the vibrations of the saxophone, another interesting discovery about the relation between bodies and musical instruments in performance (Chen, Smith, Wolfe).

[7] In 2007 *Strength* received a *Unique Award of Merit* from the Canadian Society of Cinematographers.

[8] Excerpts from *Three Songs of Life* can be viewed at <http://debussy.music.ubc.ca/pritchard/> under "rep. works".

[9] An excerpt from *What Does a Body Know?* can be viewed at <http://www.magic.ubc.ca/artisynth/uploads/VisualVoice/DIVA-Performance-Japan09HQ.mov>.

[10] Premiered on 24 Jan. 2007 at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. Perf. Marguerite Witvoet as DIVA, text by Meryn Cadell, music and diffusion by Robert Pritchard.

[11]"A human being always and conjointly *is* a living body (head, trunk, extremities, with all that these contain) . . . and *has* the living body as this physical thing" (Plessner 34-35, emphasis in the original).

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Touched: Organization, Control and Emergence in Choreographed Performance Systems

Henry Daniel

Control, complexity, self-organization and emergence are terms that have long driven research on the behaviour of systems in the sciences. However, little of that work has been contextualized in the arts, and even less so in choreography and performance. Human computing scientist Arthur Kirkpatrick, roboticist Richard Vaughan and choreographer Henry Daniel explore how these issues can resonate in arts/science research through their collaboration on *Touched*, an interdisciplinary performance work, which takes as its point of departure two images that evoke themes of creation and destruction. The *Nataraj*, a potent symbol of Hindu culture, and Michelangelo's *Hand of Adam and God*, a symbol of Renaissance Christian art, provide fertile ground for a choreographic examination of the behaviour of human and technological systems in an interactive context. The research generates some quite unexpected results, not least of all the notion of an intelligent body as an emergent 'choreographic organism'.*

Introduction

We often use the human body as reference system and refer to bodies of literature, the arm of the law, the body as a text or as a site for discourse and other figurative expressions of corporate, mental, spiritual and emotional bodies. In ancient Egyptian and Greek architecture, the cubit was a unit based on the length of the human forearm (Lawlor 93-95); supported by his extensive research of the human body, the renowned Italian artist and scholar Leonardo da Vinci also bequeathed to posterity an extensive body of multidisciplinary work that is still used as a point of reference. The two-volume *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, edited by Edward MacCurdy, is a testament to the comprehensive research carried out by this artist during a lifetime of work in this area. In short, the human body has always played a significant role in determining how we visualize our world, as well as how we construct our artefacts, institutions, identities and rituals within it. This perspective, however, is being fundamentally challenged by a different paradigm. Computer-based technology is becoming the most important tool for framing and organizing bodies in society, and for creating and disseminating information in the twenty-first century. Indeed, this technology is single-handedly responsible for ushering in a new kind of post-humanist thinking that simultaneously shifts the emphasis away from the human body and draws attention to the body as part of a larger 'systems ecology'.

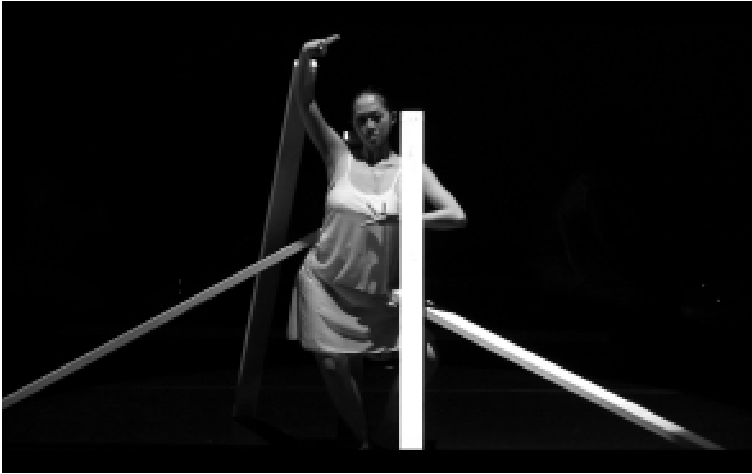

Fig. 1. *Touched.* Perf. Lily Hsu and Scheherazaad Cooper. Photogr. Henry Daniel.

In an attempt to explore some of the issues related to this so-called post-humanist shift (see Hayles; Pepperell; Badminton), a team of scientists, media artists and performers came together to collaborate on a new arts/science project. One outcome of this endeavour is *Touched,* a choreographic work featuring human beings and technological systems as 'performers' in a constructed environment. As a choreographer and dance scholar, my focus is on the movement of bodies and bodies performing in personal, social, cultural and institutional contexts. Before turning to the more theoretical considerations of *Touched* I would first like to introduce the reader to some of the cultural contexts of the research.

Touched takes as its starting point two popular images from two very different religious/philosophical traditions. The first is a detail from Michelangelo's fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, *The Hands of God and Adam*, an image that symbolizes the transference of the spark of consciousness from the divine to the human realm in the Christian religious tradition. Figure two shows the dancing figure of Lord Shiva in the *Nataraj*. Shiva, a key figure in the Hindu religion, represents the source of all movement in the universe as (s)he dances the world into and out of existence.

The choice of these two images is self-explanatory; Shiva is the lord of dance in a universe where bodies are energetic configurations in constant motion. Adam is the first human creation of an Old Testament Jewish God (subsequently adopted by Christianity) in one of these worlds. Each of these deities commands a position at the top of a highly structured system in which each element 'below' supports the one 'above'. In this instance, support is

framed as worship (i.e. constant, singular and undivided devotion, emulation and self-sacrifice) and below and above refer to importance in a hierarchical tree of life. The entire material structure of the world is thus seen as a self-supporting system where the divine activity of creation, maintenance and destruction plays out. This is the unique 'performance' that Shiva and God are constantly engaged in and which this essay seeks to draw parallels with.

Fig. 2. *Touched.* Perf. Scheherazaad Cooper and cast. Photogr. Henry Daniel.

In the yogic tradition of India, intellect is considered a material thing that issues from the same source as the natural world's physical objects, the two differing only in degrees of materiality and distance from an original source. This tradition sees biological and psychic activities as material aspects of the same phenomenon in which inner and outer worlds correspond (Eliade 19). In the philosophical thinking of Samkhya and Yoga,[1] the basis of most yogic philosophy and practice in both East and West, no new form can progress beyond the possibilities of existence present from the beginning of the universe. New species, as Western theories of evolution suggest, are therefore impossible (22). Eliade argues that the generation of the physical world, according to these teachings, is a psychic act of self-knowledge. As such, objective and psychological phenomena form a common matrix in which every physical and mental phenomenon is a fragment of a great unity, each possessing a memory of its creative genesis. Hypothetically, then, an original creation can become known through the careful examination of an autonomous fragment of that whole. Both Hindu and Christian religious philosophies claim that the human being is just such a microcosmic fragment.

The aim of *Touched,* therefore, is to show how these perspectives bear on processes of creativity in choreography and dance by drawing on some fundamental concepts embedded in the two images mentioned above. The underlying premise is that these two systems of organization (Hindu and Christian), although vastly different in scale from the artifice of a choreographic work, bear certain similarities to the latter and to one another.

The mechanism through which I have chosen to frame these similarities is control. Shiva and God are controlling factors, they create, maintain and destroy and, perhaps more importantly, they allocate 'powers of creativity' in a descending order of hierarchy. Control here implies the setting up of structures, constraints, and parameters that influence or determine how and when bodies act, and then setting them in motion so that they can exploit their innate potential (i.e. perform their possibilities as created entities). The character Shiva is the controller, the maintainer and the destroyer of the theatrical universe. The Michelangelo figuration of a Christian God transfers the creative power of touch to human beings, who in turn create machines that simulate life at a grossly basic or 'artificial' level. The result is the creation of different levels of control, with humans seeking to manipulate their environment and one another. In other words, they behave as miniature gods. *Touched* draws on these two religious/philosophical concepts to create a choreographed world of its own, one that neither demonises technology as a purely negative force, nor upholds an idea of divinity that is unquestionable.

Fig. 3. *Touched*. Perf. Lily Hsu. Photogr. Henry Daniel.

Homo Faber: *Performing the Self*

> Technology is the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it. (Frisch 178–79)

Complexity, self-organization and emergence are processes inherent to the evolutionary processes of nature. They are also present in choreographic processes in the sense that simple movements evolve into more complex structures with emergent properties of their own. The audience tries to make sense of the system (i.e. the relationships between the independent dance steps, the nature of the bodies at play and what moves or is moved by them). This situation is made more complex with the inclusion of audio, video and a range of interactive and sensing technologies. *Touched* is a world that consists of human and 'divine' performers as well as artificially intelligent technological systems that together bring forth something that is literally grounded in an artifice.

The premiere performance of *Touched* took place on 3 Apr. 2008, and was comprised of sixteen performers, sixteen programmed robots (iRobot Roomba's with their internal 'organs' removed but with the original electronic brain intact); sixteen movement 'limiters' (pieces of 2" x 4" planks that were used in a number of configurations in the stage space (see fig. 3), two Motion Capture 'towers' to capture movement data from an interactive bracelet on the Shiva dancer's forearm (the data used to manipulate other audio-visual media within the performance space), three video data projectors used to direct the data from this and other sources (generated during the course of the performance), an interactive platform that Shiva spent most of 'her' time on (the dancer playing that role was female), and two cameras, one overhead and another facing the proscenium arch of the stage, both capturing movement information which was also used to generate and manipulate audio-visual data (see fig. 4).

The objective was not only to create an interesting theatrical event, but also to generate and manipulate a set of information that was capable of provoking fresh ideas and insights into the nature of intelligence and intentionality in human and non-human systems. The characters were designed to play roles within a structured but relatively open system that we hoped would exhibit significant emergent behaviours. By emergent I mean actions that were not explicitly programmed or choreographed, but which could emerge as a result of the complex interactions between individual parts of the system, be they through human or technological interventions. As the chief external 'programmer', so to speak, I hoped that these emergences would cast some light on the nature, meaning and inherent potential of the interactive system.

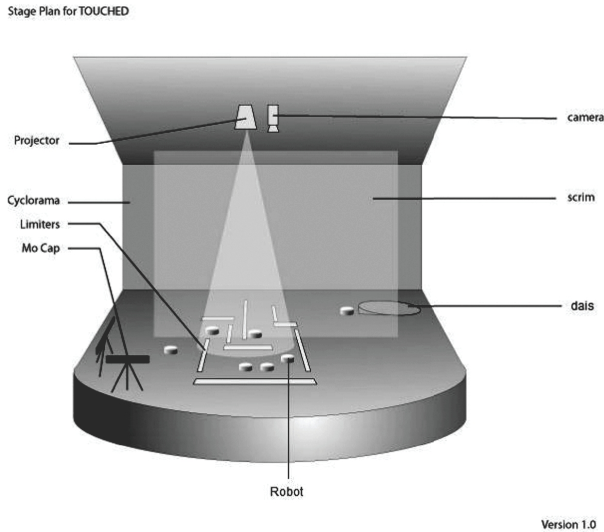

Fig. 4. *Touched*. Stage Design. Henry Daniel.

Self-organization means that a system has the ability to organize itself internally so that it increases in complexity through self-regulation. This implies that the system is self-sufficient, which is not completely true, however, since any system must have inputs and outputs in order to communicate with an external world. Self-organization suggests that a system does its work with the least possible influence or guidance from outside sources. In other words, it controls its own destiny, a potentially contentious idea since no individual or thing is isolated from its environment. The question here, nevertheless, is whether a dance can work within such a framework and whether a choreographer can sufficiently give up control to allow a system to assume its own shape. Can a choreographic work have a life or identity of its own, and is the choreographer's job merely setting up a series of possibilities and then observing where he or she can intervene when necessary? I argue that such a work starts off as a relatively open system and becomes increasingly closed due to a changing set of dynamics both internal and external to the work itself. This, then, is the nature of its self-organization.

Choreographing *Touched* was quite an unusual experience since halfway through the process, which included an enormous amount of improvisatory movement input from the performers and specific instructions about certain research protocols from the computing scientists, I handed over nearly sixty minutes of choreography to my two other collaborators, the internationally recognized media artist Mark Coniglio and choreographer Dawn

Stoppiello of Troika Ranch. Their instructions were to come up with fifteen minutes of a compact and cohesive 'demonstration' performance for the Body Spaces conference at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver on 15 Mar. 2008. The expected result was unusual in that choreographers almost never hand over their work to other choreographers, and certainly do not remain on the side quietly witnessing their work being "wrecked."[2] This was a very bold and risky act indeed. The idea, however, was to introduce an external, disorderly element into a system that had already attained some degree of equilibrium. It was also necessary to allow these two 'outsiders' into the process in order for them to gain an entry point of their own, independent of my interference. This process of re-organization lasted a full week, at the end of which the first demonstration performance took place at the UBC Dorothy Somerset Studio Theatre. Following this preview, we all returned to the studio to reconstruct the deconstructed choreography, a process that involved returning to material that had been discarded and explaining the intent behind some of it. This new dramaturgical approach meant that some new agendas had to be worked out. What emerged three weeks later at the second premiere was literally a new choreographic system.

Ilya Prigogine, a Nobel Prize laureate for his work on thermodynamic processes, has confirmed that over time "an isolated system, whatever its nature, will approach thermodynamic equilibrium" or "disorder" (qtd. in Schieve and Allen 5). He also proved that such a system, if it were subjected only to "weak flows of energy or matter, so that it remains only slightly out of equilibrium, adopts a steady state" (5). My recent choreographic work takes on its identity through a similar process. As choreographer I try to guarantee the work's survival, or the survival of my own ideas, even as it is confronted by inner and outer forces that threaten its "steady state." These forces can be as varied as the personal egos of collaborators, the intellectual weight of history or even debates about whether artists and scientists can truly work together to achieve something purposeful. *Touched* seeks to explore how these forces work within a system of choreography, in an environment where a number of collaborators, each of whom would like to maintain some degree of control over their intellectual property, nevertheless strive toward a larger collaborative purpose. Hierarchies are certain to develop which, by themselves, introduce further complexity to the system. The above are but a few of the tasks that confront a choreographer working at the intersection of art and science while using technology as a medium. In short: the performance *Touched* was a performance that operated at different systemic levels, including the performance of two scientific experiments,[3] dealing with motion tracking technology and autonomous robotic system, as well as including two concurrent choreographies within one theatre performance. Furthermore, it presented students as human subjects of a scientific research project and as dancers participating in a choreographic experiment. While it

invited the computing scientists to adapt to the experimental artistic concept of a choreographic organism, it also allowed the artists to appreciate the scientific perspective and to thus understand themselves as part of a technologically and choreographically guided system. The idea of performance having a very different set of imperatives in the arts and sciences is not lost here.

This brings us to the quotation from author Max Frisch at the beginning of this subchapter, which claims that technology often acts as a substitute for engaging in deeper human relationships. I argue that technology challenges us to probe the fundamental assumptions of our humanity, assumptions that entail perhaps inaccurate ideas about our abilities as human beings, which in turn points to a large discrepancy between who we currently are and what we can potentially become on the larger evolutionary scale of beings. Our claim that we are 'images of God' leads to all kinds of wild speculations concerning our abilities that are often overrated. I would associate such God-like abilities with a more human intelligence. The genus *homo faber* in Frisch's novel is more the practical man with no belief in providence or fate and who is convinced that a certain "truth" exists in the formulas of probability (Frisch 19-20). This sort of mind believes that science and technology can explain and solve all human problems, and one need not look elsewhere for solutions.[4] However, by the end of Frisch's novel, the main characters are either dead, about to die or emotionally, mentally, physically and psychologically devastated. One can expect results such as these from a simplistic perspective of the human being's relationship to technology, complexity and self-organization.

The point here is that together, human and non-human systems (including the technological) form a complex system of interdependencies, which are essential to an understanding of post-humanity. The picture that *Touched* attempts to create is one of a world of possibilities where art, science and technology can work together in a constructive manner, addressing concepts that cannot be adequately addressed by either. The post-human perspective sets the human being up as just one entity in an inherently self-organizing, goal-seeking ecological system with "huge environmental impacts" (Smith and Jenks 7). However, the goal here is much more than simply survival; it is continual creation. As philosopher Henri Bergson once argued, the intellect has a sense of at-home-ness with inanimate objects, hence our innate attraction to technology.[5] For Bergson however, the idea of evolutionary life involved far more than a self-organizing system. Indeed, to fit life into such a convenient formula, as our genus *homo faber* attempts to do, devalues it. At the moment we may be little more than *homo faber*, the "intentional," "*information*-modulated" and "*goal*-seeking" system (Dennett 26-7), governed by beliefs and desires too narrow for the evolutionary life that Bergson had in mind. Part of my argument here is that we are human beings as much as we are machines. A truly post-humanist view is only

possible if we are able to remove ourselves as the focus of a god-centred creation (Hebrew, Christian, Hindu or otherwise) and relocate ourselves in a more decentralized position where we are *capable* of being inspired images of an evolutionary category.

Embodying Information: Choreography as an AI and AL System

Given the fact that in the India's yogic tradition intellect is considered a material thing that issues from the same source as the natural world's physical objects, and that biological and psychic activities are considered material aspects of the same phenomenon, the idea of a choreographic organism (with living and artificially living elements) that has a life of its own does not seem implausible. Also, given that biological entities, computational machines and choreographic systems display some form of autopoietic organization,[6] an interesting scenario emerges that echoes the well-worn statement that life itself is a theatre of performance actions.[7] In *Touched* the idea is to create a new ritual theatre that includes others of vastly different and varying natures. In this theatre the divine, the human and the machine are equivalent concepts, parts of a system of interdependencies that furthers the broader agenda of evolutionary life, and notions of organization, control and emergence in choreographic systems.

Fig. 5. *Touched*. Perf. Marc Arboleda and Jeanette Kotowich. Photogr. Henry Daniel.

One possible model of a hierarchical system claims, for instance, that the intelligence of an organism is determined by what it serves for as food. In other words, the more intelligent an entity the more attractive it is as sustenance for even more intelligent forms of life. Many ancient and some modern cultures believe, for example, that human beings help to maintain the existence of the phenomenal world through their awareness and reaffirmation of it. Impressions are therefore seen as nourishment for "higher" forms of being just as food, water and air are for "lower" forms (Ouspensky 186-94). In this case new impressions, generated through conscious awareness of the world around us, are as important for the existence of the higher emotional and mental bodies as food, air and water is to the physical body. For instance the Kwakiutl, on the Northwest coast of British Columbia, believe that the world is full of intelligent sentient beings, with and without visible material forms, which is linked by a chain of reciprocal feeding (Walens 12). Life is thus a cyclical process where individuals are what they eat and become what they are eaten by.

It is interesting to compare this notion of an environment in which everything is alive and, according to its own degree of intelligence, aware of its environment, with more recent models of complex artificial life systems such as Daniel Dennett's anthropomorphic attribution of life to machines or Pinker's description of intelligence as a product of information which, when used rationally to form complex relationships, creates an intelligent environment (Pinker 65).

The fields of research, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Artificial Life (AL), also owe a lot to the work of scientists such as Alan Turing (1912–1954) and John von Neumann (1903–1957), as well as others who were deeply interested in the nature and power of computational systems and the latter's ability to simulate processes that were previously thought to be solely within the domain of human beings. While AI is concerned with the design of autonomous agents (software and/or hardware), AL has as its main focus the understanding and modelling of the formal rules of life. The emphasis on the latter was very much stimulated by the knowledge that an organism's "logical form" and its "material basis of construction" was clearly separable (Langton 11). This last fact became the starting point for the notion of a choreographic artifice where the structures of life and non-life could interact with one another. It was not a difficult step then, to my mind, to see how the idea of a choreographic organism could become a practical reality.

Since the initial goal of AI was to develop intelligent systems modelled on the human mind itself, researchers found it necessary to treat human beings as if they were complex distributed physical systems that operated under certain performance conditions. The key lies in the interpretation of the term performance, which here moves beyond efficiency, optimisation and computation, on the one hand, and human expression, on

the other. A choreographic organism challenges us to rediscover notions of performance that go far beyond the articulation of a biological body in front of an 'audience' that is located in the same space and views the event at the same time as it is taking place. *Touched*, therefore, attempts to create a life-like networked environment where organic and non-organic entities interact, and where perceptions of matter, time and space are altered – in short, a complex system with emergent properties. The level of complexity required to enable a machine to feel, think and act as a human being is currently impossible to achieve. Perhaps the type of strategies necessary to simulate a choreographic organism requires a radical rethinking of choreographic practice itself. Some of this kind of strategizing has been taking place for quite some time in research that attempts to simulate behaviour from movement (cf. Gray and Caldwell, Lenarcic and Thomas) and from speech, language and thought (cf. Hutchby, Cangelosi and Parisi, Mitkov). I argue that the underlying objective in all of these strategies is to alter 'audiences' perceptions by feeding them new impressions, hence altering their perceptive apparatus.

We have seen that the modern computer, although changing extremely fast, is only just beginning to mimic the remarkable capacity for self-organization that human beings possess. However, these machines need a much more sophisticated level of programming to even get close to accomplishing this. Human performance involves an innate and dynamic transfer of information from one place to another, information that is re-organized and re-presented through a special kind of 'effort'.[8] Part of my task as a choreographer is convince the performers that I need their help to realise a world that is not currently in existence. The choreography itself is only a framework, an organized system of movement actions that is in part suggested by them. As choreographer William Forsythe once claimed in a television interview, choreography is about organization: "either one is organizing the body, or . . . organizing bodies with other bodies, or a body with other bodies in an environment that is organized." This, he argued further, "seems to be the challenge of choreography at the end of the twentieth century."[9] I believe the challenge in the twenty-first century is to create much more intelligent choreographic systems and networks that involve a very different kind of relationship between audiences and performers.

If understanding the effects of organization in humans and machines was the challenge for choreographers and scientists alike in the twentieth century, control and emergence may be the two most important features to pay attention to in the twenty-first. And since the quality of perception is an important factor in what people are able to apprehend, audiences also need to know that becoming aware is a deeply dis-embodying and intensely de-corporealising act. Theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Patrice Pavis believe that audiences are capable of sensing the structures of a work in a

deeply embodied manner. They claim that our ways of looking are both conscious and unconscious, that our thoughts possess a kind of "spectator's body" (Pavis 127-30) and a "psychic" corporeality (Grosz 181). I do not know exactly what a spectator's body or a psychic body entails, but what I sense is that they are steps en-route to a type of dis-embodying process that makes the individual much more aware of 'becoming' than 'being'. In other words, becoming aware of the numerous stages of transition to and from different kinds of bodies.

Motion Capture and other sensor technologies simulate some of these stages by polarising bodies into notions of *virtual* and *real*. And as digital technology introduces new ways of presenting these types of bodies, new performance concepts and sets of practices also appear. Hence, as computation increasingly augments dance, the performer's physical actions, the computer's activities and the performer's thought processes and states of conscious awareness become its most important ingredients. If the performer's physical actions are reduced to almost nothing, the type of performance that results would be one where mental activity and computation are tightly integrated. But since we do not want to remove the physical body altogether from dance, viewers would then have no other choice but to depend on their ability to re-cognize and/or re-member actions and behaviours from their store of inherited or learned memories. In other words, they would have to take on the physicality of the performers and dance themselves. What this leaves us with is the following challenge: how can one involve the audience, as viewers who did not come to the theatre to perform, in an act of performance that needs something from them in order to complete the transaction?

Touched is part of an ongoing attempt to create a new kind of framework for this kind of creation. The *Touched* project as a larger entity that strives to bring scientists, performers and audiences together to become witnesses to new material interfaces between technology, the body and our phenomenal environment. My aim in choreographing this work was to permit each member of a team of collaborators to influence the process, and to allow the results to develop and evolve over time. This of course necessitates a strategic series of follow-up 'experiments', where choreography becomes the articulation of an intricate, complex but methodical process for extracting knowledge from bodies, human or otherwise, and re-presenting them in increasingly new forms.

Notes

[*] Henry Daniel's interdisciplinary research project *Touched* is a collaboration with the Simon Fraser University School of Computing Science, the SFU

School for the Contemporary Arts and the New York-based performance group Troika Ranch.

[1] The sage Kapila is reported to have written down his teachings in the Samkhya Pravachana Sutra, which was subsequently lost. Patanjali is reported to have written down the Yoga Sutras at a time that is also unknown but estimated to be between 300 BC and AD 300.

[2] Collaborator Dawn Stoppiello mischievously used the phrase "how to wreck a dance" to describe a process that American choreographer Susan Rethorst first utilised when deconstructing and then reconstructing a dance. Rethorst also invited trusted artists to do the "wrecking." In my case, it took enormous patience and self-control to do nothing while my work was being altered.

[3] See, for example, Matthew Crider et al. and Vaughan.

[4] Frisch inverts the Oedipal myth in high Greek tragic style by presenting the lives of Walter Faber, Hanna Landsberg-Piper and daughter Elisabeth Piper as a series of improbable events occurring in bewilderingly rapid succession.

[5] Cf. Bergson's original introduction to his *Creative Evolution* xxxv-xxxix.

[6] Autopoietic organization is a system's ability to produce and reproduce its constitutive elements while maintaining the boundary that separates it from the environment.

[7] Cf. Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, for example.

[8] I prefer to use the term 'effort' instead of 'free will' since the latter implies a more contentious position

[9] TV re-broadcast of a taped interview with choreographer William Forsythe (see Gardiner).

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Fig. 2. *Touched*. Perf. Scheherazaad Cooper and cast. SFU Mainstage Theatre, Burnaby, BC. 3 Apr. 2008. Photogr. © Daniel, Henry.

Fig. 3. *Touched*. Perf. Lily Hsu and Scheherazaad Cooper. SFU Mainstage Theatre, Burnaby, BC. 3 Apr. 2008. Photogr. © Daniel, Henry.

Fig. 4. *Touched*. Stage Design. © Daniel, Henry.

Fig. 5. *Touched*. Perf. Marc Arboleda and Jeanette Kotowich. SFU Mainstage Theatre, Burnaby, BC. 3 Apr. 2008. Photogr. © Daniel, Henry.

Appendix

Program Notes for Touched

Concept and Choreography: Henry Daniel.

Collaborators: Mark Coniglio – Guest Artist, Troika Ranch – Media Designer; Dawn Stoppiello – Guest Artist, Troika Ranch – Choreography; Jai Govinda – Bharatanatyam Instruction; Jamie Griffiths – Media Instruction; Scheherazaad Cooper – Guest Performer (Odissi Dance).

Performers: Victoria Dawe, Kim Dixon, Lily Hsu, Jeanette Kotowich, Anna Kraulis, Anny Lin (Violinist), Rachel McIlroy, Sarah Russell, Olivia Schaeffer, Janette Tseng, Jennifer Yau, Marc Arboleda, Shang-Han Chien, Chancz Perry, Justin Reist, Adam Basanta (Composer).

Media Team: Sammy Chien– Graphics, Media Design; Shang-Han Chien– Graphics, Media Design; Barry Liu – Videographer, Editor; Stefan Smulovitz– Interactive Technician; Richard Vaughan – Robotics; Arthur (Ted) Kirkpatrick – Motion Capture; Nelson Talbot, Graham Talbot, Nathaniel Sol – Running Crew; Rob Groeneboer – Camera/Pool Shoot.

Simon Fraser University Theatre Production Team: Olive Pang – Stage Manager; Kelsey Peacock & Jessica Cvjetkovic – Assistant Stage Managers; Carmen Hung – Lighting Design; Anil Chauhan – Technical Director; Scott Owens, Grace Park – Assistant Technical Directors.

University of British Columbia Theatre Production Team: Jay Hendrickson – Manager of Technical Theatre production; Carmen Alatore – Front of House Manager; Marijka Brusse, Lauchlin Johnston – Technical Support; Ben Feagin, Jay Taylor – Production Support; Markus Hallensleben – Producer.

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The premiere took place on 3 Apr. 2008 at the Simon Fraser University Mainstage Theatre, Burnaby, BC (with a preview on 15 Mar. 2008 at the Dorothy Somerset Studio Theatre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada).

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