

# Skepsi

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**Enacting Interpersonal Space: the Role of the Body in Social Cognition**  
Chiara Teneggi: *University of Bologna*

**Tam Lin Transformed**  
Kat Peddie

**Bodies in Motion: Working through Plurality**  
Noyale Colin and Rebecca Woodford-Smith: *Middlesex University*

**Tangled Pathways**  
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**'Build Ups' and 'Slim Downs': Reshaping America, 1945–1970**  
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**Passing Thoughts: A Photographic Essay on the Body as Form**  
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**Back from Beyond: 21–22 July, 1972**  
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Eva De Clercq: *University of Pisa*

**The Swarm: A provocation for opening**  
Dara Blumenthal—Guest Editor:  
*University of Kent*



# (De)Parsing Bodies

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*Skepsi* is an online research journal based in the School of European Culture and Languages at the University of Kent (SECL) and is entirely run by research students.

The aim of *Skepsi*'s editorial board is twofold: to honour the spirit of SECL by striving to take advantage of its unique position as a crossroads in academic studies in Europe and to become a forum for European postgraduate researchers and postdoctoral scholars by developing collective thinking processes in the context of academic research.

Our title, *Skepsi* — which comes from the Ancient Greek 'σκεψις [*skepsis*]' or 'enquiry' and the Modern Greek 'σκέψις [*sképsis*]' or 'thought' — symbolises our will to explore new areas and new methods in the traditional fields of academic research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Originality and creativity in the approach of thought and of texts are crucial for us: to enhance and to promote these aspects will be our contribution to the tremendous range of existing academic publications.



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**F**or this issue of *Skepsi*, dedicated to the Body, we welcome Dara Blumenthal as Guest Editor and must thank her for her input, particularly as regards the choice of cover image, a striking image from the work of Joe Wright, an artist who aspires to show through his photography intimate aspects of the world around us that all too often we, preoccupied as we are with getting on with our lives, fail to notice. We thank him for allowing us to use one of his images and urge you to visit his website.

Thanks are also due to all who submitted material for consideration, both those whose work was accepted and those who were, on this occasion disappointed and we must not overlook our dedicated teams of peer reviewers, copy editors and proof readers, who all contribute to the journal's quality.

On a personal note, we welcome Jo Pettitt who has recently joined the Editorial Board after helping with the organisation of our very successful fifth annual conference, *Don't Panic! The Apocalypse in Theory and Culture*, held in May 2012, of which more in a future issue dedicated to its proceedings.

Finally, although, as we said in our last issue, Fabien Arribert-Narce had already left the Editorial Board, he was still very much an 'eminence grise' behind the scenes; in particular, he worked closely with our Guest Editor for this issue. But now we must say 'Goodbye' properly. Having worked closely with the members of the new team and prepared them for the challenges and rewards of running *Skepsi*, he has turned a new page and begun a new chapter in Japan.

*Skepsi* would never have existed without all the effort, passion and commitment that Fabien, a founding member of the Editorial Board, put into it. He will be greatly missed by all of us who had the honour and pleasure of working alongside him and seeing *Skepsi* grow from an idea sketched on a napkin into the respected and well known graduate journal that it has come to be. We thank him with all our hearts and wish him well in Japan.

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## Foreword

The aim of this special issue of *Skepsi* dedicated to the body is twofold: on the one hand, our intention is to contribute to challenging the conception of the body as a rock-like and autonomous unity, a conception that, starting with Descartes, has deeply characterised philosophical tradition;<sup>1</sup> on the other, we believe that, in order to investigate the perspectival nature of the body, it is necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach; for this reason we welcomed not only academic articles, but also creative works both textual and visual.

The inspiration for this issue was a conference entitled *The Body: Exploring Culture and Research* held at the University of Kent in October 2011, a conference which our Guest Editor Dara Blumenthal organised. However, it was not intended that the issue would necessarily be confined either to the proceedings of the conference in particular or to academic articles in general.

The project we present in the following pages can be well described by a sentence from Friedrich Nietzsche's uncompleted and posthumous work *The Will to Power*: 'the evidence of the body reveals a tremendous multiplicity' (Nietzsche 1968: 518). The concept of multiplicity is the Ariadne's thread that gives continuity to the present issue: multiplicity as a theoretical hypothesis about the nature of the body and multiplicity as an interdisciplinary approach to imagine new ways to study and experience it. This idea of a body as a plurality that cannot be fixed into a static unity is graphically illustrated by the cover image, a swarm or 'murmuration' of starlings. A passage from Roberto Esposito's *Immunitas* clearly expresses the conception of the body we want to propose in this issue:

[T]he body is a place of confrontation and competition between diverse, potentially conflicting cellular segments. It is never original, complete, intact, 'made' one and for all; rather, it constantly makes itself from one minute to the next, depending on the situation and encounters that determine its development. Its boundaries do not lock it up inside a closed world; on the contrary, they create its margin, a delicate and problematic one to be sure, but still permeable in its relationship with that which, while still located outside it, from the beginning traverses and alters it. (Esposito 2011: 169)

From poetry to neuroscience, from photography to philosophy, the following contributions address the theme of the body from different perspectives in order to let its complexity emerge.

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<sup>1</sup> For a clear and complete analysis on the body in modern thought, see Chris Shilling's seminal work *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2003).

Chiara Teneggi demonstrates how the main approach to the study of social cognition in contemporary neurosciences reduces the ‘social event’ to the ‘behaviours of individuals’. But in a social context, ‘behaviours are not only of individuals but also between individuals’; consequently the subject is not something prior to the relationship between other subjects but is always the result of an interaction. In this sense, as the neuro-phenomenologist Francisco Varela observes, ‘the virtual self is evident because it provides a surface for interaction, but it’s not evident if you try to locate it. It’s completely delocalized’ (Varela 1995: 211).

From different perspectives, Kat Peddie and the co-authors Noyale Colin and Rebecca Woodford-Smith elaborate in their works an idea of body as always kept within a relationship, as opposed to a monadic and static representation of it. In a poem inspired by the folk song *Tam Lin* and the reading of Georges Bataille, Peddie offers the means whereby to think of our body as having a permeable boundary. Tam Lin’s metamorphoses, in the arms of his lover Janet, prove that diversity and otherness are not just a risk but also a positive possibility. Collin and Woodford-Smith analyse the theoretical question of embodiment through the lens of performance making, demonstrating the importance of body representation as distributed rather than closed by immutable boundaries. Their approach has a double relevance: on the one hand, it indicates a different way of understanding the body; on the other, it allows the inextricable connection between theory and practice to emerge.

Katie Lewis’s pictures allow us to understand better how to frame a question concerning the definition of our body. Lewis usually organises her work into grind-like charts and diagrams ‘mimicking science and medicine’s representations of the body as a specimen, visually displayed for the purpose of gaining knowledge’. Her aim is to create ‘distance from the information and objectify the experience, giving a false sense that the body is accessible and easily understood’. Her artistic works thus make us understand that asking ‘what is our body?’ implicitly brings with it another question regarding accessibility to our somatic identity, a question too often forgotten.

Following a Foucauldian genealogical methodology, Elizabeth Matelski’s contribution seeks to demonstrate that the ‘ideal body shape’ is a relative and historical concept related to a wide variety of factors, not only medical but also and mostly social and political. Matelski’s analysis takes into consideration in particular the transformations of aesthetic canons in the United States between 1945 and 1970. The study not only has a historical relevance but also defines an interesting framework useful to understand contemporary issues related to an obsessive concern with the body. In the words of the British sociologist Nikolas Rose, human



beings today ‘judge and act upon their soma in their attempts to make themselves not just physically better, but also to make themselves better persons. This is what I call a “somatic ethic”’ (Rose 2008: 46).

Introducing a genealogical analysis of the body also implies the need to face the finitude of ourselves in its entire contingency, as Foucault himself wrote:

‘Effective’ history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. (Foucault 1977: 88)

Ashley Denise’s photographic images explore the materiality and plasticity of the body from an original point of view which allows the contingency and finitude of the human condition to emerge. The clocks and the images of organs and bones beneath a layer of apparently artificial skin are just few of the details that bring the spectator into this dimension of *absolute immanence* in all its enigmatic meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Facing our *absolute immanence* means also facing the suffering and the vulnerability of our existence. The poem by Harriet Clements ‘expresses the body’s reaction to trauma by drawing on a personal experience’. *Back from Beyond* communicates with rare intensity our own precariousness and fragility. In doing so, it also reminds us of a fundamental perspective from which we have to consider the body: the phenomenological one, a point of view too often forgotten by some important philosophers of the mind who assert the possibility of reducing a first person experience to a third-person point of view (e.g. Dennett 1991).

If Daniel Dennett’s decision to declare consciousness as a necessary illusion is aimed at liberating the philosophical thought from what he calls the ‘Cartesian theater’ (Dennett 1991), the two final articles seem to suggest a third way of bridging the gulf between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, a way which is neither reductionist nor metaphysical. The articles by Eva De Clerq and Claire Hampton close this issue on the body by engaging in critical terms with Cartesian dualism. Hampton investigates the value of dance theatre as a legitimate means of transcending dualistic tendencies in academic research. She claims that in order to avoid a reductionist interpretation of ourselves it is necessary to use a new form of enquiry aimed ‘at presenting body and mind as mutually obligated parameters of subjectivity’. Starting from a reading of J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Elizabeth Costello*, De Clerq argues that the singularity of human existence finds its roots in the body itself. Her analysis of the notion of

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<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of the term *absolute immanence* see Giorgio Agamben’s essay so entitled in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Agamben 2011).

embodiment is also useful to put into question what we could call new postmodern forms of dualism that permeate so called Continental thought.

Finally, an enigmatically entitled and thought-provoking afterword from our guest editor Dara Blumenthal points out the constant movement between nature and culture, the living body and the political context, showing how these dimensions cross each other and make one the provisional outcome of the other. Blumenthal finds in this ontological premise the political possibility to challenge the individualism characteristic of the capitalist society. But, in order to preserve the emancipatory character of her political provocation, it is important to remember that, as Agamben clearly states:

The ‘body’ is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power. In its extreme form, the biopolitical body of the West (this last incarnation of homo sacer) appears as a threshold of absolute indistinction between law and fact, juridical rule and biological life. (Agamben 1998: 105)

Forgetting this important advice would mean to negate the ontological premise itself, that is, to fight against every dualist and monist thought that presupposes a body already fully defined, doing nothing but mirroring the metaphysical structure we are trying to deconstruct.

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## Enacting Interpersonal Space: the Role of the Body in Social Cognition

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The purpose of this article is to bridge the gap between high-level social processes and low-level sensorimotor processes. Specifically, it wants to show that human co-presence and social interactions (high-level social representations), are immediately remapped in spatial representations (low-level sensorimotor processes).

The idea that an embodied cognition is committed in higher-level cognitive processes was developed at the end of the twentieth century. It has been theorised by Maturana and Varela in biology and neuroscience; by Lakoff and Johnson in neurolinguistics. In order to propose an alternative paradigm to computationalist cognitive science, Maturana and Varela conceived cognition as action-oriented and have proved that perception is strongly mediated by embodied (sensory-motor) processes (Maturana and Varela 1998; Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991). Lakoff and Johnson have shown that the body is able to generate meaning even before a development of self-consciousness. They analyse the several dimensions of signification — images, qualities, metaphors, emotional states — in order to demonstrate that their roots are in the encounters of body with the world (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Johnson & Lakoff 2007). On the other hand, the role of low-level spatial processing during high-level social representations has not yet been proved, even if space and time are the most basic structures of human cognition. Thus, spatial relationships among individuals might be extremely significant in order to shape and define social dynamics of interactions among people.

Nowadays, an alternative approach to the traditional social cognition is the Interaction Theory (IT). IT focuses on inter-corporal activities occurring during social interactions, in particular coordination and reciprocity conceived as a necessary *medium* to understand the other person's intentions and emotions. IT has introduced the concept of 'we space' in order to point out the importance of another embodied agent physically co-present; surprisingly, it has said nothing about the space and spatial representations between two or more bodies during social interactions.

The present study attempts to provide an interdisciplinary theoretical frame about the importance of spatial representation for social cognition. It refers to research in social psychology, phenomenology and neuroscience. Social psychology has discovered that

different social relations are reflected in different interpersonal spatial distances between two partners; phenomenology has identified the embodied aspects of inter-corporality between two agents; neuroscience has defined personal space as a body-centred action space. Bringing together the most important suggestions of those fields of research, this work demonstrates not only that personal space is body-centred but that one's own implicit spatial representation is continuously shaped and transformed by the kind of interactions occurring between two people. In order to prove such a thesis, two experiments are carried out and discussed. The first experiment tests whether the co-presence of a human body modifies one's own spatial representation; the second whether and if so how cooperative or uncooperative interactions reshape the spatial representation between two individuals.

The first two sections of this article will briefly outline the concepts of social cognition through social interaction and interpersonal spatial representation, with particular reference, in the first, to 'Theory Theory' and 'Simulation Theory' and, in the second, Interaction Theory, social psychology and phenomenology. The purpose, methodology and results of the two experiments are discussed in section three, and the interpretation of those results in sections four and five, which deal with Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 respectively. The final section draws conclusions.

### **1. Social Cognition through social interaction: a different perspective from 'Theory of Mind Theory' and 'Simulation Theory'.**

The term 'social brain function' has been often used in social cognitive neurosciences. Here is a current definition of it:

Social brain function is tightly linked to social context, and social context consists of multimodal social properties including the behaviors of individuals and details in the environment. Social context changes continuously and is often unpredictable. An action that was socially appropriate a few seconds ago is not guaranteed to be appropriate now. Therefore, if social conflict is to be avoided, frequent updates of each agent's internal representation of the social environment must be an essential brain function (Fujii, Hihara & Iriki 2007: e397).

This definition shows some critical points. First of all, it is wrong to reduce the 'social event' to 'behaviors of individuals'; in fact, in a social context, behaviours are not only of individuals but also *between* individuals. Secondly, people interact with each other and, from the outset, the behaviours between individuals can be defined as actions *with, towards* or *against* somebody. Thirdly, individuals live and move in an environment that is characterised spatially and temporally. Lastly, the environment is a 'social environment', namely, a physical place where interactions among people, physically and temporally co-present, are

performed. At this point, Gallagher, as well as De Jaegher and Di Paolo, would introduce the relevance of social interactions to explain and to ground social cognition.

‘Interaction Theory’ is a theory which has arisen as an alternative paradigm to ‘Theory of Mind Theory’ (ToM) and ‘Simulation Theory’ (ST).<sup>1</sup> ToM and ST have been the most important approaches to social cognition. The former claims that an abstract internal theory of mind enables us to develop inferences by which we understand and forecast people’s behaviours. Mental states (like desires, beliefs, etc.), cause and justify how individuals usually behave.<sup>2</sup> The latter asserts that we do not need a theory enabling us to make inferences in order to understand people’s behaviours. ToM considers the body a crude device of peripheral transmission. ST postulates the use of a first person simulating model that projects third person mental states as if ‘we were another person’, or as if ‘we were in his situation’. ST has been successful since the discovery of mirror neurons in the premotor cortex. In fact, mirror neurons not only fire when we *perform* an action but also when we *perceive* another person performing an action (action is different from movement because the former is goal-oriented).<sup>3</sup> ST is strengthened by the discovery of mirror neurons, a process interpreted as if it would make use of a sort of emulation at level of sensorimotor system through the re-activation of the same neural processes activated during an action. Mirror neurons:

allow us to directly understand the meaning of actions [...] of others by internally replicating (‘simulating’) them [...] The observer understands the action because he know its outcomes when he does it (Gallese, Keysers & Rizzolatti 2004: 396).

Nevertheless, ST is criticised by IT because it does not take into account the *reciprocity* of relationship between two or more individuals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gallagher first put forward Interaction Theory as an alternative proposal to ToM and ST in *How the body shapes the mind* (2005). In order to define this new field of research, it is necessary to provide IT with an exact definition of ‘social interaction’ and to identify the possible roles that IT plays in social cognitive performances. For additional information, see: De Jaegher, Di Paolo & Gallagher (2010).

<sup>2</sup> The concept of ‘Theory of Mind’ was first put forward by Leslie and Baron-Cohen in their article ‘Does the autistic child have a “theory of mind”?’’, where they show how children with autism are unable to develop theory of mind mechanisms. It is a capability that enables normal children to attribute mental state to themselves and to other people. The emerging conception of ‘Theory of Mind Mechanisms’ subsequently achieved significant success also in the understanding of normal human psychology. Today, ToM is employed by neuroscientists (Frith), psychologists (Meltzoff), and philosophers (Fodor, Dennett) to explain the ability to take the-Other’s perspective.

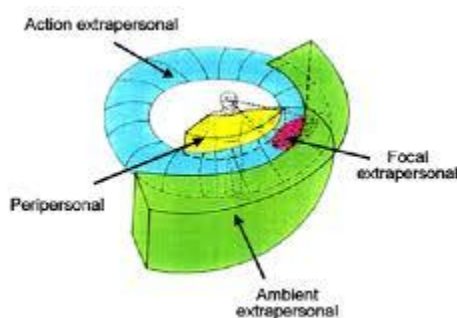
<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis of mental simulation was first theorised by Gordon (1986). Today, ST is based almost completely on data from neuroscience (e.g., Barsalou 2003; Decety 1996; Frith & Dolan 1996; Hesslow 2002; Jeannerod 1994, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Such a lack of ‘reciprocity’ in ST is thoroughly discussed by Fuchs and De Jaegher (Fuchs & De Jaegher 2009: 468).

On its part, IT claims that social cognition is grounded in social interaction. The interaction theorists Gallagher, Di Paolo and De Jaegher focus on the embodied and participatory aspects of social understanding. They aim to demonstrate that ‘interactive processes are more than a context for social cognition’ (De Jaegher, Di Paolo and Gallagher 2010: 441). Interaction implies the engagement of at least two agents in a complex co-regulated pattern where no agent loses its autonomy. In the context of embodied approaches, social cognition involves the ‘know-how’ that allows individuals to sustain interactions and act together. Thus, ‘understanding’ in this context, requires a pragmatic ability to act appropriately in a particular situation. Social interactions demand a reciprocal and joint activity and include an engagement between the participants. ‘Joint-activity’ is a complex process supported by joint attention, action observation, task sharing, action coordination (Sebanz 2006; Vesper, Butterfill, Knoblich & Sebanz 2010). Engagement can correspond to fluctuating feelings of connectedness with the Other, whose meaning sometimes seems transparent and sometimes opaque, and of increasing and decreasing possibilities for participation. Such a kind of study on acting together paves the way for a conception of social cognition relating to interconnected individuals and not to a mind in an isolated body. Coordination is the most important feature of joint action and it implies a non-accidental correlation of two or more systems that are coupled together to develop a task. Namely, the individuals engaged in this coupling have to adjust their action to those of their partner. Coordinated action can be both emergent and planned. The former occurs spontaneously and without a *plan* to act together. An example of emergent coordination between two people is the synchronisation of speech and bodily movements during a conversation. The latter requires a representation of intentions and desired outcomes in order to plan an activity where the role of the involved agents is defined. In this field of research, Krueger has introduced the interesting notion of ‘we space’ to point out the social meaning of another’s bodily co-presence (Krueger 2010: 2). As the next section shows, such a ‘we space’ refers to spatial coordination and not to a spatial representation between individuals that is the object of the present research. Thus, after introducing the meaning of Krueger’s concept, the section focuses on explaining its limitations and the importance of spatial representation during a social interaction.

## 2. Interpersonal spatial representation: confronting Interaction Theory, Social Psychology and Phenomenology.

Krueger employs the meaning of ‘space’ in neurosciences, where recent findings have emphasised its practical feature. In a neuroscientific context, ‘space’ means ‘body action-centred space’. That is, the spatial representations have been defined and built on the different possibilities of body-centred actions of an embodied agent. Therefore, ‘extrapersonal space’ is the space beyond the actions of reaching; ‘peripersonal space’ is the space around one’s body within which actions of reaching are possible (it will be central in the following paragraphs); ‘personal space’ is the space of the body’s surface.



The taxonomy of space representations includes at least three main sectors: Personal (i.e., the space defined by the body surface); Peripersonal (the space that encompasses the objects within reach); Extrapersonal space (the space beyond our immediate reach and that one can get close to enough only by locomotion).

FIGURE 1: 'FOUR SPACES': THE TAXONOMY OF SPACE IN NEUROSCIENCE <sup>5</sup>  
© www.neuropolitics.org

As Figure 1 shows, it is one’s own body that constitutes the focus of spatial representations, whereas there is no reference about spatial representations between *two* bodies, between the self and the others. Krueger enriches such a meaning of ‘space’ by taking into account not only the actions of one agent but also the mutual adjustment of actions and intentions occurring *among* individuals. In this perspective, our sensory and motor bodies allow people to perform *face-to-face* interactions with others who are physically co-present. The co-presence is conveyed by coordinated actions, attuned glances and emotional

<sup>5</sup> There have been many studies about this space and its categorisation. See the definition of ‘Bodily awareness’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: ‘The notion of a special area of space around the body has been first proposed based on the observation of animals by Hediger (1955), the director of the Zurich Zoo. When a threatening object enters a spatial margin of safety around the animal’s body (the ‘flight zone’), animals engage in a range of protective behaviors (Dosey & Meisels 1969; Cooke and Graziano 2003). Similarly, humans are sensitive to the violation of their peripersonal space, whether it is by a snake or by a mere chair that should be avoided to navigate in the room. Interestingly, it was recently found that neutral visual stimuli close to a part of the body interfere with tactile experiences, if the location of the visual stimuli is incongruent with the location of the tactile stimuli (Spence et al. 2004). There is thus a multisensory attentional mechanism, which relates stimuli in the external space and stimuli on the body (Ladavas and Farnè 2004; Makin et al. 2008). One may suggest that the representation of peripersonal space underlies our awareness of our body “within a larger space which can contain other objects” (Martin 1993, 212)’ (Encyclopedia of Philosophy <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bodily-awareness/#PerSpa>>; [accessed 11-Jul-12]).

synchronisations among people. By means of such components, human beings configure and shape an emotionally-featured shared space. However, neither Krueger nor other theorists of IT refer to the space as a space *between* individuals. When they analyse the reciprocal and joint activity among people, the spatial representations of individuals as a result of such interactions is completely overlooked. In summary, the concept of ‘we space’ introduces the idea of interpersonal activities without making reference to the space. On the contrary, peripersonal space captures the idea of a multisensory interface for inter-actions, but most research in this field has only focused on the representation of *one’s own* body. As Donna Lloyd says, if much is known about neural mechanisms that codify the space around one’s body, little has been shown about the mechanisms codifying the space between two (or more) bodies. Nevertheless, spatial relationships among individuals are significant because they shape and define social dynamics of our interactions with people (Lloyd 2009).<sup>6</sup>

A different perspective can be found in social psychology, where the social significance of spatial distance between individuals has been theorised. In his *The Hidden Dimension* (1996), E. T. Hall introduced the concept of ‘personal space’ to mean the closest ‘bubble’ of space surrounding a person. Entry into this space is acceptable only for closest friends and intimates. Different studies using personal space as a parameter have been carried out, for example by the psychologists Larry M. Dean and Kinzel: the former has determined to what extent the *social* distance among military people belonging to different ranks is a *spatial* distance; the latter has found a correlation between violent people and their overestimated spatial perception. A summary of their findings follows.

*Distance and Rank:* Dean and his colleagues measured *interaction* distances at the start of a conversation between individuals belonging to various ranks in military settings (Dean, Willis & Hewitt 1975). They found that the distance between military personnel tended to be greater when a person of a lower rank approached a person of higher rank than when peers approached each other or when a person of higher rank approached a person of lower rank. In summary, it is the subordinate who is responsible for spatial distances during social interactions. In this case, spatial representation is a dependent variable of formal organisation.

*Body-Buffer-Zone:* Kinzel measured the ‘body-buffer-zone’ in violent prisoners in comparison to that in non-violent prisoners. Body-buffer-zone (BBZ) was identified by Horowitz, Duff and Stratton as the area around a person within which anxiety is produced if another enters. BBZ was conceived as an area surrounding the body which represents the

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<sup>6</sup> In this article, Lloyd gives an interesting neurophilosophical frame to the space between individuals.



boundaries of what is felt as 'inner' versus what is felt as 'outer'. Kinzel's comparative measurement showed that in violent prisoners BBZ was almost four times larger than in non-violent prisoners. He suggested that violent prisoners have a permanent abnormality of body image. In fact, they behave 'as if their bodies are extended further into the space around them. Thus, to intrude on their personal space is to intrude on their bodies' (Kinzel 1970: 99).

If the space surrounding a person (i.e. personal space), is a dependent variable of social organisation and if it correlates with specific characteristics of personality, it seems coherent to hypothesise that 'space' is an I-perspective and that it is shaped by our social activity. The two studies referred to above have codified 'personal space' by means of a spatial distance explicitly kept by the subjects in various contexts. That is a different representation in comparison to the neuronal implicit spatial processing. The similarity or correlation between peripersonal space in neuroscience and personal space in social psychology has not yet been proved. The present research does not intend to draw a parallel between the two spatial definitions. The main purpose is to detect and develop the relative components of both, as being useful to endorse the initial thesis about a remapping of social representations in sensorimotor processes. Although psychologists have codified and measured space in a way that is different from neuroscience's practical space, this research extrapolates their respective theoretical suggestions: spatial perception is body-centred and it varies as a function of our social or practical activity. Phenomenologists have pursued the same theoretical principle. Husserl, for instance, in *Ding und Raum* (1907), analysed the importance of body-movements and *kinaesthetic sensations* for the experience of space and the constitution of spatial objects. He claims that spatial objects can only appear for and be constituted by *embodied subjects*. Merleau-Ponty in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1947) put forward the concept rendered in English as 'body-world relationship', in order to point out that the engagement in a social world is a function of having a body and motility. However, our body is related to other bodies during our entire life (from a family context to a social one); a social event should therefore be added. Social event is the new component of this research that aims to measure the spatial representations *between* two bodies after different social events and will be exemplified by the co-presence of another human being and cooperative and uncooperative interactions during two experiments.

From an embodied perspective, the space between two embodied agents is not an abstract concept or a framework regulated by a code of conduct. On the contrary, the spatial representation occurring between two individuals is enacted by the human sensorimotor

system. In other terms, the mere human co-presence and people's social behaviours might enact different inter-personal body-centred space (or, the space between two bodies). This hypothesis suggests a bond between the high level of social interaction and the low level of sensorimotor capability and it has been verified by two experiments that the third section will explain.

### **3. Experiments: purpose, method and results.**

To give substance to an embodied viewpoint concerning spatial representations between two or more bodies, two experiments were designed and peripersonal space (PPS) representation was measured.<sup>7</sup> The experiments were intended to test the following hypotheses:

- 1) PPS representation varies as a function of the presence of another person (co-presence).
- 2) PPS representation varies as a function of social interactions.

The choice of measuring PPS was motivated by its features that allow us to verify its modulation. Moreover, PPS has been well codified in neuroscience and experimental evidences have proved the following properties. Representations of PPS are body-centred or body-part centred, restricted to the space immediately surrounding the body (extending to about 20–40 cm from the skin surface in monkeys and up to perhaps 70 cm in humans). It is a multisensory interface between the body and the environment; 'multisensory' because it is represented by neurons that integrate information from multiple sensory modalities (somatosensory, proprioceptive, visual and auditory); an 'interface' because within the limits of PPS the body can directly interact with the environment where one runs into objects and meets up with people. As the external world is characterised by social components and not only by physical objects, it makes sense to conceive of the PPS as an inter-face for social inter-actions. Until now, two main functions of PPS have been detected: it enables involuntary self-defensive movements and it serves voluntary object-oriented actions and nothing has been reported about its social function.<sup>8</sup> Plasticity is another important feature of PPS; in fact, its representation extends to include mirror images, inanimate objects and tools actively held in the hand.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when wondering about the social function of PPS, this

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<sup>7</sup> The experiments were carried out in collaboration with Professors G. Di Pellegrino and A. Serino (CNC, Cognitive Neuroscience Center, University of Bologna).

<sup>8</sup> The scientific definition of PPS and its functions can be found in Graziano and Cooke (2006: 845, 859)

<sup>9</sup> In order to read an example of plasticity after tool use, see Holmes and Spencer (2004).

research intends to verify the hypothesis that PPS representation is shaped by social events occurring between two human bodies.

PPS is an implicit representation that occurs at a non-conscious level; it is a non-explicit measurement that takes advantage of its multisensory property. In fact, experimental findings have shown stronger visuo-tactile or audio-tactile interactions in near space than in far space; that is to say, the detection of a tactile stimulus on an area of the body gets faster only when a visual/auditory stimulus occurs *near* that stimulated part of the *body*. For this reason, an audio-tactile interaction task was proposed during the experiments in order to obtain the extent of PPS representation.

### 3.1 Method

Subjects were asked to respond rapidly to a tactile stimulus administered on their right cheek, while being subjected at the same time to task-irrelevant dynamic and stereophonic sounds which gave the impression of a sound source *approaching* (the ‘IN sound’ in Figures 1 and 2) the subject’s face.

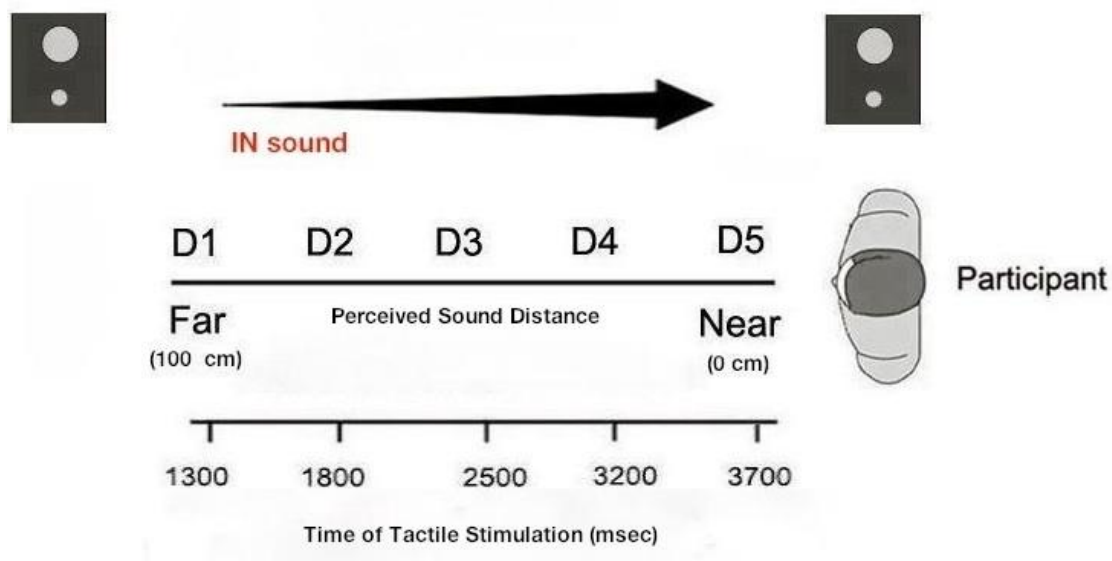


FIGURE 2: THE AUDIO-TACTILE-INTERACTION TASK  
© Teneggi, Canzoneri, Pellegrino & Serino

Tactile stimuli were given at five different temporal delays from sound onset, implying that they were processed when sounds were perceived at five possible different distances from the subject’s face (ranging from D1, very far, to D5, very close; see Figure 2). Subjects were instructed to ignore the irrelevant sounds and to respond vocally as fast as possible to tactile stimuli. Since task-irrelevant sounds boost tactile reaction time (RT) only if presented within

the near space (i.e. PPS),<sup>10</sup> the critical time-point, i.e., the critical distance where a sound affects tactile perception, can be considered as the perceptual limit of the multisensory PPS around the target body part and thus a proxy of the boundaries of PPS representation (Serino et al. 2007; Tajadura-Jiménez et al. 2010). In such a way, no distance between individuals was varied in order to evaluate their spatial perception and participants were not informed about the real purpose of the experiment (the measure of PPS).<sup>11</sup>

We measured the social modulation of PPS representation by proposing two tasks. In the first one, in order to investigate whether another person's presence modulates the extent of PPS representation, we had participants perform the audio-tactile task in the presence of either a dummy or a person placed in the far space (see Figure 3). The living or inanimate partner was seated facing the participant at a distance of 100 cm, namely at the same distance of the furthest loudspeaker from where approaching sounds originated (i.e. the far space). In the second one, we contrasted a cooperative interaction between two individuals with an uncooperative one during a game for money.

In Experiment 1, we found that the boundary of PPS changes depending on the presence of another human or a dummy. In Experiment 2, we demonstrated that PPS boundaries extend to include the space around the other after performing an economic game with the Other, but only if the Other is cooperative during the game.

#### **4. Interpretation of Experiment 1: recognising a body just as a human-body.**

In front of a dummy, participants performed exactly the same task as in front of a person. The order of dummy and partner conditions was counterbalanced; that is to say, half of the participants faced a dummy first and then a person, the other half a person first and then a dummy.

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, when approaching sounds enter near space, the RT to a tactile stimulus get easier and consequently faster. See the illustration.

<sup>11</sup> This measure of the extent of PPS was designed by A. Serino.

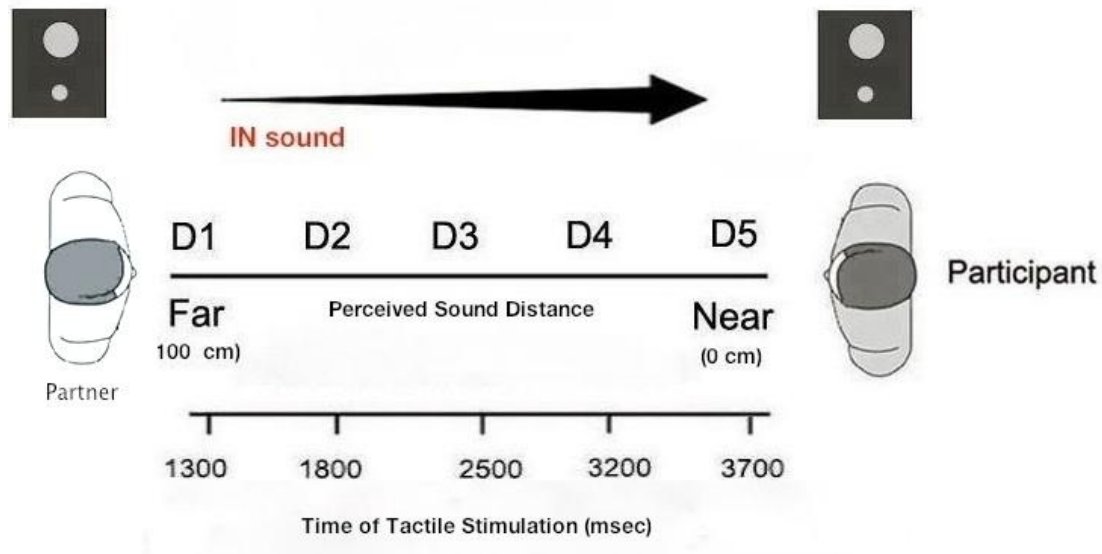


FIGURE 3: TASK WITH A PARTNER<sup>12</sup>  
© Teneggi, Canzoneri, Pellegrino & Serino

We found that the boundaries of PPS were closer to participants when they performed the audio-tactile integration task facing a human being (the ‘Other-condition’) rather than a dummy (the ‘dummy-condition’).<sup>13</sup> This finding shows that PPS boundaries adapt to the presence of others. In other words, the boundaries of PPS representation shrunk towards one’s own space, when the far space was occupied by a human body, as compared to when it was occupied by an artificial body.

Such a result seems to be coherent with the qualitative analysis of social psychologists. They state that when two individuals share the same space, neither of them considers the whole space as their own. On the contrary, both of them tend to shrink the boundaries of the available space. They naturally assign half of the area to the co-present agent. For instance, when two people share a table, they tend to perceive half of the table as a symbolic and spatial representation of their own personal space. However, if two people have a different status, the one with a higher one will take or will be conceded a larger portion of the table.

Such a result is understandable for phenomenologists, too. In fact, they confer the meaning of a person’s presence to the human body. When discussing intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty does not refer to the body either as an object or as a crude physical entity. The

<sup>12</sup> Partner was either a dummy or an individual in Experiment 1; Partner was always an individual in Experiment 2.

<sup>13</sup> The results are explained in detail in Teneggi, Canzoneri, Pellegrino & Serino (unpubl.). In the dummy condition, the sound approaching the body facilitates (i.e. boosts) the reaction time (RT) to tactile stimulus when it occurs at distance D2. On the other hand, in the Other-condition, the detection of tactile stimulus gets easier and faster only at the distance D3. As D3 is nearer participants than D2 and the boundary of PPS is where sound boosts the RTs, such a finding is interpreted as if the boundary of PPS would shrink towards the participants only in the Other-condition.

human body is a living body and it is the expression of a ‘presence’ (i.e. my presence, your presence, our presence ...). The corporeity of a human body discloses and exposes a living existence to other embodied presences. Quoting the philosopher:

When my gaze meets another gaze, I re-enact the other existence in a sort of reflection. There is nothing here resembling ‘reasoning by analogy’. [...] Now the perception of others is anterior to, and a condition of, such observations, the observations don’t constitute the perception (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 410).

Following this viewpoint, the result should be interpreted as follows: the material body of another individual is immediately recognised as being different from a lifeless material object. Therefore, another human being, standing in front of us, makes our spatial perception different from that when we are facing a dummy.

This interpretation reminds us of Lévinas’ philosophy about the ‘face-to-face’ encounter with the Other: in his view, the initial and pre-linguistic exposure to the Other corresponds to an ethical command that has no need of any linguistic mediation or inference. Thus, any individual’s face immediately drives the Self to take a primordial responsibility for the Other. The Other is recognised as an autonomous individual by means of a pre-reflective, intuitive attentiveness. In order to understand Experiment 1 better, the analysis does not have to be developed as far, since it encompasses the whole of Lévinas’ inquiry about the Other. When facing the Other, says Lévinas, the Self is made aware not only of the distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ but also that the Self, like the Other, has finitude; both the Other and the Self occupy a certain time which is closed by death. The possibility of death obliges the ‘I’, the Self, to be answerable to the ‘You’, the Other; it is this responsibility felt by the ‘I’ that is the essence of the Self (Lévinas 1992).

However, something like an ‘obligation’ towards the Other appears. In fact, if we contrast the participant’s PPS representation in the dummy condition with the human body condition, we find that the participants instinctively let the human body have its own space. PPS representation can be formed despite the subject’s explicit awareness of it (i.e. it occurs at an implicit level). Thus, one can legitimately say that the participants’ PPS representation adapts to the presence of another individual prior to any communicative action and in a pre-reflective way. Furthermore, it is within the limits of PPS that one’s actions are performed. Thus, participants might intuitively assign an autonomy of action to the Other (i.e. the partner). In such a case, it is not clear why PPS boundaries reduce towards the participants. As stated above, Lévinas might assert that it deals with an ethical obligation. On the contrary, neuroscientists might infer the following antithetic hypothesis: as PPS may serve as an early

detection of a potential threat approaching the body, the human partner might trigger a participant's defensive protective behaviour that is responsible for the derived PPS representation. In such a perspective, the boundaries of PPS were closer to the participants in human condition than in the dummy one, because the participants subliminally monitored the near space. However, the partner did not act in a threatening manner; on the contrary, he stayed still, with a 'neutral' facial expression. Consequently, such a hypothesis is coherent, but it has not been empirically proved yet. In any case, both hypotheses are interesting and they will stimulate further investigation in this field. Moreover, social and cultural components have to be taken into account during further experiments.

### **5. Interpretation of Experiment 2: do cooperative behaviours enable people to enact a common space?**

In order to assess whether a high level of social interactions affects the extent of PPS representation, we had participants perform the previous audio-tactile task, facing a partner before and after a game for money. No dummy was used, only a human partner who faced the participant in the same manner as for Experiment 1. New participants were tested and each of them played only once. During the game, the partners (i.e. actors), were instructed either to be cooperative or not to be cooperative with the participant who had performed the audio-tactile task. All players were told that they were 'randomly assigned' the role of player A or B. Actually, player A was always the one who had the PPS measured and player B was always the actor. The game for money consisted of a decision phase and an outcome phase. During the decision phase, the players A had to decide between two options about an amount of ten euros: 1) to keep the greater part of the amount for themselves and send their partner few euros; 2) to share the ten euros equally with the partner. The first choice made the game end; the second choice introduced the outcomes phase during which the amount doubled in value (so it became twenty euros and each player therefore had ten euros) and player B was given two options: 1) to divide the amount equally; 2) to keep more money for themselves. We had thirty two participants (i.e. the players A during the game) take part in the experiment.

Before the game, PPS boundaries of the participants were near to themselves and not near to the partner, in the same way that Experiment 1 shows (see the human body condition). After the game, we re-measured the extent of PPS representations of participants, while they were facing their partner set in the far space (i.e. the partner was the actor during the previous game). After the cooperative interaction, we found PPS boundaries between near space, at the

self-location, and far space, at the location of the Other, had even vanished.<sup>14</sup> We interpret such a finding as if the PPS boundary was so extended that it included the space where the cooperative partner stayed.

On the contrary, after a non-cooperative interaction, the participant's PPS boundary was clearly marked at the distance D3, namely near to themselves as in Experiment 1 (i.e. the Other-condition) and in pre-cooperative condition. Subsequently, no modulation of the extent of PPS representation occurred. However, in comparison to the measure of PPS before the game, we found that the participant's reaction times to tactile stimuli became significantly faster in each trial; namely, when auditory stimuli were presented both far and near from the stimulated cheek. Thus, we have hypothesised an arousal effect after non-cooperative interaction. In fact, the participants behaved as if they were on the alert. Moreover, when the sound entered near space, RTs were absolutely the fastest. Post-cooperative results are meaningful, especially if we consider that only after a cooperative interaction, the PPS boundary shifts towards the partner as far as to include the far space. The psychologist Bakan introduced the definition of the term 'communion' that gives a new slant on the post-cooperative PPS representation. Bakan argues that communion arises from strivings to integrate the self in a larger social unit and it involves such qualities as focus on others and cooperativeness. Finally, communion is important in taking other-perspective (Bakan 1996).<sup>15</sup>

The results reflect Bakan's definition, if it is translated into spatial representations. In this case, the communal (or cooperative) interaction makes the participants behave as if they were spatially in the other-perspective and in connection with the partner's space. If communion makes the person integrate in a larger social unit, cooperative interaction makes the person integrate in a larger and commune space that might be essential to build a social space. If the participants are spatially connected with the partner, probably, after non-cooperative interaction, they felt a sort of 'separateness'. An interesting experiment carried out by Tsugumi Takano supports this possibility.<sup>16</sup> He investigated when or why people feel a sense of isolation in the physical proximity of others. He hypothesised that one may feel a sense of loneliness in the absence of 'trust'. To test it, he also had participants play a 'lend

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<sup>14</sup> Before the cooperative interaction, the detection of tactile stimuli is boosted when the sounds occur at the distance D3. After the cooperative interaction, the relevant speeding effect of near-sounds (in comparison to the far-sounds), on the reaction times to tactile stimuli is lost. On the contrary, RTs are boosted also when sounds occur in the farthest space, where the cooperative partner is placed. Consequently, participants' RTs are speeded up both in the farthest space and in the nearest space. For such a reason, it was impossible to detect a difference between I-space and Other-space.

<sup>15</sup> For additional information, see David Bakan (Bakan 1966).

<sup>16</sup> For additional information, see Tsugami Takano (Tsugami 2011).



and pay back money game'; their partners, in some cases, were instructed by the experimenter to betray them. The results show that the participants felt loneliness when they were betrayed by the partner after trusting him (i.e. after lending money). This study concludes that one can feel a sense of isolation in the absence of trust. Although the sense of isolation or loneliness is not detected in Experiment 2, non-cooperative interaction nonetheless significantly boosts the participants' reaction time, so that the boundary fell in near space where their own body is. The resulting effect is as if they are monitoring the space near the body in order to protect themselves. In comparison to the situation the cooperative condition, there appears to be no connection with Other space; probably, they felt themselves detached from the partner. Following these considerations, the presence or the lack of a 'larger and commune space' might be an essential component in order to increase or decrease the sense of belonging to a social community.

In such a way, Experiment 2 can stimulate Interaction Theory, proposing a new perspective and a new field of research. When IT theorises about the phenomenon of cooperation, it analyses coordination and joint actions. In fact, cooperation is renamed 'embodied coordination' in order to 'contrast [it] with the methods of traditional game-theory approaches to cooperation, which examine strategic decisions made to cooperate or to defect' (Marsh, Richardson & Schmidt 2009: 325). Experiment 2 shows that even Interaction Theory can deal with a high-level cooperation as Game Theory does, without reducing such an event to the sensorimotor coordination. If Game Theory approaches do not *require* that individuals have bodies (as claimed by some interaction theorists), certainly it *implies* that individuals are embodied and situated.

## 6. General Conclusions

In summary, Experiment 1 shows that the mere presence of another human being directly shapes and structures one's spatial representation. Experiment 2 shows that a high level of social cognition (i.e. a personal choice about an amount of money) can affect low level audio-tactile integrations between near and far space. Thus, the experiments reveal that the spatial representation between two bodies variously functions as an indicator of both co-presence and social interaction, a factor which illuminates the sense of Deleuze's observation that:

Le tort des théories philosophiques, c'est de le réduire tantôt à un objet particulier, tantôt à un autre sujet [...] faisant d'autrui un objet sous mon regard. Mais autrui n'est ni un objet dans le champ de ma perception, ni un sujet qui me perçoit, c'est d'abord une structure du champ

perceptif, sans laquelle ce champ dans son ensemble ne fonctionnerait pas comme il le fait. (Deleuze 1969: 356–57).<sup>17</sup>

Reading the findings through the Deleuzian theoretical construct, one can state that the Other and the interaction with the Other is going to structure our spatial perceptual field. In such a way, both hypotheses have been demonstrated as giving substance to the embodied perspective and enriching Interaction Theory. Finally, these results reveal that low-level multisensory processing used to construct spatial representations is prone to social modulation. Such new findings suggest a link between high-level cognition, such as social cognition, and low-level sensorimotor representations, such as peripersonal space.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘[t]he mistake of philosophical theories of the [Other] is to reduce him either to a particular object or to another subject [...] [that] transforms me into an object. But the Other is neither an object in my field of perception, nor a subject who perceives me: it is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does’ (translation by Constantin V. Boundas in *Logic of Sense* by Gilles Deleuze, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas (London & New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), p. 346).

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## Tam Lin Transformed

Kat Peddie

I first discovered *Tam Lin* through the folk band, Fairport Convention, who recorded the folksong in the late 1960s and still perform it. I loved it for its story, its insistent beat, its sly verbal tricks and slippages. The story is as follows: Janet is warned not to go to Carterhaugh, home of the elf-man Tam Lin, for '[t]here's none that go by Carterhaugh but they leave him a pledge / Either their mantles of green or else their maidenhead'. As Janet not only goes (who wouldn't on such strict instructions not to?) but reties her 'kirtle green' as she leaves, something else, unstated, has been left. A pledge indeed it seems — we soon discover not only that 'Janet goes with child' but that she must complete a challenge to 'win' the man or elf who is now her 'true love'. The fairy queen (this is a folk tale after all), having saved the life of Tam Lin seven years ago, now wishes to sacrifice him to pay her Hallowe'en tithe to hell. To save Tam Lin, Janet must steal him off his horse from the queen and hide him under her mantle, holding him tightly, whilst the queen transforms him into various animals considered both repulsive and dangerous. Janet does so, and Tam Lin, and the family unit, is saved. The queen's curse hangs over the end; possibly, or possibly not, powerlessly.

As I was walking (the beginning of another Fairport song), not along a highway but the road to my house, I was singing this song to myself and noticed that I was syncopating the rhythm of the song and my footsteps other around the line 'I so fair and full of flesh', a heavy right foot step on every 'f' alliteration. When I returned home I tried in text to rewrite the line as it now appeared to me as stepped. Having thought about how my body had responded to the song and how it had then altered its cadence, I began to think of the bodies of the song itself.

It seemed to me that the sex scene so literally skirted over bore some relation to the scene conveyed in more detail — the metamorphosis of Tam Lin, in the arms of Janet, into a transformative bestiary, as she, to win her love (his love), must prove herself by holding tight to his changing form(s). Something to do with how strangely, transformatively, one experiences one's own body in the act in which one is most intensely experiencing it; abandoning control over it; even losing consciousness of it through its responses. How the boundaries of one's body are necessarily permeable. I had been reading Bataille's *Eroticism* at the time. This bled into the poem and its processes in a way that I was not fully conscious of.

In keeping with my interest in the song and the fact that I was reading Bataille in order to develop a theory of an erotics of collage, the idea was to create a poem almost entirely composed of words from the song — words and phrases rearranged and newly positioned in a cut-up, transformed to an extent but not at a far remove from their original context. Some words are stolen from elsewhere. '[L]i / on limbed' echoes Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'lionlimb' in 'Carrion Comfort' — his religious agonies of 'that night, [...] / of now done darkness' when he 'lay wrestling with (my God!) my God' being not so far removed from his struggles with desire. '[H]and' comes from Robert Lowell's 'Near the Ocean', a point of contact 'a hand, your hand, then!' — the isolated and desolate speaker's attempt to touch another, his wife, a 'Monster' in her alterity, yet 'loved for what you are'. The frog, I believe, came from a fairytale, not far removed from folksong.



I so fair  
                   and full  
                           of flesh  
                                   am feared  
 it be my self          am phibian  
                                   am newt / snake  
 a hand to hold frog flesh  
 Janet li  
 on limbed (what I) me in your arms your hair your mantle your  
 kirtle above the knee your maiden head  
                                   the bridle ring  
                           and you will love  
 flesh father flesh  
 your son out of  
 sight.

had I known Tam Lin  
 this night. naked knight.

**Bodies in Motion: Working through Plurality**

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In *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being*, Cultural theorist and mathematician Brian Rotman posits that alphabetic text has become incompatible with selves and subjectivities that have emerged in relation to new technologies and networked media. While he argues that the digital self is going plural, he raises the question of how the self could ‘function in ways other than [an] organised arborescence’ (Rotman 2008: 104). Considering the challenges that the idea of a networked self is to the understanding of western consciousness, Rotman suggests that with parallel computing the breaking down of barriers between self and other leads the networked self to become multiple, distributed and besides itself:

But what is involved in becoming besides oneself? In experiencing plurality? How does one accede to the para-human? The process is not to be identified with imitating, reproducing, splitting oneself; [...] It is rather a form of a temporal change, becoming party to a condition other than one’s own, a question of self-difference, of standing to the side of the single, monadic ‘I’[...] Can I, you, those yet to come, really not be what we have (felt to have) been for so long in Western culture, an ‘I’ that is before all else, as a condition for all else, an enclosed, individual, indivisible, opaque, private, singularly rooted Me? (Rotman, 2008: 103-04)

As two performance-makers from different backgrounds (dance and theatre), we attempt, in this article, to find strategies that will allow us to examine the shifting tension between our sense of the monadic ‘I’ and the idea of the distributed self that Rotman powerfully describes as ‘becoming beside ourselves’.

We will initially map the content of our research, and, following this, use our individual voices to reflect on our collaborative process. In addition to referencing Rotman’s ideas throughout the article, we also draw on the work of philosophers as an empirical fit to our practical research, including William James’ notion of appropriation and Brian Massumi’s and Suzanne Guerlac’s insightful exploration of Bergson’s ideas of duration. In the final part of the article, we demonstrate the possibility of defining the collaborative process in correlation with Paul Cillier’s theories of complex systems, and discuss, with reference to Erin Manning’s philosophical insight on consciousness in a network, how the dynamic processes of our movement improvisation produces a collision of selves, and thereby impacts upon our understanding of authorship.

Through our individual practice-as-research doctoral studies in performance-making at Middlesex University, we have engaged in an on-going collaboration based on our mutual concern for the process of embodying our research. A central concern was to investigate how two performers could account for each other's presence. To this end, we have met on a regular basis for practice sessions since April 2011, and we have also developed our practice through two residencies (in August 2011 at PAF (Performing Arts Forum) in northern France and in January 2012 at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre). This project has led us to explore a number of ways of supporting and illuminating each other's inquiry. First, we have experimented with feedback techniques, using drawing, text and movement responses. Secondly, we have practised duet, structured improvisations based on sensation and memory stimuli. Thirdly, we have used online communication to share reading, videos and writings.<sup>1</sup> These techniques have informed the development of an on-going process of collaborative practice. This article aims to frame tendencies that occur when working with others in the studio, for example, the way we make sense of each other in the context of movement improvisation, and the role of memory during such non-verbal communication. The set of conditions for this on-going project has provided a good terrain to break down some of the mechanisms of collaborative performance making, and have therefore allowed us to illuminate some relevant aspects of contemporary performance making, with more specific insight around the relationship between self and bodies in motion.

During our sessions, we attempted to illuminate and share each other's research, which individually engages with collaborative practices and performer training, through an exchange of our training and practices. We were concerned with the processes of performance making, and we thus focussed on these processes, as opposed to creating a performance or work in progress. During the first studio sessions we uncovered a set of notions that we were mutually interested in exploring: presence, transformation, memory and time; and we each brought various exercises and approaches to movement to the sessions that allowed us to engage with this set of notions. During the collaboration, we developed our practice in different contexts and environments. Alternating between continuous monthly-based practice sessions and short and intense periods of research in residency situations, our collaborative practice can be outlined both inside and outside the studio:

We work together in studios in London in frequent but rushed sessions in an old police station with no windows; in the French summer in a former nun's

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<sup>1</sup> See details of the sessions at: <http://parallelintervals.blogspot.com/search/label/Rebecca>

dormitory transformed into an arts centre, with sweeping views of a village, a church bell tower, and a garden with bright deckchairs and apple trees; and in west Wales, as a cold winter wind whistles and seagulls squawk outside the round space, and a circle of high windows reveal grey sky and occasional sunlight.

We stretch, talk, run, move, dance, and improvise; create solo and duet choreographic sequences that blend old work, new movements and repeated gestures; introduce to each other various exercises, techniques, props, costumes, images, texts and sounds; give each other a list of tasks and perform them together in an extended improvisation; attempt to respond to each other by extending our senses; and write 'butoh-fu' image 'poems', and take turns reading them to each other as we improvise responses.

We also create solo sequences based on the memory of the gestures of others; mirror and give each other impulses to respond to; undertake mutual interviews and observations; record our experiences in notes, sketches and marks on large sheets of paper taped to the walls; film and photograph ourselves; attempt to trace each other's danced pathways with masking tape, and endeavour to create a map of practice in the space that maps the network of the self.

In an attempt to extend our practice and respond to each other through the environment outside the studio space, we play in gale-force winds on a jetty by the sea and then try to embody the experience in the studio. We think and write about, reflect upon, struggle with, and share our experiences about our training and our failing bodies. We talk about our digital selves and our online identities.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section of our reflections on our collaborative process, we will discuss bodies in motion with reference to Rotman's notion of experiencing plurality. In the second section, we will account for the development of a strategy of performance response in the studio. In the third section, using a specific movement improvisation, we reflect on our practical exploration of the notion of performer's self through problematising the relation between recognition and intention in live performance.

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<sup>2</sup> Edited personal reflections from Rebecca Woodford-Smith's notebook.



## 1. Bodies in motion - Experiencing Plurality

Rebecca:

In this auto-ethnographic practice-as-research account, I attempt to describe the performer-self as experienced in collaboration. I am aware of the complexities of attempting to account for such an embodied experience through writing, and doing so through a self-reflective account.

I write this sat on a train, glancing at the Welsh landscape of estuaries, snow clad hills and barren windswept trees silhouetted against the quickly darkening pink sky; and later sat on a plane hovering over a bed of white clouds, below which I imagine is Scandinavia. Later still — as I write at this moment — I am jetlagged in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar district of Tokyo and have the strange (yet familiar) sensation that my body has not yet caught up with its self and is perhaps still hovering somewhere over Siberia. In the act of reflecting on, and remembering, the multiple actions in the multiple (and contrasting) studio spaces through the act of writing, and whilst sitting at home and travelling, I have the sense that I am experiencing the plurality that Rotman describes.



REFLECTIONS OF UNFAMILIAR TOKYO  
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Noyale:

I feel at the moment quite settled, in a rather steady position, not travelling. Shortly, I will stop writing and go to collect my daughter from the child minder and follow the toddler's routine before going back to the space of the screen.

How does this screen relate to what happened between Rebecca and me?

As we have decided to start to compose the reflection about our work through individual voices, I am paragraphing myself into the design of a word document. I find my way in this reflective account of my collaboration with Rebecca in the tension between a notion of 'extension of self' in terms of the work we have done together during the past ten months and a sense of myself as a professional dance practitioner, be it as a dancer, teacher or researcher. It is perhaps this sense of fixity which leads me to focus on the tension that I identify in collaboration, the tension between knowing what is me and what is neither me nor someone else or, as Rotman puts it 'becoming multiple and parallel' (Rotman 2008: 104).



NOYALE IN WALES  
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## 2. Bodies in motion - Performance Responses

Rebecca:

My actions in the studio are not confined to me, or to Noyale, or to the studio spaces; perhaps they are located — temporally — in a network of multiplicity, experienced through plurality. I am curious how this plurality, or network, operates in the performer body, in particular in relation to Noyale's and my practising together. My background is primarily in theatre, and I work as a performer, researcher and teacher. My movement-training is influenced by the butoh-influenced technique of *Gekidan Kaitaisha*. As practitioners, Noyale's and my own training backgrounds, modes of practice and geographical past and present locations differ vastly. Yet we also share many commonalities in terms of performance making approaches and in terms of our current position of negotiating doctoral research through practice. I wonder how we both position ourselves within this place of difference and commonality, and how this collaborative work together might fold into our individual practice.

Through our reflection on Rotman's tracing of the self as located in, and distinctly shaped by, the gestural, the written, the spoken and the digital, one line of our practice-as-research enquiry develops into our questioning the self as located in the digital, and we attempt to reflect upon how we are — or one is — defined by our or one's relationship with digital technology.

In the studio, Noyale asks me to reflect upon this 'digital self':

Noyale: Could you describe your online profile?

Rebecca: I have a website [...] incomplete. I didn't want to have one [...] it feels necessary, I'm still not sure about it and I haven't told anyone about it [...] I have a page on different social networks [...] several blogs, not public [...] traces from the past from various sites. Comments I might have made on public forums, or records of performances I've been in, or conferences I've been to. Images [...] or reviews of my work ... if you looked me up online you would be able to find out quite a lot of information about me; where I live, maybe you could work out my age, see what I looked like. I'm quite careful and private [...] I don't like [...] I delete things [...] I delete comments I've made [...] I don't want a record to still be there. My website presents a certain image of me [...] carefully edited [...] it's hard to remove yourself [...]

Noyale: Can you describe your physical profile?

Rebecca: [...] I'm small [...] slimish [...] not thin [...] well proportioned. White. Pale. Blonde hair. Hair is frizzy or curly, dark eyebrows, sharp bone structure. Pointy nose, small lips. Green blue eyes. My weight changes. I don't think I have a strong physical presence. So I feel a bit, invisible I suppose [...] I'm an artist, a writer, a researcher [...] wife, partner, friend, daughter, sister, future mother maybe ... I ... I'm a dancer, an actor, a performer. A thinker, a reader [...] a gardener [...] I like the sea and open

spaces and big skies, and [...] I like the city [...] I'm 31 [...] If I disappeared what would remain? There's quite a lot of medical records. I've been quite ill.

Noyale: Can you describe your home?

Rebecca: [...] I think of my parents' home and my home with my husband as my two homes [...] [Starts to move in space as if in home] like this as you enter [...] [continues to describe the two homes in detail and gestures throughout, pointing to what she is describing. She moves around the space as if walking through the rooms].

(Edited transcript of Noyale interviewing Rebecca, Aberystwyth, 5th January 2012).

Noyale:

During our residency in France we defined our research theme to be 'presence/absence' in relationship to each other. Drawing on the idea that presence only exists with others we built on our mutual experience of solo works to set up a situation of events for working together. A central concern was to investigate how two performers could account for each other's presence. To this end, we seamlessly shifted between being an audience for each other as much as a co-performer, from solo to duo, from 'you', 'us', 'I', from thinking to feeling and bounding ourselves to what Merleau Ponty advocated as 'the flesh that thinks'. We explored the notion of active viewing, an observation technique, which aims at focusing on the threshold just before the observer starts to interrupt with the unfolding action. This technique allowed us to go away from verbal or rational writing feedback and led us to veer toward performative responses in relation to our individual work. For example, the writing of *Butoh-Fu* as a poetic instruction invited a personal yet connected response.<sup>3</sup>

A starting point to my improvisation was one of Rebecca's *Butoh-Fu* 'poems':

Gaze extending for a 1,000 miles, seeing something  
Hair falls behind  
Breeze brushes cheeks  
Gaze pulls her forward, limp hands pulls her back  
Skirt bellows around legs, like an ocean.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Butoh-Fu', is a form of notation, developed by Tatsumi Hijikata, whereby a series of word images are interpreted and embodied by the dancer to create movement. Hijikata's notations were often taken from images, such as paintings, and were written in a poetic form.



NOYALE PERFORMING THE BUTOH-FU 'POEMS'  
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### 3. Bodies in motion: Performer Self through Appropriation

Rebecca:

As I am questioned on both my online profile and my physical profile, I stand in the middle of the studio and feel exposed. I later watch a recording of this interview and am aware of the contrast in my responses. I describe my online identity mainly in the negative, as something I want to 'delete', edit and keep private. As I am asked about my 'physical profile' I respond in detail, and I gesture and point my toes. When I describe myself as located in my home, I automatically begin to move around the space, as if I am walking through my home. I can visualise the staircase, the sea view, the late afternoon sunlight

creating a pattern on the kitchen wall; I can smell the damp in the bedroom, feel the worn carpet under my feet and remember myself and my sister sharing a bath when we were one and three years old. As opposed to the static self I located online, this physical profile is in a visceral state of flux<sup>4</sup>. It is such a state of flux that I experience when in the studio with Noyale; I am constantly changing, adapting and adopting my approach and my physicality to find a common fit with this other dancer-body, and to extend myself to the studio space.

This sense of flux, adaptation and adoption is something that I always experience when I collaborate with other performers. As I write, I am rehearsing with (mainly Japanese) performers in Tokyo<sup>5</sup>, and I sense a shift again in my body, movements and perception of myself. This shift and complex sense of myself is rooted in my history of collaborating with these performers, in our shared (and separate) training, in my position of both insider-company member and outsider-guest performer, in our limited verbal communication, in my sense of being away from home and in many other complexities besides. Yet, as I warm-up in the Tokyo studio, observing the other company members, I am reminded — physically — of choreographies, gestures and actions that I had somehow forgotten. Perhaps sometimes it is only possible to see myself through another, and through this it is less a sense of ‘I’ and the ‘other’ and more a sense of us and of a network.

For example, in a morning session in the studio in Wales, I begin to move through a solo choreographic sequence that I know well, have developed over several years and have performed many times. As I move, I experience a complex internal dialogue with myself and with layers of memories that are associated with the sequence.

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<sup>4</sup> Clearly, one could also argue that the digital space is not static, as it constantly changes through both direct agency and technological advance. However, Rebecca is focusing in this enquiry on the sensorial aspects of living performance spaces, as opposed to the conceptual implications of virtual spaces.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing (February 2012) Rebecca was working with *Gekidan Kaitaisha* (Theatre of Deconstruction) in Tokyo, with which she has collaborated with since 2004, usually on a yearly basis, for a project that might have a month-long training and rehearsal period.



REBECCA PERFORMING THE SEQUENCE AS DESCRIBED ABOVE  
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Gradually, Noyale begins to mirror my movements; I am not focusing on her, but I can see her in my peripheral vision and am aware of her presence. Later, I watch the film recording that we have made of this exercise; unintentionally, I am out of shot and you can only see Noyale moving, her movements seem to be her own, and yet I can recognise myself in her. It is not that she is merely able to capture — or replicate — the way that I move or the signature of my movements; it is a sense that she *recognises* ‘me’ — and what that ‘me’ might be — and she can pre-empt my movements, my rhythm and my use of the space. Equally, I can recognise Noyale. In another exercise, I stand behind Noyale and respond to her improvised movements through gradually extending my awareness of her over time. I follow through responding to her impulses, until we move together, responding to each other equally. I would suggest that within this exercise, we are also working with recognition, as I am able to respond to a sense of Noyale’s movements through my peripheral vision. This recognition is based, in part, in an understanding of the rhythm of her body in time and space. Such an understanding does not merely come from the act of moving with Noyale as another body but from a continually unfolding shared dialogue and the interweaving of a personal and a collaborative relationship. Hence, such a sense of ‘recognition’ is based on a set of complex relationships, which endlessly interweave and separate. This can be looked at in relation to Rotman’s notion that we have a ‘better’ sense of self through the multiplicity

of self. But what about my complex interior life — during my sequence — that Noyale cannot experience? Perhaps this exists as part of the network, in the space, and in the history of our practice.

As I consider such moments with Noyale, I am lead to reflect upon my current collaboration with *Kaitaisha* in Tokyo. Alongside other company members, choreographer Hino Hiruko has trained me in *Kaitaisha*'s signature movements and techniques over the last eight years. Hino's signature movements were in turn (in part) influenced by her training with Butoh founder Tatsumi Hijikata. My way of moving is both limited and defined by my own physicality, and yet I carry a trace of Hino — and perhaps Hijikata's — physical essence through my re-appropriation of their movements. I am both them and uniquely me. In this training, I have attempted to grasp something of the essence of Hino and other company member's movements, through an understanding of the impetus for such physicality, for example through working with the notion of transformation.

Further reflecting on what this notion of recognition might be, I want to draw upon another example of my practice with Noyale. In an attempt to engage with each other and the environment outside of the studio, Noyale and I stood, during the residency in Aberystwyth, on the jetty by the sea in gale force winds and played with the sensation of allowing our bodies to be moved by the wind. Later, in the studio, we improvised together, playing with the sensation that we had experienced on the jetty. Within the improvisation, I was able to respond to Noyale in the space intuitively, through my knowledge of her rhythm and duration and through the shared experience of the spatial and physical elements of moving on the jetty. This shared sense of recognition allows us to enfold and embody each other's sense of rhythm, duration and space.





RESPONDING TO AND EMBODYING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SEA IN THE STUDIO  
© REBECCA WOODFORD-SMITH & NOYALE COLIN

Noyale:

I sense that the process of those responses is very close to Rotman's description of 'experiencing plurality'. According to Rotman, 'the process is not to be identified with imitating, reproducing, splitting oneself; or identifying with, or assimilating another; or being reborn as a new being (though it can couple with and be traversed by all these). It is rather a form of a temporal change'. In performance production, terms we frequently use include mirroring and copying, alongside cutting and pasting techniques, but here this process of performance response is better understood as a process of appropriation of each other's movements and thoughts which happen through time and space. In a short essay, 'How Two Minds Can Know One Thing' (1912), the psychologist and philosopher William James developed his notion of 'appropriation' by the 'I'. In this essay, James tells us how two minds could be conscious of one thing. He says that 'to be "conscious" means not simply to be, but to be reported, known, to have awareness of one's being added to that being; and this is just what happens when the appropriative experience supervenes' (James 1912: 132).

Whereas our use of performance response could be defined as an attempt 'to be reporting' for each other through an acute awareness of each other's bodies and thoughts, one might argue that each moment is experienced from a unique angle and with a particular point of interest. For James, the moment of experience is not fixed in a particular present, it has duration. Each moment folds something of the past, present, and the future. What is the impact of this conception of time on our collaborating bodies? How as artists do we make sense of each other's duration? In terms of production values we can observe on the relationship between performance making and time as a resource. If one of the characteristics of the collaboration between Rebecca and me is its on-going nature, what, more importantly, seems to be the driving force behind our work together is the combination of time and trust. I remember feeling more patient for the work to uncover than if I was working on my own. The involvement of someone else's body in the studio — as an active observer, a reporter of sensations — heightened my sense of respect for the work in a way that is very different from that when I am engaged in a directing role. I have a

better conviction that there is something in what we are doing that is worth pursuing. The worth of the moment shared together. Whether we are stretching, laughing about our bodies being tight from spending too much time at the computer or working on concentration and internal processes, we are constantly learning about who we are in relation to each other. Whereas some of our exchanges could be quite verbal, direct and intentional, other moments of intense exchange manifested themselves indirectly and unintentionally during improvisation. For example, when Rebecca responded to my instruction 'dance like your father for three minutes', the conviction of her rhythmic presence immediately engaged me in a complex network of possible family relationships between father and daughter. Her stamping of the feet, her clapping of the hands remained with me as an internalised rhythm of past memories of our work together, memories which not only add to what I already know of Rebecca but also add to what I know of myself. I am then developing in James's words a 'consciousness of still wider scope'. When later on we experimented with stealing each other's movements during our improvisation, I found myself involved in rhythmic patterns, which came directly from earlier observation of Rebecca, from another time and space. While the branching out to other spatio-temporal experiences feeds my imagination as I perform Rebecca's movement, this rhizomic view of the improvisation's process is bound to what Rotman describes as '[b]ecoming party to a condition other than [my] own'.

Having trained in front of a mirror for many years, I am easily able to reproduce other people's movement; however, the intention of the exploration was not to copy Rebecca strictly but rather to grasp something of the essence of the movement, what in dance can be identified as movement's intent or in other words, as Randy Martin has observed, 'the aesthetic content' of a dance which he calls 'kinetic intention' (Martin 1985: 62). If a dancer's intention of the movement constitutes an elusive component in choreographic composition, including for the dancer herself, in the case of the relationship between a dancer and a choreographer the ability of the choreographer to communicate (more often verbal) clear intention of movement for the dancer is crucial to the rehearsal process. For Martin, 'Kinetics [intention] are the dancers' response to

a motional situation, though the choreographer must find the means to create those situations' (Martin 1985: 62). However, the collaborative practice with Rebecca is concerned with the relationship between two practitioners using improvisation as a mode of performing. In dance improvisation, movement is the foundation of the communication between dancers. In this particular improvisation with Rebecca, the idea was primarily to focus on the repetition of her movements and to use improvisation to access the communicative aspect of movement. In improvisation the recognition and understanding of the intention happen while moving. Because dance unfolds through time, intention can not be perceived at once; it is in becoming and in relation with other internal and external factors including space, time and other bodies.

In live performance the body constantly adjusts to a new set of conditions including internal and external factors. The philosopher Brian Massumi observes that 'a body present is in a dissolve [...] a thing cannot be understood without reference to the non-present dimension it compresses and [...] expresses in continuity' (Massumi 2002: 201). As we have previously seen, for James the moment of experience has duration; it follows from this that, in the context of live performance, what is experienced in continuity is the duration of the performer's body; therefore, one might argue that the body movement's intention is linked to its duration. Suzanne Guerlac, in her writing on Bergson's notion of duration offers important insights into the relationship between body and memory. Guerlac stresses that whereas 'the body is a centre of action that acts in the present' (Guerlac 2006: 122), consciousness operates as a coping mechanism for the body 'by synthesising the heterogeneous rhythms of duration into temporal horizons of past, present, and future' (Guerlac 2006: 122).

If the process of grasping the essence of Rebecca's body's intention has something to do with the development of a kinaesthetic memory acquired through dance training, the analysis of this complex process is out of the scope of this article. What interests me here is the way in which my effort to grasp the essence of her intention — which we could also call my appropriation of her movement — creates a junction through which we both collide. When

Rebecca later watched the video of this moment which only framed me in the shot, she could recognise herself in my movements and I could recognise myself doing the movements, but they belonged to both or neither of us.

### Conclusion

If, as Rotman argues, there is no doubt that ‘networks and the relentless co-presencing and distribution of the psyche they facilitate already [start] to control the sites where subjects are produced’ (Rotman 2008: 104), the foregrounding of the body in performance always refers to these sites of subjectivity. In these terms, performance-making seems to be an appropriate field in which to look at the way whereby the self may become a network, hence the recognition for the need to narrate our experience as performance practitioners. Yet we are still to define what those feelings of being plural or multiple might imply with regard to bodies in motion and collaborative practices in the performing arts.

Paul Cilliers, in his study of complexity and postmodernity, examines networks as applied to human systems. Cilliers argues that a system ‘can develop a distributed form of internal structure’ in the way which a ‘structure is neither a passive reflection of the outside, nor a result of active, pre-programmed internal factors, but the result of a complex interaction between the environment, the present state of the system and the history of the system’ (Cilliers 1998: 89).

Our collaborative practice might be considered to be what Cilliers describes as a ‘complex system’, or as ‘not constituted merely by the sum of its components, but also by the intricate *relationships* between these components’ (Cilliers 1998: 2). Accordingly, we could argue that our collaborative practice can be seen as a collaborative system that develops a distributed form of emergent shifting relationships. During movement improvisation, the constant process of decision-making in operation when bodies are in motion is influenced by the interaction of internal and external factors. If, as we have demonstrated, time and trust parameters, in conjunction with the function of memory, constituted a central focus in our practice, we might begin to see how our feeling of being plural might be bound to how the complex process of emergent shifting relationships between those constitutive elements influence performers’ decision-making.

From a philosophic perspective, Erin Manning, drawing on James, reassesses the interaction between computer and human in web-based networking. She challenges the hierarchical order which lay between the knower (the human) and the known (the computer). She argues that ‘[k]nower and known are no longer situated at the predictable extremes of a

given relation. Knower and known are co-constituted in and by the event itself. This is what is meant by being conscious in a network' (Manning 2009) For the purpose of this reflection on the performer's body as self, our experiences as performers in the studio appear to parallel Manning's position in this different non-virtual networking situation. In the context of movement improvisation, a hierarchical division may be forged between the leader and the follower of movements. We speculate that the shifting of boundaries that occurs during improvisation in the studio is bound to a 'working through' (Lyotard 1991: 54) the accumulative memory of what we know of each other through time. This dynamic process in turn leads to what we could here call a decentralisation of our selves being 'co-constituted in and by the event' (Manning 2009) of our improvisation together.

One consequence of this collision of selves in such collaborative practices is its impact on authorship. James writes:

It is, indeed, 'mine' only as it is felt as mine, and 'yours' only as it is felt as yours. But it is felt as neither by itself, but only when 'owned' by our two several remembering experiences, just as one undivided estate is owned by several heirs. (James 1912: 61)

Based on this dynamic process, the form of collaboration that we have developed might echo James's metaphor: an undivided estate owned by several, or multiple, heiresses working within a network, as we have argued, of distributed selves.

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## Tangled Pathways

Katie Lewis

**M**y current work traces experiences of the body through methodical systems of documentation, investigating chaos, control, accumulation and deterioration. The artificially rigid organisation of my materials alludes to control — of the individual body as an institutional domain and of irrational experience as a manageable, concrete set of events. My choice to use the body as a starting point aims to give visual form to physical sensations that are invisible to the eye and medical imaging, and only exist in the subjective realm. I collect data through daily documentation processes and then generate numerous systems to allow the information to exist in a material form. I abstract and quantify the data in order to give authority and agency to subjective experiences.

The work alludes to the body in certain pieces, through the text or a particular material, but the reference remains abstracted. By abstracting and codifying the work, I want to evoke a sense of the passing of time, accumulation of information, presence and absence, chaos and order, control and loss of control and the possibility of the system collapsing upon itself or reaching a breaking point. Once I devise a system for a particular piece, I follow it all the way through the work allowing the visual results to exist outside of subjective expressive decisions. By strictly following and never veering from a given system, the work is tightly controlled and asserts itself as accurate and authoritative (however false and unscientific), questioning the gap between a subjective experience and medicine's conventions for understanding the body. The work is often organised into grid-like charts and diagrams mimicking science and medicine's representations of the body as a specimen, visually displayed for the purpose of gaining knowledge. In this way I create distance from the information and objectify the experience, giving a false sense that the body is accessible and easily understood.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> More examples of the author's work can be found at <<http://katiehollandlewis.com>>

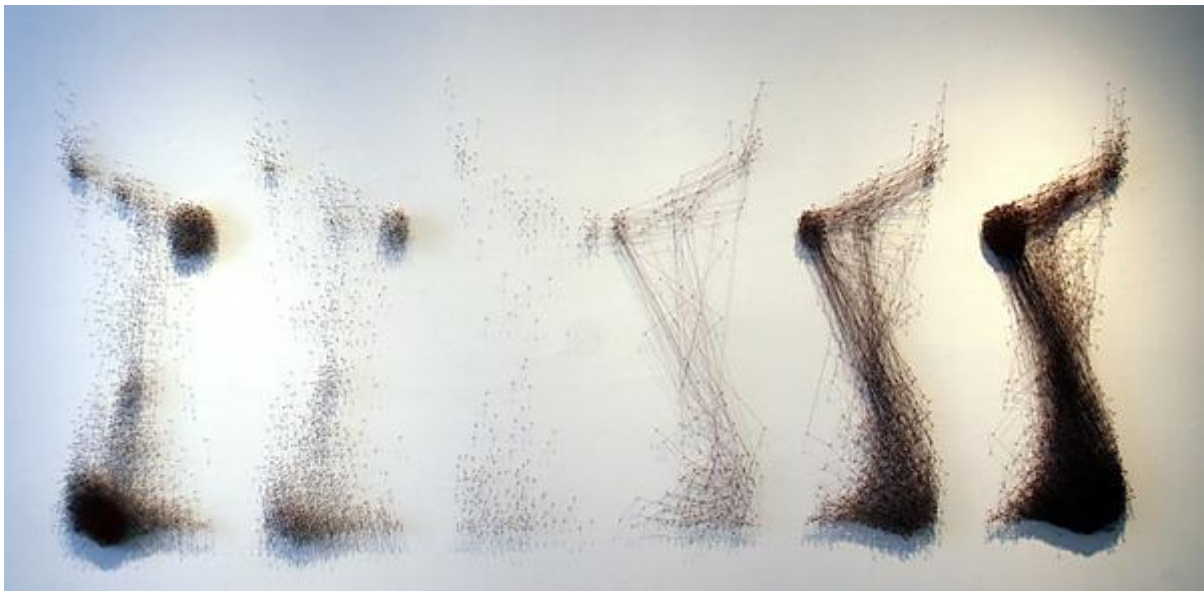


TANGLED PATHWAYS 1  
pins, enamel, thread: 49" x 106" x 1.5"  
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TANGLED PATHWAYS 2  
pins, enamel, and thread 49" x 106" x 1.5"  
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pins, enamel, and thread 49" x 106" x 1.5"  
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**‘Build Ups’ and ‘Slim Downs’: Re-shaping America, 1945–1970**

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*Mama won't let me diet anymore... This morning I was having my usual half grapefruit for breakfast and she made me eat a slice of whole wheat bread and a scrambled egg and a piece of bacon. That's probably at least 400 calories, maybe even five or six or seven hundred... I wonder if I could stick my finger down my throat and throw up after every meal? She says I'm going to have to start eating dinner again too, and just when I was getting down where I want to be and I've quit fighting the hunger pains.*

Anon., *Go Ask Alice*

The author of *Go Ask Alice*, the anonymous diary published in 1971, is obsessed with her weight. Her journal is a recounting of not only her daily activities but also how much weight she has gained or lost. The fifteen-year-old girl avoids chocolate and French fries, and equates her new popularity at school with the ten pounds she has recently lost. When she has whittled her frame down to 115 pounds, the teen author wistfully notes her desire to lose an additional 10 pounds. ‘Mom says I don’t want to get that thin,’ she writes, ‘but she doesn’t know! I do! I do! I do!’ (Anon. 1971: 7) This seemingly typical teenage reaction is symptomatic of the heightened preoccupation with weight that affected American women of all ages in the years immediately following World War II.

At the close of World War II, female beauty ideals were in flux because American culture had reached a period of instability. Betty Friedan famously argued that, during this time, American women fell victim to a ‘feminine mystique’ that instructed them to pursue femininity and avoid conditions that threatened to strip them of it. Although the universal validity of Friedan’s claims has been challenged with regard to body image, the author-housewife was not exaggerating.<sup>1</sup> The post-war period saw the re-emergence of feminine ideals similar to the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ from the mid-nineteenth century to combat paranoia that American women had become overly masculine during the war years. Found in middle-class prescriptive literature of the antebellum period, the ‘Cult of Domesticity’ or the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ declared that to be a ‘true’ woman, one must be pious, virginal,

<sup>1</sup> For a reassessment of Friedan, see (under *Further Reading*) Joanne Meyerowitz (Meyerowitz 1993) and Daniel Horowitz (Horowitz 1996).

submissive, and domestic. This system of beliefs placed women in the ‘private sphere,’ or the home.<sup>2</sup> Although this was not a complete return to beauty and domestic ideals from the so-called Victorian Era, the post-war ideal certainly was focused once again on family togetherness with women at the centre of the home. Young women married earlier than their mothers had in the previous generation and gave birth to more children in rapid succession. Large numbers of women abandoned higher education or a full-time career and instead sought fulfilment through marriage, motherhood, and housework.<sup>3</sup> In the words of one contemporary writer, ‘[t]he war was over, and [women] were supposed to sashay back to the kitchen and learn how to make green beans baked with Campbell’s cream of mushroom soup’ (Douglas 1994: 47). With memories of a devastating, economic depression and a world war casting shadows over the country, the political, economic, and social institutions endorsed this return to domesticity as patriotic and necessary.

But perhaps more interesting than the renewed emphasis on domesticity, was the focus on cosmetic standards. As scholar Barbara Coleman notes, ‘[i]n a society based on strict gender roles, women needed to look like women. They could not resemble Norman Rockwell’s *Rosie the Riveter*’ (Coleman 1995: 10). Although wartime propaganda assured the public that performing a ‘man’s job’ would not threaten American women’s femininity or sexuality, reconversion demanded that women forfeit employment to stabilise the home.<sup>4</sup> Among the numerous changes expected of American women to help the country return to tranquillity after World War II came a modification in the representation of the perfect feminine figure. Americans began the full-fledged war against fat in the post-war years when the fashion industry promoted thinness as the aesthetic ideal, and the insurance and medical communities equated health with size. Thus, beginning in the 1950s, Americans, particularly women, dieted and exercised their way towards skinnier, more firm and trim figures as a consequence of a tightened relationship between fashion, foreign policy, insurance figures, and medical opinion. A new, all-consuming discourse in prescriptive literature, namely women’s magazines, demanded thinness above all. But fewer than 200 years ago, however,

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<sup>2</sup> For works addressing white women’s bodies and beauty ideals in nineteenth-century America, see Joan Jacob Brumberg (Brumberg 1988) and also (under *Further Reading*) Lois Banner (Banner 1983), Frances B. Cogan, (Cogan 1980), Alison Piepmeier (Piepmeier 2004). Valerie Steele (Steele 1985), Nancy M. Theriot (Theriot 1996) and Jan Todd (Todd 1998).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the changes women experienced prior to, during, and after World War II, see (under *Further Reading*) Karen Anderson (Anderson 1981), William Chafe (Chafe 1991), Susan M. Hartmann (Hartmann 1982), Elaine Tyler May (May 1988 and May 1994).

<sup>4</sup> For more on wartime and reconversion propaganda see (under *Further Reading*) Maureen Honey (Honey 1984).

weight was not an important issue. At the turn of the twentieth century in fact, being underweight, not overweight, was the leading concern of medical doctors (Czerniawski 2007: 273).

### 1. A brief history of slimming in America

The first penny scale appeared in the United States in 1885. The new weighing machine showed up in chemist and grocer's shops and soon expanded to street corners, cinemas, banks, office buildings, railroad stations, and subways (Seid 1989: 90). The penny scale transformed the way Americans thought about weight. With the ability to measure one's body to the nearest pound, weight transitioned from a qualitative subject to a quantitative evaluation (Czerniawski 2007: 273). Between 1890 and 1910, middle-class America initiated the battle against body fat when several factors – changing gender roles, consumerism, economic status, medicine, modernity, and mortality – simultaneously collided (Fraser 2009: 13). America became a weight-watching culture when people increasingly believed that the body was tied to the self. Being fat or thin often had little to do with one's shape or size, but rather an assumed identity directly attached to the body. Criminologists used weight to identify character types, insurance companies and actuaries tied weight to risk and mortality, and the fashion industry used weight as a litmus test for beauty (Schwartz 1986: 9, 147). According to historian Peter N. Stearns, never before in American history was dieting so popular along with an aversion to 'obesity' (Stearns 1997: 3).

During America's transition into a quantified weight culture, women were particularly affected. Although accounts of women starving themselves can be found as far back as the Middle Ages and holy ascetics, a new kind of 'fasting girl' emerged in nineteenth century America. *Anorexia nervosa* was the result of not only a new authority given to doctors in the period, but also larger changes in bourgeois life. The self-restraint necessary to achieve this body type was a characteristic valued in antebellum society. Food refusal and its accompanying slimness were signs of social status as thin, frail women were unfit for productive work. Additionally, advice books of the era cautioned their female readers to be careful of what and how much they ate. Hunger and gluttonous eating were connected to sexuality and desire; therefore by demonstrating a modest appetite, a woman exhibited her own sexual virtue. It is clear, then, that modern *anorexia nervosa* existed well before the mass preoccupation with slimming in the twentieth century (Brumberg 1988: 178, 182).

## 2. 'Build up' diets

Fast forward to the years immediately following World War II, and the emphasis in women's magazines and health books was not on starving oneself or fad diets. Instead, prescriptive literature urged women to 'build up' their bodies to become sturdy, vigorous machines. Women's and teen magazines from 1945 to 1970 played a major role in constructing the ideal body type for the 'all-American' woman. During the 1950s, in fact, five out of six women read at least one magazine every week (Currie 1999: 23). In a culture where television was just taking root in suburban living rooms, magazines offered guidance, disseminated the news, and informed Americans how to think and feel about national and international issues. Women looked to fashion periodicals for instruction on how to be feminine and fashionable. In addition to appropriate clothes, the proper body was an essential ingredient of feminine perfection.

Although historians have been quick to note the relentless attempts to push women back into the home and back into their role as mothers and housewives, this does not acknowledge that immediately after World War II, women were still seen as needed. 'These days,' one beauty guide observed (Waddy 1944: 10), 'women need all their strength to stand up to the strenuous calls upon their system and food is the only thing to provide that strength'. This message was a continuation of wartime attitudes about the female body. 'Strictly Personal', an official U.S. War Department training film, stressed the importance of vigorous exercise, a balanced diet and the benefits of sleep to female military volunteers. The omnipresent narrator announces in the film's opening minutes, '[i]n perfect physical shape; yes, that's what it takes to do the man-sized job you've picked for yourselves when you volunteered'.<sup>5</sup> Delicate waifs would not help America win the war and neither could they help restore the nation after the global conflict.

In a stark contrast to articles that appeared later in the 1960s, women's magazines in the immediate post-war years addressed the plight of underweight women. 'You don't have glamorous curves; your chest is flat; your legs are like toothpicks; your neck is scrawny', the beauty editor for *Screen Stars* described (Bennett 1951c: 63). 'You feel masculine, like a boyish figure, when you want so much to feel feminine'. Ironically, this androgynous look became fashionable and desirable in the late 1960s. But in years immediately following

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this, see (under *Further Reading*) 'Strictly Personal', in *United States Army Pictorial Service, 1945, U.S. National Library of Medicine*.

World War II, women's magazines celebrated a different body type. 'A chubby, well-groomed figure is always attractive', another author advised her female readers (Daly 1946).

With the popularity of curvy silhouettes, underweight women sought ways to add extra pounds. Prescriptive literature advised housewives on the best kinds of exercise and food to help them stay energised and 'build up' their bodies. Exercise regimes focused on stretching and strengthening muscles without the use of bulky weights. Moreover, most articles highlighted exercises one could perform to strengthen muscles while simultaneously doing the daily housework (Benjamin 1945: 140). Exercise and a nutritional diet were also seen as a strategy for young women coping with the loss of a husband or boyfriend to war. The *Ladies' Home Journal* recounted the story of a recent widow whose unhappiness had shrunk her already slight figure to less than 100 pounds. Rather than allowing her GI husband's premature death to signal the end of her own life, however, she rebounded and re-built her figure (Benjamin 1945: 105).

Magazines for young girls similarly encouraged their readers to develop healthy eating and exercising habits at an early age, but *not* to actually diet. 'Don't be alarmed by those little bumps and bulges because it is much better at your age to be "round" than too "skinny",' one author encouraged (Williams-Heller 1953). *Polly Pigtales* and *Calling All Girls*, the predecessor to *Young and Modern* magazine, reminded readers that they would be growing several inches in the coming years, and that their body would grow more easily with some fat reserves. 'Doctors do not recommend dieting for your age', a journalist noted. 'In fact, if you are twelve or under, they say it is even harmful' (Furman 1963). *Calling All Girls*, created by the publishers of *Parents* magazine in the autumn of 1941, had little interest in reflecting teenage life; its goal was to encourage healthy habits and set a good example for young readers.<sup>6</sup> Instead of printing page after page of diet plans, these magazines urged their readers to be physically active and to eat nutritionally balanced meals. This healthy and pro-body conscious attitude, however, vanished from women's and teen magazines in the mid- to late-1950s.

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<sup>6</sup> Teen culture, particularly girl culture, was certainly not new to the post-war period. See Kelly Schrum (Schrum 2004) and (under *Further Reading*) Jon Savage (Savage 2008).



### 3. Slimming down – ‘lazybones’ weight loss, passive exercise and diet pills

The national weight-loss campaign was originally directed at men because reports revealed they were at the highest risk of heart disease.<sup>7</sup> But women, not men, became the most religious dieters. In 1954, *Reader's Digest* reported that 34 million adults considered themselves ‘too fat’ but noted that women were more eager to lose weight than men (Anon, *Reader's Digest* 1954: 34). In 1954, a Gallup poll discovered that twice as many women as men worried about their weight, and one in three women dieted compared to one in seven men. However, the motivations for female dieting had little to do with health. A 1959 Roper poll reported that 66 per cent of women dieted to ‘make their clothes fit better’ or to avoid ‘look[ing] heavy’ (Wyden 1965: 9).

The dieting industry became a viable economic giant in the mid-1950s. Between 1950 and 1955, diet soda drink sales increased by 3,000 per cent. ‘Food substitute’ products like the chalk-powder drinks Metrecal and the ‘Rockefeller Diet’ were also introduced in the 1950s. Metrecal’s earnings expanded from \$4 million in the late 1950s to \$13 million in 1960 (Seid 1989: 106). By 1959, 92 diet books were in print, and by 1961, 40 per cent of all Americans used reduced-calorie products (Stearns 1997: 109). Dieting groups and youth ‘fat camps’ became *de rigueur* in the 1950s and 1960s. One of the first national diet support groups, TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly), grew from a club of three friends in 1948 to an organisation with 2,481 branches by the early 1960s (Seid 1989: 107). Other dieting groups such as Weight Watchers immediately followed. Weight Watchers earned \$160,000 in 1964; in 1970, business had skyrocketed to earnings of over \$8 million (Stearns 1997: 109). In addition, magazine articles that had once featured strategies to ‘build up’ bodies were systematically replaced by slenderizing techniques.

‘Build-up’ diets of the late 1940s and early 1950s focused on energy, health and vigour as the goal of shaping up. American women wanted to be slim, no doubt, but what they meant by ‘slimness’ was different from what the definition became by the end of the 1960s. The most crucial difference between the immediate post-war years and the beginning of the 1960s was the dieter’s goal. In the early to mid-1950s, the ideal woman still had flesh on her bones. For example, the average contestant in the 1954 Miss America Pageant weighed 121 pounds and measured five feet, six point one inches tall — around eleven pounds less than the national average and just a little below MetLife Insurance’s ‘desirable’ height and weight

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of the national weight loss campaign and its findings, see (under *Further Reading*) Barbara Ehrenreich (Ehrenreich 1983: 68–87).

tables (Deford 1971: 313–16, 325). The culture of slimming culminated with the androgynous high-fashion model, Twiggy, in the late 1960s. Therefore, it is more useful to see Twiggy's body type as a bookend, rather than a dramatic, overnight change in the aesthetic ideal.

In addition to having a new dieter's goal, by the mid- to late-1950s, a new attitude towards weight loss appeared in women's magazines. Prescriptive literature turned away from promoting physical exercise as a legitimate means to lose weight, in favour of easy, effortless diets and 'passive' exercise. In 1958, *Harper's Bazaar's* 'Lazybones Diet' promoted a curtailed eating regime in which dieters were urged to spend the Friday-to-Sunday period in complete idleness. The magazine promised a weight-loss of two or two-and-a-half pounds over a 'quiet summer weekend'. The diet instructed, 'sloth is mandatory' due to the limited 800 to 1,000 daily calorie regime, leaving little energy available to exercise safely (Anon. *Harper's Bazaar* 1958). Most diets reprinted in the various women's and fashion magazines were intended for women wishing to lose five to ten pounds to reach a fashionably low weight. The extreme calorie cutting such as that of the 'Lazybones Diet' was only suggested for brief spurts, a few weeks at most, with some diets then suggesting a secondary 'maintenance' diet for when the desired weight loss was achieved. But no distinctions were ever made between diets for women who desired to lose a few pounds or dieting strategies for women who wanted to shed 50 to 100 pounds. America supposedly suffered from an 'obesity epidemic', and yet the most circulated media for diet advice — women's magazines — failed to advertise the real work that losing large amounts of weight would require.

In addition to 'sloth' and 'lazybones' dieting, high-end 'reducing' salons had appeared in most major cities by the mid-1950s. Three of the most popular were Elizabeth Arden, Slenderella International, and Helen Rubinstein's salons. The selling-point for reducing salons was minimal effort on the part of the client. 'The trouble with exercise is – it's often so much trouble,' one women's magazine lamented (Anon. *Vogue* 1954). The solution was vibrating devices and roller-tables where women relaxed while the machine did all the work. Clients were promised correct posture, the elimination of saggy areas where fat can accumulate and better muscle tone. But while exercise salons emphasised the relative ease with which weight loss was achieved, this fed into the negative stereotype that 'overweight' or 'obese' people were lazy, unmotivated and inactive.

Vibrating belts, roller-tables and electrodes were not the only suspect exercise schemes to come out of the post-war period. ‘Beauty experts’ widely believed that by simply pounding away at inches of unwanted fat the problematic areas would flatten and become streamlined. Even rubbing fleshy areas with a rough bath towel was thought to help ‘rub away the superfluous inches’ (Waddy 1944: 48). Joan Bennett, an actress and beauty contributor for *Screen Stars*, encouraged her readers to roll across the floor 50 to 100 times every morning to carve away extra inches on their hips and derrières. Bennett also suggested rocking back and forth on one’s buttocks while grabbing the knees to create a slimmer silhouette (Bennett 1951a). Another exercise that she called ‘the thumper’ consisted of lying on the floor, using one leg as a lever to raise the body, and dropping back down on fatty spots (Bennett 1952). She also recommended picking up marbles with the toes every day for twenty minutes to build up calf muscles (Bennett 1951b).

Another passive exercise strategy, ‘isometrics’, became popular in the early 1960s. Isometrics is any kind of exercise in which the muscles exert force against an immovable object or against themselves without movement. Like the bumping and rolling machines that preceded it, proponents of this ‘scientific exercise’ promised potential users that they could ‘exercise without moving a muscle’ (Anon. *Vogue* 1964: 120). The benefits of isometrics over isotonic exercise (physical activity), was heralded in periodicals as diverse as *Vogue* (Anon. 1964) to *Sports Illustrated* (Rogin 1961). Passive exercise appealed to American women not just because of the promise of results with little to no effort: women also avoided more traditional exercise such as active sports, jogging, or weight lifting for fear that too much action would transform their feminine bodies into bulky, masculine, and muscled figures. Because of this, post-war magazines held a tenuous position in celebrating professional and amateur female athletes.<sup>8</sup>

America’s obsession with easy weight-loss came to an apex with a diet pill scandal in the late 1960s. Diet pills and appetite suppressants were certainly not new (Anon. *Screen Stories* 1953). What was unique in the late 1960s, however, was the mass number and types of pills being prescribed, and consequently the number of ‘medical doctors’ making a handsome living off the rainbow-coloured tablets. The FDA estimated that between 5,000 and 7,000 ‘fat doctors’ treated five to ten million patients every year, sold more than two billion diet pills and achieved gross earnings close to half a billion dollars (Anon. *Life* 1968a).

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<sup>8</sup> For the relationship between femininity, the mass media, and female athletes see (under *Further Reading*) Susan K. Cahn (Cahn 1998).

In 1968, *Life* magazine published an exposé on the diet pill craze (Anon. 1968). The article began with the story of Cheryl Oliver, a college co-ed who worried about her weight and ultimately died from taking a lethal combination of diet pills. Commonly prescribed drugs for weight loss included amphetamines to suppress appetite, barbiturates to counter the jitters the amphetamines could cause, thyroid which increases the rate the body burns calories, the heart drug digitalis, diuretics which flush water from the body, and laxatives. Using diet pills she had received in the mail, Oliver, at age 19, went from 160 pounds to 120. The medical examiner attributed the teen's death to an excessive loss of potassium in her body and digitalis poisoning.

Following this tragic tale, *Life* sent investigative reporter Susanna McBee undercover to ten 'obesity' doctors. At the time McBee was five feet, five inches tall and weighed 125 pounds. According to Met Life's desirable weight tables from 1967, the reporter was at an ideal weight, and even a little on the skinny side of the spectrum.<sup>9</sup> Of her own body she stated, 'No one has ever called me fat. A little on the hippy side perhaps. But never fat. I am a reliable size 10' (McBee 1968: 24). Over a six-week period, McBee visited a number of osteopaths and other 'fat doctors', posing as a woman who wanted to lose weight. The reporter expected to be rejected by all the health care professionals as she was neither 'overweight' nor 'obese'. To her surprise, however, all ten doctors welcomed her business and in fact congratulated her for 'catching the problem' early on. Among the doctors McBee visited, there was no consensus on diet or exercise. Moreover, she noted that the preliminary physical examinations she received ranged from exotic tests to merely a weight and measurement assessment. 'There was consensus though,' she wrote, 'on one point: pills, pills, pills' (McBee 1968: 27). Between the ten doctors she visited, McBee was prescribed 1,479 pills (McBee 1968). Even after the *Life* exposé, however, readers wrote in to the magazine with continued praise for the potentially deadly pills. One woman who had reduced her body from 198 pounds to 135 pounds wrote, 'I would rather live my present, happy, full life for half as long than to prolong a miserable, self-hating half-life of a fat woman' (Anon. 1968b). She claimed that due to her weight loss, she was now popular and had acquired a new job that doubled her income (Anon. *Life* 1968b). For women such as she, the supposed pay-off was far too great a temptation, even if her health was jeopardised.

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<sup>9</sup> At 5' 5", the 'desirable weight' for women 25 and over was 118–127 pounds for a 'small' frame, 124–139 pounds for a 'medium' frame, and 133–150 pounds for a 'large' frame.

The American love-affair with diet pills in the mid- to late-1960s was indicative of the overall change in exercise and diet literature. Short-cut slimming attempts were certainly not created during this period, but they did become more of a visible trend in women's magazines. By the late 1960s, even articles that had once reassured teen girls that they would grow into their bodies or that they should eat three-balanced meals a day, had all but disappeared. Studies revealed that the number of high school girls who thought they were 'too fat' had grown from 50 to 80 per cent between 1966 and 1969 (Wolf 1991: 185). Drawing on the protest vernacular of the day, *Seventeen* magazine suggested readers could hold a 'Thin-In' (Anon. *Seventeen* 1968). The event's guest list could include girls on diets ('and who isn't?' the 1968 magazine pointed out). Decorations would include large pictures of very thin models, entertainment was an exercise period and food included low-calorie snacks. Similarly in *Teen* magazine, a young girl wrote in to the periodical's beauty editor to ask advice about what style of trousers she should wear if her lower body was heavy. Instead of suggesting a flattering cut, the *Teen* editor responded: 'We suggest buying any favourite pant style — one or two sizes too small. Or spend your entire month's allowance on a pantsuit that's too small, and you'll find a new supply of willpower for diet and exercise' (Anon. *Teen* 1966: 53). While teen magazines in the 1940s and 1950s had once urged their readers to build a positive relationship with their bodies, by the 1960s they now mirrored the message of periodicals aimed at an older generation — slenderising at all costs.

#### **4. From 'build up' to 'slim down'**

So why did women obsess over their figures in post-war America? Why did the country transform from a 'build up' to a 'slim down' nation? As others have noted, starting at the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class America first became concerned with weight loss, but in the years after World War II slimming down became a national obsession.<sup>10</sup> French designer Christian Dior's 'New Look' democratised fashion and declared that thin was 'in'. Post-war anxieties about Communism also led to concerns about weight. And at the same time, medical and insurance actuary data swayed the American population into believing that, not only was being 'overweight' unattractive, now it was deadly as well.

Fashion standards had a broader audience in post-war America. With the advent of ready-to-wear clothing, the creation of dress sizes shaped women's weight consciousness.

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<sup>10</sup> For more detailed descriptions of this, see Hillel Schwartz (Schwartz 1986), Roberta Pollack Seid (Seid 1989) and Peter N. Stearns (Stearns 1997).

Paris and New York still dominated design, but mass-produced imitations made fashionable clothes widely available by the end of World War I (Schrum 2004: 24). Although most women's clothing remained custom-made well into the 1920s, shop-bought clothes contributed to women's anxieties about the shape and size of their body. As shop-bought clothing was standardised to a specific body shape and size, if she failed to fit the pre-made patterns, a woman perceived there was something wrong with her figure. As standardised ready-to-wear clothing became more available and accepted in the post-war years, women now had time and money to keep up with the latest fashion trends.

Christian Dior's 'New Look' demanded slenderness above all. Although the silhouette featured high-rounded breasts and full hips, these were features that could be simulated with rubber or foam padding. A tiny hand-span waist, however, could not be faked, even with the help of girdles and corsets. Dior noted that for a woman to wear his design, she must have an 'épée silhouette' — be as slender as a fencing blade (Anon. *Newsweek* 1956). Moreover, clothing shops stocked smaller sizes. Thus, in order to be truly stylish, the average woman had no choice but to slim down. Men's clothiers, however, continued to sell the same sizes as they had for the previous twenty years (Anon. *Newsweek* 1956).

In addition to changing fashion trends, dieting and exercise gained new importance in the 1950s and 1960s over fears that Americans were growing bodily and mentally 'soft', and could therefore be more easily influenced by Communist propaganda. 'We've been called "soft" and our children have been described as physically unfit, inferior in strength and stamina to children of other countries,' the *Ladies' Home Journal* warned, 'Our technology has created a physical void' (Deutsch and Deutsch 1963). In a post-war era defined by excess and mass consumption, middle-class America needed to exhibit restraint not of consumption of products, but bodily restraint from food and drink.

Finally, and more damaging, dieting gained momentum and credence in the post-war period due to the widely-publicised belief that fat was literally killing America. The health industry, led by Louis I. Dublin of the MetLife Insurance Company, launched an all-out campaign against 'obesity' and 'overweight'. Dublin, long-time actuary for MetLife, spoke at an American Medical Association symposium in 1951 on what he saw as a direct correlation between fat and mortality. 'Overweight' individuals purportedly died 282 per cent faster than 'normal' people (Anon. *Newsweek* 1956). The medical profession had always considered 'obesity' to be unhealthy, but they generally situated their definition of too much fat at the far end of the weight spectrum. Dublin redefined 'overweight' as ten per cent above actuary

table ideals and ‘obese’ as 20 to 30 per cent above it. In doing so, the influential insurance company statistician catapulted, overnight, ‘average’ Americans into the category of ‘overweight’ (Seid 1989: 118).

But insurance companies could not have created this fear of fat without the support of the medical community. And unique to this period, doctors were more trusted as experts than ever before. The problem, however, was that these ‘experts’ relied on Dublin’s data. In their own reports, medical doctors and scientists continually referred to the MetLife studies as if they were authoritative versions of the ‘truth’, rather than looking for different sources upon which to base findings. The scientists and doctors agreed — being overweight shortened one’s life and weight loss lengthened it. Due to the fear of Communism and its link with the growing ‘obesity myth’, the federal government funded several studies. In 1961 the U.S. Public Health Service conducted its own height-weight studies, and in 1969 the White House held a special conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health (Seid 1989:120–23, 141). The Government’s attention to weight and health fed the ever-growing panic that the country was suffering from an ‘obesity’ epidemic far worse than that which Dublin had earlier suggested. Dublin’s reports ultimately decreed, however, that no one was ever *too* thin.

## 5. Conclusion

Just as the ideal body shape transitioned from a woman with curves to an androgynous silhouette in the post-war years, the strategies to obtain the model figure changed as well. Guide books and women’s magazines encouraged moderate physical activity and a nutritionally balanced diet in the years immediately following World War II to create energised, ‘built up’ women, ready to guide the nation into peacetime. By the mid-1950s, however, advice columns tilted towards weight-loss and slenderising tactics. ‘Easy’ weight-loss schemes such as crash diets, diet pills and passive exercise salons appealed to a post-war American population rapidly becoming accustomed to instant gratification and immediate results. Promises of effortless weight-loss not only sold these products but also perpetuated the damaging myth that fat people are lazy. ‘Overweight’ and ‘obese’ women were not only seen as unattractive: in a country whose historical foundations praised a solid work ethic, indolence was not a desirable trait.

Agencies like the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) regularly publish reports revealing how Americans are significantly fatter today than they were in decades past. One recent study revealed that the average American woman has grown an inch since 1960 but now weighs 24

pounds more than her 1960s counterpart (Ogden, Fryar, Carroll and Flegal 2004: 1–18). While data such as this is used to convince Americans to stop eating fast food and to exercise more regularly, what is more significant is that, while the average American becomes heavier, the average fashion model becomes slimmer. In 1947, the average model stood five feet, four inches tall and weighed 125 pounds. In 1975, she had grown to five feet, seven inches and weighed only 118 pounds. Today, the typical fashion model weighs 117 pounds and stands five feet, eleven inches. Most models are skinnier than 98 per cent of American women.<sup>11</sup> Not only is the average American woman becoming fatter but the gap between ideals and reality is also widening. This does little to motivate the typical woman to cut back on calories and take the stairs instead of the elevator. Although the average American has changed in size since the 1960s, one thing remains a constant — the desire for immediate results with little to no effort. The growing gap urges women to crash diet and creates negative body esteem.

The desire to be ‘ten pounds thinner’ is certainly not going away anytime soon, but we need to be conscious of why we feel the need to diet and vigorously exercise. Why do we aspire to look like the celebrities on the cover of glossy magazines? Why are super-thin fashion models more popular and better paid than ‘plus-size’ models? More than two-thirds of women between the ages of 18 and 25 reportedly would rather be ‘mean’ or ‘stupid’ than fat, and over 50 per cent in that age group claim they would rather be ‘hit by a truck’ than be fat (Rhode 2009: 1040). Statistics such as these are altogether disturbing. The quality and worth of a woman should not be predicated on her jean size. Celebrating good health and longevity should become priorities rather than mimicking a too-thin, socially constructed aesthetic.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg’s *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* nostalgically laments, ‘In the twentieth century, the body has become the central personal project of American girls. This priority makes girls today different from their Victorian counterparts [...]; before the twentieth century, girls simply did not organize their thinking about themselves around their bodies’ (Brumberg 1997: 97). It is not the purpose of this essay to be nostalgic about the 1950s — a time when women were encouraged to have more meat on their bones. Women were still pressured about idyllic shapes; it was just a different kind of ideal from that which women desire today. Instead, what I hope this history provides its

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on eating disorders and how this pertains to models and public celebrity figures, see (under *Further Reading*) National Eating Disorders Association.



reader with is the call for self-reflection. A look back to a not-so-distant past reveals an American history where slenderness has been *en vogue* for only a short span of time. Throughout the country's history, a variety of body shapes were deemed beautiful. Only with the widespread nature of mass media and the democratisation of fashion did a more psychologically coercive and monolithic ideal of feminine perfection rule. By misguidedly equating health with weight and size, Americans have embraced the 'thin ideal'.

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**Passing Thoughts: A Photographic Essay on the Body as Form**

Ashley Denise

While trying to figure out how to write about my photographs of the body, I started to realise that my work didn't say much about 'the body' but rather said more about me.

Photographing something is one thing, evaluating it is a completely different process —one I am still not completely familiar with.

Over the years I've photographed many different bodies, thinking I was exposing novelty — revealing truth — creating new forms. While I might (or might not) have been doing these things, in time it became more apparent that I was exposing *my* body, *my* physicality, *my* experience — exposing inconsistencies — and piecing them together through time.

Bodies move.  
Lines become blurred.  
Time creates a passage.  
Photos create a space ...  
Visions ... Relations ... Experience ...  
Create Questions

In the end, my photographs were meant not to create images *of* the body but, rather, to attempt to evaluate personal questions that *come from* having a body.

The body is a medium for giving and receiving. On one hand it is the medium between things — between you and the world — and on the other hand it *is* the world. The body is both abstract and precise — it thinks, it feels, it recognises, and because it moves, it changes. Thus the body is also the medium for change. Its malleable surface is unavailable for definition, and that, for me, is the most intriguing aspect of the human body.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> See more examples of the author's work at <[ashleydenisephotography.com](http://ashleydenisephotography.com)>.



SELF PORTRAIT  
© ASHLEY DENISE



DERRICK  
© ASHLEY DENISE



THE ONLY THING HE EVER SHARED WAS HIS SKIN  
© ASHLEY DENISE



UNZIPPED — 1  
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UNZIPPED — 2  
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**Dance Theatre: An Anti -Discursive Illustration of an Embodied Existence**

Claire Hampton

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This article draws together two traditionally polarised and hierarchised modes of theoretical enquiry: the representational, textual theories of traditional academics such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault and the phenomenological, somatic approach of the performance-based theorist and choreographer Jasmin Vardimon. The aim of this research is to ‘resist tendencies to dualism, which splits subjectivity into two mutually exclusive domains’ (Grosz 1994: x) by integrating practice and theory in a relationship of mutual dependence. A relationship that goes beyond acknowledging dance as an effective means of understanding page-based theory by which to recognise a reciprocal current of exchange demonstrating that the dancing body not only represents, interprets and reinforces discursive theory but also is capable ‘of generating ideas or theorising through practice’ (Morris 2001:58). It questions whether the amalgamation of practical and theoretical discourse makes dance theatre an effective paradigm that may transcend the traditional hierarchy between mind and body that pervades academic enquiry.

The Jasmin Vardimon Company has grown to be one of the most influential dance companies in the British dance theatre field. The following analysis of *7734* by the Company is conducted through the multiple lenses of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of ‘habitus’, Michel Foucault’s post-structural concept of ‘the docile body’ and dance historian Susan Leigh Foster’s notion of ‘corporeal articulation’. It will examine Vardimon’s embodied, corporeal expression of the intersections between these theoretical camps.

Having grown up on a kibbutz, the Israeli-born choreographer Jasmin Vardimon joined the Kibbutz Dance Company before moving to Britain in 1997 at which time she established the Jasmin Vardimon Company. Through her intercultural dance practice, she has forged an impressive career in British dance theatre and has received various awards including The London Arts Board ‘New Choreographers’ Award (1998) and the Jerwood Choreography Award (2000). Her appointment in 2006 as an Associate Artist at Sadler’s Wells Theatre demonstrates the impact and prestige of her choreographic work (jasminvardimon: who/jasmine).

Vardimon's art has distinctly European dance theatre influences 'that can be traced back to Pina Bausch and the Tanztheatre tradition' (Spalding); however, the Company combines dance based movement with visual arts, mime, music, technology and text to create rich performance tapestries. The company's current repertoire of works, *Yesterday*, *Justitia* and *7734*, continues to be performed in the UK, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and 2011 saw the company's debut performance in the United States. The international success of the Jasmin Vardimon Company is attributable to 'her acute observation of human behaviour, beautifully detailed movement, insightful humour and engaging drama' (jasminvardimon: about).

This critical examination of human behaviour is exploited in *7734*, a piece of dance theatre which is a 'reflection on genocide, man's universal capacity for cruelty and the horror of our continued and systematic violence' (Steiger 2010–11). The title *7734* is eerily reminiscent of the concentration camp numbers tattooed on to the forearms of survivors, and when written in digital numerals and read upside down actually spells *hell*. In an interview at Sadler's Wells Theatre in 2010, Vardimon maintained that *7734* 'was not dealing with the Holocaust' but went on to explain that 'that's my essence, my connection' (Vardimon 2010). The piece calls into question the relationship between the dark side of human nature and creativity and furthermore empirically investigates the notion of legacy in the context of shared diasporic memory and 'inherited pain' (Vardimon 2010-11). Whilst Vardimon may not have created this piece to be specifically about the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War, she seems to imply that these are her connection to the dark side of mankind and that the essence of man's cruelty to man will be different for each one of us, as audience members, dependent upon our own personal and/or inherited memories.

The strong thematic motifs and the profound, horrific images that are etched through and across the active bodies of the performers in *7734* make this piece of work an exemplification of practice-based theorising. The performance of *7734* begins with a formally dressed, male maestro conducting a Wagner overture against the setting of a satin draped landscape, a landscape that rises and falls with the movement of the performers beneath to the melody of the music.<sup>1</sup> As the overture reaches its climax, the performers beneath the silky draped fabric

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<sup>1</sup> The use of Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser* opera in *7734* is incredibly evocative in itself; Hitler was a fan of Wagner and is reported to have seen his operas as an embodiment of his vision for the German nation. Wagner's compositions became 'national music' in Germany during the World War Two and were regularly played to inmates at the Dachau camp as part of a 're-education' programme. However, the inclusion of Wagner's music created problems when *7734* was due to be performed in Tel Aviv at the end of May 2012: Vardimon was obliged to yield to the demands of the Israeli Opera Director General Hannah Munitz, and remove the Wagner

roll away, taking the luxurious veneer with them and exposing piles of discarded clothes and rags in front of a foreboding watch tower. A solitary performer is left standing on stage, head forward, hair hanging down, feet shoulder-width apart and slightly turned in, arms drawn into her sides, hands tense, shoulders hunched, her body racked with shivers. The performer falls to her knees; the maestro turns and bows; the audience applauds. This opening scene in *7734* plunges the audience headlong into the inter-textual and multi-layered levels of theory, theme and form that inform the entire piece. The impeccably dressed conductor, the classical music and the rich undulating fabric read in the context of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital, that is 'the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts [...] corresponds [to] a social hierarchy of the consumers' (Bourdieu 1984: 1), clearly place the conductor in a position of power.<sup>2</sup>

The individual 'habitus' of each audience member informs a thought process that occurs beneath the level of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> 'Habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification of these practices' (Bourdieu 1984:170); we therefore distinguish our own place within the hierarchical frame work in relation to the culturally rich conductor via this thought process. 'Nothing more clearly affirms one's "class", nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (Bourdieu 1984: 18); the conductor is in possession of all competence and understanding in this field in which the audience finds themselves, and we therefore arrange ourselves accordingly beneath him; he is 'the dominant fraction of the dominant class' (Bourdieu 1984: 176).<sup>4</sup> This hierarchical framework is also mapped out in the relationship between the conductor and the other performers on stage, as the maestro is actually conducting the movement of the performers beneath the draped fabric as opposed to an orchestra of musicians. At the climax of the music as the performers roll away the thin fabric veneer of luxury at the gestural direction of the conductor to reveal the dark and desolate environment beneath and we see the lone, desperate,

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overture from the piece for the performances in Israel. As Smorzik explains: 'Wagner's music has been boycotted in Israel for decades because of the nineteenth-century German composer's anti-Semitic worldview and his descendants' ties to the Nazi party' (Smorzik, 2012). 'After I was invited to perform in Israel I was told that I wouldn't be able to include the Wagner piece,' Vardimon told *Haaretz*, in a telephone interview from London, adding that her eventual decision to comply with the Israeli Opera's request wasn't easy. 'I debated the issue for a long time, and consulted many people whose opinions I appreciate. I've decided to do it out of respect for the Israeli audience' (Smorzik, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The author has drawn on her recollections of a performance of *7734* given at The Hawth, Crawley, Surrey, 27 April 2011 for the description of this and other scenes.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'habitus' in this context refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions'. (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

<sup>4</sup> The term 'field' in this context refers to social constructs that are defined by their own sets of standards, rules and social practises and have their own hierarchical frameworks. Economics, politics, literature all constitute legitimate fields in modern society, 'they are characterised by their own distinctive properties, by distinctive forms of capital, profit, etc.' (Thompson, J. 1991: 15).

tortured figure left behind, the conductor becomes a figure of cruelty. Yet this does not alter his position of power; indeed, he bows, and as an audience we affirm his status and implicitly condone his actions by applauding.



7743: THE CONDUCTOR  
© JASMIN VARDIMON COMPANY AND TRISTRAM KENTON<sup>5</sup>

The Wagner overture is replaced by indefinable industrial, war-like sounds as the ensemble of performers roll on to the stage one by one to join the solitary woman from the previous scene. The stage is filled with piles of discarded rags and clothing, overshadowed by the presence of the ominous watch tower to the rear of stage left. The conductor remains down stage left, a serene look upon his face, his hands gently performing the traditional gestures of a music conductor. The performers behind are on their knees, heads bent forward, hair hanging down; they perform a series of movements comprising four rapid arm movements that cross the body, creating the impression of their desperately searching through the discarded clothing. Their movement quickly increases in urgency, and the motif grows and develops to include standing, falling and rapid circling beating arm movements. The performers literally fling their bodies between movements, pitching from side to side. The tortuous impression this creates is accentuated by way in which their heads whip back and

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<sup>5</sup> This and the other image in this article were taken by Tristram Kenton at a performance of *7743* given at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London in July 2010.

forth and their long hair slashes through the air. Simultaneously the conductor continues to conduct, his subtle gentle hand gestures perfectly synchronised with the crashing bodies of the performers; as they repeatedly jump up and launch their bodies to the ground, his hands rise and fall; as they flail their heads frantically from side to side, his hand glides in a gentle left to right gesture. His dictation of their movement is clear.

If we consider 7734, as many critics have done including Laura Thompson writing for the *Telegraph*, to be ‘about the greatest hell of all — the Holocaust’ (Thompson, L. 2010), then Vardimon’s appropriation of a conductor/orchestra metaphor for dictatorships, when appreciated in conjunction with Bourdieu’s theories of class distinction, is not only incredibly apt and poignant but also brutally visceral.<sup>6</sup> As the conductor gently moves his hands back and forth to produce the torment in the bodies of the ensemble behind, we are plunged into an explicit comparison between Hitler’s orchestrations of the physical atrocities perpetrated against the victims held in concentration camps during the Second World War. The conductor’s status as a ‘dominant fraction of a dominant class’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176) establishes his position within the bourgeoisie and inclines him towards hedonistic aesthetics and ‘revolutions conducted in the name of purity and purification’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176) a sentiment sickeningly reminiscent of Hitler’s campaign to annihilate the Jews because they were ‘contaminating European nations with their bad blood’ (Konner 2009: 94). The persecution of the Jews, during the Second World War, was based on a profound anti-Semitic somatophobia.<sup>7</sup> This establishes dance as an ideal vehicle not only for representing this physical torture but also for ‘generating conversations in a field of flesh, fully sensory, embodied processes of interrogation, critique and dialogue’ (Meskimmon 2011: 8).

In the Wagner overture scene, Vardimon also utilises Foucault’s notion of a passive unfinished body, defined and created through regimes of power, to explore man’s inhumanity to man; implicitly, Nazi regimes of punishment, discipline and power over the Jews. The control executed over the performers by the conductor signifies Vardimon’s commentary on

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<sup>6</sup> Wagner’s anti-Semitic affiliations add another layer of meaning to this metaphor.

<sup>7</sup> The length constraints of this article prevent an in-depth investigation of this anti-Semitic somatophobia. Whilst this note may seem simplistic, its brevity is not to be seen as a trivialisation of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. The following list of the ways in which their anti-Semitism was based on the Jewish soma is not comprehensive. According to Nazi propaganda the threat posed by the Jews was physical; Jews were not only classified as diseased but more importantly they were a disease, not only infecting Germans with bacteria and illness but also infiltrating the Aryan race at a genetic level by intermarriage and reproduction between races. Children in German schools were taught how to identify a Jew with precise anatomical knowledge; ‘they often have a low slanting forehead [...] big ears like cup handles and dark curly hair’ (Konner, 2009: 97). But most importantly, the persecution of the Jews was unimaginably physical; ‘filthy and stinking from being condemned to human squalor, fevered and skeletal from the deliberately inflicted typhus and starvation, gums gushing blood [...] hands and feet shredded and bleeding from forced marches and slave labor’ (Konner, 2009: 116).

dictatorships, and yet the control she has exercised as a choreographer over the performers in this scene embeds this theme into the very action of the performance. The control of the conductor and the subservience of the other performers is signified by the explicit connection between the conductor's gestures and the movements of the ensemble: he controls their 'movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity; an infinitesimal power over the active body' (Foucault 1977: 137). Through this connection we define the relationship between conductor and ensemble on various levels: obviously primarily as conductor/orchestra and secondly, yet still overtly, as dictator/oppressed. Furthermore, the audience is complicit in the action of the conductor; this was inferred by the applause he received only minutes before as we subconsciously recognised and accepted him as an agent of hierarchical importance. As a result the audience members become unwittingly submerged in the 'carceral continuum' (Foucault 1977: 297), and the audience becomes complicit in the surveillance and control of the performers. Vardimon's choreographic decision to invoke the 'docility' of the performers' bodies at this stage implicitly reinforces her attack on despotism. The surface level theme of the performance is internalised and strengthened by its presence in the actual composition of the dance. As the scene progresses and the conductor begins to speak, he refers to the orchestra (and by default oppressed societies and perhaps namely the Jews) as a machine; the synchronicity and comportment of the dancers on stage thus further embodies the concept of 'coercion [...] at the level of machine itself' (Foucault 1977: 137).

The theories of Susan Leigh Foster, the dance historian, are a reaction to the highly discursive (post)-structuralist models of thought which have continually displaced the materiality of the body, such as those posited by Foucault.<sup>8</sup> She states that 'the possibility of a body that is written upon but that also writes moves critical studies of the body in new directions' (Foster 1995: 15). In this way she attempts to promote bodily analyses into a new era within which the existence of the body 'as a tangible and substantial category' (Foster 1996: xi) is no longer 'permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse' (Shilling 1993: 80). She uses dance as a primary subject of investigation and as a metaphorical framework through which she explores the intersections between culture, feminism, anthropology and politics and as such 'dance-making [...] becomes a form of theorising' (Foster 1995: 15). By applying Foster's concept of corporeality I would contend

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<sup>8</sup> Foster, writing on theorists such as Michel Foucault, observes: 'These writings seldom address the body I know; instead they move quickly past arms, legs, torso and head on their way to a theoretical agenda that requires something unknowable or unknown as an initial premise' (Foster (1992: 480) quoted in Morris (2001: 52)).

that Vardimon's invocation of Foucauldian passivity endows the dancers' bodies with agency; as opposed to silencing the active body of the performer's, the synchronised virtuosic display of technique manifested in the ensemble motif shows 'how the crafting of moving bodies into a dance reflects a theoretical stance towards identity' (Foster 1996: xiii). The gestures of the conductor are subtle, understated and graceful, the full horror, torment and cruelty of his control is manifested in the thrashing, violent movement of the other performers. Vardimon allows the theme of oppression to be executed to, through and across the moving bodies of the performers; she invokes the articulability of the active body. Her work can be understood as both consciously and corporeally theorised and articulated, promoting a fundamental unity between interiority and exteriority, mind and body.

For Bourdieu the most basic of corporeal actions is charged with social meaning. The way we stand or walk may feel like natural behaviour but it is, in fact, a learned habitual disposition, a paradigm of historical, social entrenchment personified through the active body, it is a 'state of the body, a state of being' (Thompson, J. 1991: 13). Bourdieu's body, then, is inextricably linked to social practice; his theory implies that the body has a generative intelligence since the workings of field and habitus occur beneath the level of consciousness. The power of René Descartes' proclamation 'I think therefore I am' is reduced, as 'there is a way of understanding which is altogether particular, and often forgotten in theories of intelligence; that which consists of understanding with one's body' (Bourdieu 1990a: 166 quoted in Morris (2001: 57)).

Reading Vardimon's choreographic decisions, in this scene, in the context of Bourdieu's theories of bodily intelligence, one could argue that her amalgamation of traditional dualities, such as passive/active and body/mind, is intrinsically linked to her own habitus and is therefore an example of the social influencing the body and the body influencing the social (Morris 2001). Vardimon's experience of the Holocaust 'distinguishes itself from personal memory by generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection' (Goertz 1998: 33); her experiences of these atrocities are an example of what Marianne Hirsch calls 'post-memory' (Hirsch 2008). Foster describes the art of choreography as 'a theorisation of identity — corporeal, individual and social' (Foster 2011: 4) and in this context dance-making can be read as legitimate ground for subjective exploration. Vardimon's art is no doubt 'shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma' (Hirsch 2008: 112). When discussing the themes in *7734 Nina Steiger*,

dramaturg for the show, writes that ‘along with memories, our parents pass us their fears, phobias and prejudices and so one’s cultural inheritance is made up of these elements’ (Steiger 2010–11). We can view this through the lens of Bourdieu’s theory that ‘habitus tends to generate practices and perceptions, work and appreciations, which concur with the conditions of existence of which the habitus is itself the product’ (Thompson, J. 1991:13).

If we apply this to Jasmin Vardimon’s status as third generation Israeli, in relation to the Holocaust and the Second World War, then her diasporic identity signifies an inevitability regarding the techniques that she employs. ‘Living with the stories of those who survived the Second World War, [...] [Vardimon] is especially interested in the concepts of inheritance of memory and inheritance of pain’ (Vardimon 2010-11). Inevitably, the ‘loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world “bleed” from one generation to the next’ (Hirsch 2008) and have influenced *7734*.

These are concepts which are explicitly commented upon in *7734*, yet I would argue they permeate the piece on a significantly deeper level. Vardimon’s familial history and status as third generation to the Holocaust is inherently linked with habitus, the comprised dispositions that are acquired through inheritance and experience. Since ‘the body is the site of incorporated history’ (Bourdieu 1991:13), these inherited dispositions not only inform Vardimon’s theoretical approach to this piece but infiltrate the action by means of the ‘physical conversation that goes on between dancers and choreographers that moulds and shapes the corporeal identities seen on stage’ (Morris 2001: 57). In this respect Vardimon’s choreography and her direction of her dancers is an example of a narrative strategy ‘used by secondhand witnesses to articulate their relationship to an inherited, not personally lived past that has nevertheless become an integral part of their identity’ (Goertz 1998: 33).

The influence of Vardimon’s dispositional composition is evidenced in her choreography. Furthermore the dancing bodies, in *7734*, generate meaning filled movement, ‘the body’s movements become the source of interpretations and judgements’ (Foster 1996: xi). ‘Regimes of power’ (Foucault), cultural inscriptions and ‘inherited memories’ (Vardimon) are corporeally acknowledged and re-written by the body, through the ‘relations between history and memory, the aesthetic and the political, the social and the individual’ (Foster 1996: xv).

Vardimon describes *7734* ‘as somehow a personal look at collective memory or maybe inherited collective memory’ (Vardimon 2010) and in the piece she employs a physical motif that seems to embody the fragility, pain and endurance of ‘inherited memory’. In this scene all of the performers are lying down side by side in a row across the front of the stage, apart



from two male performers who are standing side by side at the end of the row, stage left. A conversation begins between the two standing performers; the first explains to the other that he would like to know about his grandfather's experiences during the war. Even though he is aware of the details, such as the fact that this grandfather had to hide in a box, he feels the needs to hear the intimate details of his suffering; he describes it as his 'inheritance'. As the first performer falls back into a lying position, a third performer simultaneously stands up and the story is passed along; this happens three more times. With each rendition the story changes slightly and becomes imbued with opinions and interpretations. Once the story reaches a fifth performer, the first stands again. The fifth performer remarks to the first (the original grandson):

Fifth Performer: There's this guy and he wants to suffer because he hasn't suffered like his grandfather did.

First Performer: What happened to his grandfather?

Fifth Performer: I don't know, I don't remember that bit.

(Carter 7734)

Through this game of Chinese whispers Vardimon demonstrates how the opinions and dispositions of those recounting stories and disseminating memory shape the content of what is passed on. The fact that all the fifth performer has left to share at the end is the notion of suffering is a commentary upon the endurance of pain, a pain that 'reinforces the living connection between past and present, between the generation of witnesses and survivors and the generation after' (Hirsch 2008: 104).

The fifth performer falls back and joins the ensemble in a lying position, leaving the first performer standing alone. He has a small piece of white tissue paper which he unfolds, puts across his mouth and blows into the air. With short sharp bursts of breath, the performer repeatedly sends the paper up into the air and catches it across his mouth. The performer begins to use longer breaths and allows the paper to float lower and lower before catching it. As the motif progresses the performer blows the paper further and further away from himself, turning his back and executing rolls, spins and dives before turning and catching the paper just before it hits the ground.



7743: INHERITED MEMORY  
© JASMIN VARDIMON COMPANY AND TRISTRAM KENTON

Vardimon has asserted both in the interview for the performances of *7734* at Sadler's Wells Theatre referred to earlier and at a symposium held in February 2012 at the Jasmin Vardimon Centre in Ashford, Kent that audience readings of her pieces are an extension of the art itself and that audience interpretation is as valid as the original authorial intentions (Vardimon 2010 and Vardimon 2012). Personally, I read this scene as a physical interpretation of the concept of inherited memory; the thin piece of tissue paper representing the fragile and elusive quality of shared diasporic memory is never completely left to fall to the floor. The performer began the motif by only blowing the paper a short way into the air and re-catching it as soon as it began to descend and as the scene progressed, despite executing a variety of other physical actions in between blowing and catching the tissue paper, he is never able to turn his back completely and allow the paper to fall. This corporeally demonstrates the endurance of inherited memory. Vardimon seems to use the body and breath of this performer to embody humanity's inherent obsession with history, memory and the pain of our ancestors. The performer's frantic lunges and dives to save the paper signify an individual desperation to hold onto the events, experiences and emotions that are passed on to us; 'a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness' (Hirsch 2008: 104). Vardimon allows the performer to embody the historicity of memory physically; as the performer blows the tissue further away and executes longer action sequences between catching it, Vardimon demonstrates that, whilst we may not be consciously aware of the pain of inherited memory as individuals, we are inherently shaped by it. In the context of Bourdieu, these historical events endure through change and are continuously reconstituted through the production of habitus. Events of the past influence our dispositional make-up below the level of consciousness. The effects of the Second World War were felt in every 'field': politics, economics, literature, art, music, family life. These effects continue to filter through these fields and influence second and third generations 'since individuals are the products of particular histories which endure in the habitus' (Thompson, J. 1991: 17). In this scene the performer's body is always orientated towards catching the floating tissue paper, despite the bends, spins and slides that he executes, his body is placed to regain the tissue; his need to preserve his inherited memory is written into his body; the notion of 'habitus' is brought to bear through and across the, trained, active body of the performer. Vardimon approaches 'the body as capable of generating ideas, as a bodily writing' (Foster 1995: 15). She sets aside traditional aestheticised dance representations and imbues the body with agency. She demonstrates that the body is shaped by culture and

history, but furthermore she ‘cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds’ (Foster 1995: 15). The trained dancing bodies in 7734 are imbued with corporeal signifying potential, they ‘create new images, relationships, concepts and reflections’ (Foster 1995: 15).

Through and across her body and through and across the bodies of others, via the process of corporeal performance making, Vardimon empirically and tangibly theorises; she embarks upon an anti-discursive form of scholarly meditation. The piece engages in an ‘evolving theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory [...] a discussion actively taking place in numerous important’ (Hirsch 2008: 104) academic contexts. Her choreography can be interpreted as a drawing together of theory and practice in a relationship of mutual dependence and as a result her work is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Scholars who strive to exceed the limitations placed on the body by traditional dualisms must embrace the relationship of interdependence between practice and theory. To accept practice based theoretical conjectures without a discursive theoretical contextualisation is to disregard the warning made by Cynthia Novack, ‘maintaining the dichotomy between mind and body by emphasising the body alone’ (Novack 1990: 7). However, to attempt to define or analyse the body via academic discourse alone is to colonise the body through discursive practice, to deny the empirical truth of the body rendering it ephemeral and illusive. Neither practice nor theory in isolation can present a theory of unified subjectivism.

Dance, in isolation, as a means of embodied research is flawed. A dualistic approach to dance as a medium is embedded within the profession, for example, in ‘the traditional notion that dancers are in some way the malleable material of choreographers and that their job is to do their bidding; with the notion that dancers somehow subjugate their bodies to the service of their art’ (Rowell 2009: 136). Furthermore, there are factors that invalidate dance works, when these are viewed in isolation, as legitimate academic contentions to Cartesianism, in so far as they maintain the dichotomy between body and mind: the rigorously trained bodies of dancers, the rendering of expert technique, ‘the dedication to artisanal perfection’ (Foster 1996: 2) and the specific dance lexis of individual styles which has had a tendency to locate dance as a product of the ‘highly censored language of the bourgeois’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176). Dance, as a performance style as opposed to a hobby or pastime, is logocentrically bound by its own definition, it is ‘replete with the same logocentric values that have informed general scholarship on the body’ (Foster 1995: 15). The attendant audience at a Jasmin Vardimon Company dance theatre performance, or any other professional dance presentation, expects to witness strength and stamina, the physical discipline of the performers etched across and

through their dancing bodies. Whilst they may not expect the images produced by these performing bodies to be aesthetically beautiful, an audience will undoubtedly expect to witness a virtuosic display of technique.

Equally, text based corporeal theory is ‘inevitably bound up with that which it questions’ (Fortier 2002: 62), for example when referring to symbiosis of the mind and body as a counter argument to the theory of dualism the constraints of language still necessitate using the words mind and body, enforcing the very premise in contention. Vardimon’s choreography does not ‘privilege the thrill of the vanished performance over the enduring impact of choreographic intent’ (Foster 1995: 15). By drawing together practice and theory, Vardimon’s *7734* is a paradigm for an embodied exploration of embodiment; this dance theatre piece transcends the logocentricism inherent within each dimension in isolation.

In *7734* Vardimon moves beyond the disciplinary boundaries of dance and critical theory and invokes an integrated collaboration between the radically different schools. This is facilitated by the phenomenological property of dance appreciation. The themes and theories of the piece are not only expressed corporeally via the performers, they are understood corporeally by the audience. As we watch the lone female performer on stage in the first scene, head forward, feet apart, knees together, arms drawn in, hands tensed not only do we acknowledge her desperation and pain, we understand her movements and therefore her feelings via our own bodies, there is a ‘fundamental connection between dancer and viewer’ (Foster 2011: 1). In his considerations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, Jack Reynolds asserts that:

our body should be conceived of as our means of communication with the world, rather than merely as an object of the world that our transcendental mind orders to perform varying functions. (Reynolds 2004: 11)

Vardimon transcribes this phenomenological premise into a tangible corporeal theory. Her inter-methodical employment of both dance practice and sociological theory promotes the articulability of the performing bodies but also mobilises the receptivity and perceptivity of the spectating body:

When we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially produced by any human body, by our own [...] through kinaesthetic sympathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. (Martin 1936: 117 quoted in Foster (2011: 7))

Vardimon moves beyond operationalising cognitive theories through her choreography; she does more than breathe life into static discursive theorisations. By kinaesthetic transference of

theme, form and theory she invokes a relationship between the body and the mind of each spectator; a relationship of interdependence based on equal reception, perception and consideration.

In November 2011, a research seminar entitled *On Embodiment* was held at the Central School of Speech and Drama. This seminar brought together John Rothwell, a Professor of Human Neurophysiology at the Institute of Neurology, Dick McCaw, a senior lecturer in Theatre at Royal Holloway University of London and a Feldenkrais practitioner, and Steffi Sachsenmaier, a lecturer in Theatre Arts at Middlesex University and a qualified Tai Chi Instructor; the intention was to discuss movement as a common interest. During the plenary a member of the audience challenged the three speakers by suggesting that the language they had used was essentially dichotomous. He attacked the term *embodiment*, asserting that the prefix suggested a process by which body and mind had been drawn together. This allusion to embodiment as a process as opposed to a fundamental state of existence, by default, emphasised the very dichotomy that the seminary discussion had been attempting to admonish. The same audience member suggested the term ‘bodied’ as opposed to ‘embodied’.<sup>1</sup> However, in my opinion, this term is yet more reductive as it seems to negate any reference to the mind. It seems that even as we attempt to coin phrases that seek to express the unification of body and mind, logocentrically these can always be deconstructed.

Rather than attempting to ‘transcend dichotomies’ (Thomas 2006), academics and scholars should strive to overcome reductions and posit a theory of equality in regard to subjectivism. Distinctions between body and mind may never be surpassed and yet that does not necessitate a separation and hierarchisation; mind and body need to be accepted together in a relationship of interdependence to constitute the subjective. The constitution of a new form of enquiry is paramount to a non–reductive understanding of subjectivity; the hybridising of theory and practice, as evidenced in the dance theatre of Vardimon, is ‘a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure’ (Victor Turner (1990: 12) quoted in Maxwell (2008: 59)); a somatic, intellectual mode of enquiry. Dance theatre offers the opportunity to found meditations on ‘empirical facts that help us identify the salient features that a [...] theory should not efface or ignore’ (Nussbaum 2000: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> *On Embodiment*, research seminar organised by and held at the Central School of Speech and Drama on 8 November 2011.

Some theatre reviewers have been critical of Vardimon's interdisciplinary approach in 7734. Luke Jennings, writing for the *Observer*, accused Vardimon of mistaking the theatre for the lecture hall and suggested that she should 'drop the theorists off at the next layby' (Jennings 2010). However, a post-graduate conference that addressed the 'Future of Arts Research', hosted by Royal Holloway University London and held at the British Library in November 2011, was beset by the concept of interdisciplinarity as the future of arts.<sup>2</sup> So whilst this work may not adhere to a traditional aesthetic dance spectacle and may seem unappealing to conventional critics who strive to ascertain the immediate superficial value of art, it could be argued that it is at the cutting edge of research. Vardimon's choreography supersedes conventional compartmentalisation by eroding codified barriers. This choreographer defiantly contests binaries by translating them into a relationship of mutual equality. She transcends the traditional reification between disciplines to offer a new reading of the relationship between practice and theory. Her work constitutes 'a radical transvaluation of corporeality' (Broadhurst 1999: 17), presenting body and mind as mutually obligated parameters of subjectivity.

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**Back from Beyond: 21–22 July, 1972**

Harriet L. Clements

**T**his poem has its origins in a day some forty years ago, a day which began with my sudden collapse and ended with a dash by ambulance to hospital for emergency and life-saving surgery. As that day wore on, its sounds became mingled with those I could hear in my head, a music played by a shadowy figure waiting not far away ...

**SONNET**

Grey, as only in July  
late afternoon is grey, and  
gentle the quiet, homing tide  
that carried me hither, far  
from the mooring where I had  
rocked all day, lapped by dreams as  
reality ebbed and flowed ...

As jetsam, abandoned by  
drifting seas, eroded by  
sand-sweet wind, scoured limbs limply  
shift and stir as small eddies  
of sound break and slap, sucking  
into whorled hollows ...

Pattering on throbbing skin:  
shrilling from dry, stretched gut: thin  
echoes spiral up from dropped  
pebbles slowly depth-gauging  
still pools of cold silence ...

Huddled beneath pain's  
tattered blanket, I observe,  
incuriously, that Now  
becomes a bright close to the  
tunnel of Time's inverted  
spyglass, a soft litany,  
distant, yet heard with  
urgent clarity, before  
I am overwhelmed in a  
surge of dark oblivion ...

Beached stone, bleached bone-white, as white  
the winding sheet of aching  
hours in sleepless summer nights,  
until pearls of song (so the  
fifth morning of Creation  
broke) drop and gather into  
radiance, dewfresh, — the hurt  
of it! — annealing ...

So rose  
waves rescue me from the  
disappointed shadow of  
yesterday's musty busker.

## Towards an Ontology of Corporeal Uniqueness

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**P**ain, exhaustion, illness, infirmity, racism and sexism are all states in which the body loses its daily familiarity. As Derrida argues, not every experience is an experience of meaning, as phenomenology might suggest (Derrida 1981: 30). The stress is not always on the lived immediacy of a centred subject. Experience can also provoke a loss of identity. Such a non-phenomenological account of experience can be found in Michel Foucault's notion of limit-experience, by which he means an experience that tears the subject from itself in such a way that it is no longer the subject as such; it becomes decentred.<sup>1</sup> In *The Absent Body* Drew Leder contends that such experiences encourage Cartesian dualism because they often result in an apparent cleavage of the self and the body (Leder 1990: 87).<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I take up the challenge to question this Cartesian mode of thinking through a reading of J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello*, in particular Lessons Three and Four, 'The Lives of Animals' (Coetzee 2004).<sup>3</sup> This choice should be understood in the light of the fact that the language of literature is much less rigid than that of philosophy and narrates particular life stories instead of focusing on abstract and universal categories. Moreover, thanks to its open and polysemous language, literature often provides us with models, expressions and life stories that defy received understandings of important human issues. In this case, the novel reveals something crucial about the complexity of bodily life. Elizabeth Costello is a woman who has trouble accepting that she is getting older. In the west, old age is generally perceived in negative terms in part because of the enormous increase of societal and economic costs arising from the ever-increasing ageing populations in many western industrialised societies. Moreover, ageing is seen as a period of sensory, functional, economic and social decline.

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<sup>1</sup> For the notion of limit-experience Foucault is indebted to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. See Jay (2005: 361–400).

<sup>2</sup> 'Surfacing in phenomena of illness, dysfunction, or threatened death, the body may emerge as an alien thing, a painful prison in which one is trapped. [...] these experiences of separation from, and opposition to, the body serve as one phenomenological basis for dualist metaphysics'. This position has been contradicted by Stephen Burwood (2008: 263–78).

<sup>3</sup> *Elizabeth Costello* is a novel comprising eight chapters or 'Lessons' (lectures delivered by Elizabeth Costello) and a postscript. Six of the Lessons are edited pieces previously published by Coetzee. Two of them (Lessons Three and Four – 'The Lives of Animals') were delivered by Coetzee as part of the Tanner Lectures on Human Values series on 15–16 October, 1997 at Princeton University. These were later published, with responses by Peter Singer, Marjorie Garber, Wendy Doniger and Barbara Smuts, as *The Lives of Animals* by Princeton University in 1999.

Anthropologists like Sharon Kaufmann and Barbara Myerhoff, working in the field of gerontology, have tried to counter this trend by appreciating the complexity of human ageing and by giving voice to the lived experience of older people themselves (Kaufmann 1986; Myerhoff 1992). However, the ageing process often brings corporeality to explicit awareness and this experience also cries out for meaning. Of course, older people may feel estranged from their bodies because of the objectifying gaze of a society which praises young and healthy bodies but that does not mean that there is some deep sense in which they are not their bodies. On the contrary, the gaze of the other makes them aware of their *particular* embodiment as something that they cannot will away and it is this singularity that weighs upon them.<sup>4</sup> In what follows I give a close reading of Coetzee's novel to show that the vulnerability of the body is not limited to experiences of exposure to violence and death, but has also something to do with this inescapability of our corporeal uniqueness.

In 'The Lives of Animals' Coetzee tells the story of a fictional Australian novelist, Elizabeth Costello, who is invited to give a lecture at Appleton College, an imaginary American university. Costello is haunted by the pervasive indifference to the terrible way in which humans treat animals in practices such as factory farming, a violence that she compares to the horror of the death camps during the Shoah (Coetzee 2004: 62–66). Costello points out that, just as those living in the neighbourhoods of the death camps knew what was happening but chose to ignore it, so otherwise respectable members of society turn a blind eye to industries that bring pain and death to animals. Coetzee's story has generally been understood as a way of confronting – within a fictional frame – the ethical issue of how we should treat animals. Peter Singer, for instance, takes Coetzee's story to be a way of presenting arguments for a kind of radical egalitarianism between human and non-human animals (Singer 1999).<sup>5</sup> In *Philosophy and Animal Life* Cora Diamond has criticised Singer's position by asserting that the rights discourse somehow distorts and trivialises Elizabeth's experience of bodily exposure by converting it into a philosophical problem about the moral status of animals (Diamond 2008: 48). For her, Costello is not just a device to put forward ideas about animal rights (Diamond 2008: 48). Rather, she has a significance of her own: the wounded animal at the centre of the story is Elizabeth Costello herself. 'If we see in the lectures a wounded woman, one thing that wounds her is precisely the common and taken-for-granted mode of thought that how we should treat animals is an ethical issue, and the knowledge that she will

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this article, the term 'the other' is not to be understood in the sense of Lévinas' 'the Other'.

<sup>5</sup> Singer's radical egalitarianism is based upon the notion of sentient beings, beings that can experience pleasure and pain.

be taken to be contributing, or intending to contribute, to discussion of it. But what kind of beings are we for whom this is an issue?' (Diamond 2008: 51).

We are beings who are physically exposed to vulnerability and mortality but who rely on argumentation to deflect the difficulty of what it is to be a living, that is, an embodied animal. Humans are beings who are inclined to mistake the difficulty of philosophy (something which is difficult to substantiate) for the difficulty of reality (something which is resistant to our thinking about it) (Diamond 2008: 45, 57–58). Elizabeth Costello is someone who refuses to speak within the tradition of philosophical argumentation. This is why she does not offer an argument in defence of her vegetarianism and this is also why she is quick to point to the inconsistency of the fact that she wears leather shoes and carries a leather purse. The use of the imagery of the Shoah is part of her aversion for philosophical arguments: she knows that her talk of the Holocaust will offend and not be understood (Diamond 2008: 50). Elizabeth does not want to evade the difficulty of reality but she wants us to see her for what she really is. In this respect it is significant that Costello, at the beginning of her presentation, compares herself with Red Peter, the educated ape of Kafka's tale, *Report to an Academy*, and proclaims: 'I am not a philosopher of mind, but an animal exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes, but touch on in every word I speak' (Coetzee 2004: 70-71).

We should ask ourselves, what exactly is it that wounds this woman? Cora Diamond identifies this wound with the condition of human embodiment; with the physical exposure to vulnerability and mortality (Diamond 2008: 74). For Diamond, Coetzee's lectures ask us to inhabit our own bodies; they invite us to appreciate the difficulty of our bodily lives (Diamond 2008: 59). It is precisely this recognition of our own mortality and vulnerability as shared with other animals which generates our ethical obligations towards them. We are able to extend our moral sensibility to non-human others, not because we think of them as bearers of interests or as rights holders but because we see them as fellow creatures (Wolfe 2008: 15). We imaginatively read into animals a sense of the human: we hear them speak our language, we give them names and so on. For Diamond, the question of the animal clearly requires an alternative conception of ethics to the one that we find in the rights tradition, one in which we do not deflect but receive and even suffer our own exposure to the world.

In his essay, 'Companionable Thinking', Stanley Cavell draws out two key implications from Costello's denoting of herself as a wounded animal (Cavell 2008). He follows Diamond by arguing that Costello's woundedness is identifiable with the condition of human

embodiment. However, for him this woundedness has also something to do with the wound which is present, that is, touched on, in every word she speaks.<sup>6</sup> To explain what he means, Cavell turns to Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'Self-Reliance'. Every word Emerson hears or speaks is fated to express chagrin because all the words he speaks or hears are 'in essence, to begin with, the words of others, common bread' (Cavell 2008: 115). But, what other words are there? To speak is, in a certain sense, 'to be victimised by what there is to say or to fail to say' (Ibid.). We inherit a language which is always already on the scene before we are and this has profound consequences for what we often too hastily think of as 'our' concepts (Wolfe 2008: 26). Language is never absolutely singular. It is a social phenomenon that needs a certain generality in order to persist in time. Private languages inevitably falter on the edge of silence and the incomprehensible; they are untranslatable and meaningless. In order to make ourselves understood we have to rely on an impersonal language that makes us substitutable. Language is thus unable to house absolute uniqueness. That this can make us feel chagrined is evident from the conversation between Costello and her son John in the novel's first lesson, 'Realism' (Coetzee 2004: 7). Despite her effort not to write like anyone else, Elizabeth has to accept that she is just an example of writing, an instance.

But maybe there is a third kind of woundedness that is also crucial here. The title of the story, *The Lives of Animals*, is significant. Following Cora Diamond, I take the lectures as being concerned with the wounded animal at the centre of the story. Diamond interprets this woundedness as the physical vulnerability that we share with other non-human animals. For her, the central character of the story is a wounded human animal. The question, however, is why Costello needs to conceal this wound under her clothes and why she touches on it in every word she speaks. Cavell follows Diamond's reading but believes that Elizabeth is marked by yet another wound, a linguistic one, one that characterises only human beings. Cavell thus individuates two different kinds of wounds: fleshy wounds and linguistic wounds. However, the problem is that Costello seems to talk about only the one wound. Again, we have to ask ourselves, what is it that wounds this woman? Let us turn to Elizabeth's own words: 'the remark that I feel like Red Peter [...] I did not intend it ironically. It means what it says. I say what I mean. I am an old woman. I do not have the time any longer to say things I do not mean' (Coetzee 2004: 62). She is an animal exhibiting a wound, but exactly what kind of animal is she? What is the primary point of her reference to Red Peter? Let us turn to Kafka's tale in order to answer this question (Kafka 2003).

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<sup>6</sup> For the identification of these two types of vulnerability I am drawing on Wolfe (2008: 25–26).

Red Peter was shot during a hunting expedition on the Gold Coast. He was hit in two different places: below the hip and in his cheek. The first wound was severe and made him limp. The latter one was only slight but left a large red scar which gave him the name of Red Peter. After he was caught, Red Peter was put on a boat and locked up in a cage whose dimensions prevented him standing up or sitting down. He was forced to squat with his knees bent while the cage bars were cutting into his flesh. Unfortunately, Red Peter has little or no memory of his youth and he does not recall what it felt like being an ape. He is unable to give an account of the life he formerly led as an ape, as the academy requested, but has to rely on the evidence of others to tell the story of his capture. He only recalls that he had to fight through the thick of things in order to live. Imitating humans, he submitted himself to language and it was language which gave him an orientation and delimitation in the world of men. Yet this subjection to language has made him also vulnerable to language. Like all human beings, Red Peter bears a paradoxical relation to his name. The tragedy of the name is that 'what' he is called, Red Peter, is indifferent to 'who' he feels he is: 'Red Peter, a horrible name, utterly inappropriate, which only some ape could have thought of, as if the only difference between me and the performance ape Peter, who died not so long ago and had some small local reputation, is the red mark on my cheek' (Kafka 2003). At times, Red Peter is also displaced by the way humans think. He is painfully aware that many people accept the domestication of wild animals while he is haunted by it. This becomes clear when he speaks of the female chimpanzee that waits for him when he comes home late at night from banquets, scientific receptions or social gatherings. He takes comfort from her as apes do but he cannot bear to see her by day because she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eyes. This feeling isolates him and, to a certain extent, Red Peter will always remain an anomaly among human beings, if solely for the unfamiliar figure of his body. In the presence of visitors, Red Peter has a predilection for taking down his trousers to show them the wound in his hip. For him, there is nothing indecent about it and he does not understand why some writers have found a pretext in it to argue that his ape nature is not yet fully under control. But why then does he hide the scar beneath human clothing? In this respect, it may be significant that seeing people is often repugnant for him, not because he has an aversion to human beings *per se* but because they make him feel distant from the sense of his own bodily life.

Red Peter is not an ordinary animal but a wounded animal, not because he was shot – those gunshot wounds healed – but because he stopped being an ape. Like all other animals, apes are instinctively equipped for a specific environment. This means that their instincts give



them a stable structure within which to operate so that they are not overwhelmed by the tensions and the challenges coming from their environment. This is why animals do not need to give meaning to their lives and why they do not really lead a life or have a biography in the sense that human beings have. Animals just live. This also explains why Red Peter does not have any recollection of his life as an ape prior to his capture. Red Peter can no longer rely on his animal instincts because the human smell has contaminated the smell of this native land. As a result, he has to seek for an alternative. It is language that gives him a way out. Still, language turns out to be more precarious than his former animal instincts. There is something that seems to resist language: words cannot help him to deal with the idea of the domestication of wild animals.

Elizabeth Costello is also a wounded animal, not – or at least not solely – because of her physical vulnerability, as Diamond contends, but because animality is no true option for her. This explains why Costello compares herself with Kafka's Red Peter and not with an ordinary animal. Moreover, like Red Peter, Elizabeth is haunted by something that her mind cannot encompass (the way in which we treat animals) and there is nothing that can help her to settle her attitude. Interesting in this respect is that in *The Lives of Animals* Costello not only draws on Kafka's *Report to an Academy* but also on Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift 2010).<sup>7</sup> In the final episode of his travels, Gulliver reaches the land of the Houyhnhnms, a race of super-rational horses whose refinement contrasts drastically with the life of the Yahoos, naked and deformed human beings over which the Houyhnhnms rule. Gulliver comes to both admire and emulate the cool rationality of the Houyhnhnms, rejecting humans as mere Yahoos endowed with some semblance of reason. One day the Assembly of the Houyhnhnms decides that Gulliver, a Yahoo with some semblance of reason, forms a threat to their civilisation and he is expelled. Gulliver is then rescued, against his will, by a Portuguese ship that brings him back to England.

Like Costello and Red Peter, Gulliver is displaced from his ordinary mode of thinking about the world. All three of them are cut off from their established language games because something has disrupted their pre-given structures of thought. This disruption threatens their identity and their place in the world. What is even more important is that this isolation is felt in their bodies.<sup>8</sup> Costello is an elderly woman who has problems with her heart and who has difficulty accepting the fact that she is growing older. Red Peter considers himself abnormal

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<sup>7</sup> See especially Part 4.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond makes a similar observation. See Diamond, (2008: 59).

in the midst of ordinary human beings for the simple reason that he has a furred body and they do not. Gulliver is an anomaly among the Houyhnhnms because his human body turns him into the irregular, the one who does not fit. They all feel disconnected from their bodies because their intentional engagement with the world is disturbed either by a change in the normal functioning of the body – as in the case of Costello – or by a change in the accepted paradigms of embodiment in the social milieu in which one lives – as in the case of Gulliver and Red Peter. In situations of dissociation such as these it is said that one comes to realise that one is not, in some deep sense, identical with one's body. The question is whether such a dualistic reading really captures the true character of these experiences.<sup>9</sup>

Let us explore the situation in which dissociation arises as a result of the fact that one has the wrong kind of body in a given social milieu and is discriminated against because of it. The life stories of Gulliver and Red Peter are exemplary here. They are both treated in such a way that their existence as unique human beings is denied: they are turned into members of a species on the basis of their bodies and are forced to experience themselves through a whole set of negative associations. As long as they are in their familiar environments – respectively among human beings and chimpanzees – Gulliver and Red Peter have little or no occasion to experience this bodily burden. It was only when they are confronted with the appearance of 'the other' – the Houyhnhnms and human beings – that they are somehow turned into mere bodies. Still, the question remains whether these experiences really cause them to think of themselves as essentially separate from their bodies.

Gulliver and Red Peter are hurt because what they are called – a Yahoo or ape – does not correspond to who they feel they are. Still, the pain they feel does not solely come from denigratory speech, because every kind of name-calling disregards to some extent who someone is. In fact, 'the moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is, we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others' (Arendt 1998: 181), with the result that their specific uniqueness escapes us. Singularity will always exceed what one is called. The proper name Red Peter, for instance, does not designate a unique existent. Red Peter owes his name to his resemblance to the performance ape Peter and to the red scar on his cheek. Likewise, the shock that Gulliver feels when the Houyhnhnms banish him on the grounds that he is a Yahoo gives him the sense that *who* he is does not coincide with what they claim him to be.

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<sup>9</sup> For this reading I am deeply indebted to Burwood (2008: 272).

Gulliver and Red Peter may reject the objectifying gaze of the Houyhnhnms and the humans. They are not forced to recognise themselves in these corporeal descriptions. That does not mean that they can separate themselves from their bodies. On the contrary, their bodies are still the point from which they perceive the world and by which they act in the world and appear to others. Although Gulliver and Red Peter may feel estranged from their bodies because of the objectifying gaze of their ‘antagonists’, it does not follow from this that there is an important sense in which they are not their bodies. On the contrary, the experience of dissociation makes them aware of their particular embodiment as something that they cannot will away.

Dissociation is not always the result of the sudden appearance of the other. Even if one remains among one’s equals, dissociation may arise. Elizabeth Costello feels estranged, not because she is turned into a body by another but because she is growing old. In the normal course of events the body loses sight of itself in favour of the objects of its engagement, that is, it tends to recede from direct experience; it is in a certain sense characterised by absence.<sup>10</sup> In the event of inhibited intentionality the smooth interplay of body and world is disrupted and the body resurfaces in conscious experience. When one grows older, however, one’s appearance and one’s abilities undergo significant alterations. Therefore, greater attention is paid to the body, which is often experienced as an obstinate force interfering with one’s projects (Leder 1990: 84). This is why Costello’s body reveals itself as *unheimlich*:<sup>11</sup> it is no longer compliant with her life-world. Far from indicating a separation of self and body, this sense of the uncanny forces her to recognise the inescapability of her particular embodiment. The recognition of her corporeality not only reminds her of her physical exposure to vulnerability and mortality but also, and maybe primarily, of her irreducible singularity insofar as this uniqueness is a feature of her bodily existence. Nobody, in fact, can grow older or die in her place. In this sense, ageing is an almost cruelly private experience. This is why Costello feels lonely. She is imprisoned by her own singularity and she has the feeling of not belonging to the world at all.

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<sup>10</sup> For this description of the body I am deeply indebted to Leder’s analysis of the disappearing body, but I draw different conclusions from it.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Uncanny’ is a Freudian concept (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919) indicating that something can be familiar and strange at the same time, resulting in an uncomfortable feeling. For this reading I am deeply indebted to Burwood.

The concept of corporeal uniqueness confronts us with the ambiguous meaning of the notion of vulnerability.<sup>12</sup> This has to do with the fact that as embodied beings we are exposed to the wound that the other can inflict and the care that the other can provide (Cavarero 2009:20). Yet, as evidenced by the above example of growing older, the vulnerability of the body has not only a passive but also an active dimension. This means that we are not only vulnerable in our bodies in the sense that our bodies are exposed to others but that we are also vulnerable to our body, that is, exposed to it. Being-this-singular-body, in fact, has no definitive content and this indeterminateness makes us anxious; ‘it wounds us’. The burden of this corporeal uniqueness is a condition that all human beings share as embodied beings. Of course, there are people who are more likely to be confronted with the burden of their corporeal singularity because they have, for example, the ‘wrong’ kind of body in a given social milieu and are discriminated against because of it. Still, a confrontation with corporeal uniqueness can arise independently of the other’s gaze, as happens in the case of pain, exhaustion, illness, pregnancy, infirmity and old age. This means that bodily vulnerability is not necessarily something relational; it can also be something very intimate. In such situations the heightened awareness of our bodies cannot be undone by changing the norms of bodily acceptability. People of colour, for example, will have little or no occasion to experience the bodily burden of their skin colour in an African society. It is only when they are confronted with the gaze of the ‘white other’ that they are somehow turned into a mere body. Things are different in the case of sick people whose illnesses are acted out within themselves. That is not the same as saying that experiences such as illness or ageing take place in a vacuum or that they are free from the objectifying gaze of a young and healthy society. The point that I wish to make is that in these cases the painful body can emerge as a thematic object for the sufferer and become the object of an ongoing interpretative quest, even without the gaze of the other. Of course, the awareness of one’s body is a profoundly social thing but corporeal awareness does not come to be *solely* through the social confrontation (Leder 1990: 92–93). Moreover, even if the apprehension of the body is provoked by the gaze of the other, this gaze confronts elderly people with their *particular* embodiment as something that they cannot will away and it is this singularity that weighs upon them.

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<sup>12</sup> For the notion of corporeal vulnerability I am partially drawing on the work of Adriana Cavarero (Cavarero 2009) and Judith Butler (Butler 2004). By linking the concept of vulnerability with the notion of corporeal uniqueness, my perspective is more in line with Cavarero than with Butler, who uses the notion of bodily vulnerability to describe our *physical* dependency upon others. Yet, unlike Cavarero I understand this vulnerability not, or at least not primarily, in terms of exposure to the other.

If we understand Coetzee's 'The Lives of Animals' in relation to our own lives, then what can we deduce from all of this? Our bodies are intimately attached to us, they have something to do with who we are and this explains why we cannot will them away. The body singularises us, it renders us unique and irreplaceable. This singularity is characterised by the exposure of being this and not another singular body and has no other content other than the irreducibility of this exposure, with the result that we never truly know who we are. Singularity is thus not something that we can grasp or possess but rather is something that possesses us. Although the notion of singularity is often bound up with existential romanticism and with a claim of authenticity, there seems to be no interior or inviolable core to it. Limit-experiences such as growing older expose us to a direct confrontation with our bodily uniqueness. This threat places upon us the existential demand to reintegrate our bodies into a system of meaning where it becomes intelligible again. When I argue that the human body is uniquely vulnerable, I am not making an essentialist claim. On the contrary, the ontology of corporeal vulnerability is an emptied ontology which does not focus on the 'what' of identity, but on corporeal uniqueness.<sup>13</sup> Such an ontology severely challenges dualistic modes of thinking and places before us another kind of vulnerability which I will call 'symbolic vulnerability'. For reasons of space I am unable to develop this argument any further. Let us conclude by returning to where we started: 'I am an animal exhibiting a wound which I cover up under my clothes, but touch on in every word I speak' (Coetzee 2004: 71). In the light of what has just been said about corporeal uniqueness, we can thus interpret Costello's assertion as follows: she is an ageing woman who is left alone with the burden of her corporeal singularity because she is unable to put this experience into words.

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## The Swarm: A Provocation for Opening

Dara Blumenthal — Guest Editor

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The question isn't so much of what delineates my body from yours, or any body from any other body, <that is a question of borders, of boundaries which are often first taught to be seen and later learnt to be felt, generally a process of learning to project one's awareness 'out' and then back 'in' and onto one's body> but rather what breaks down our own seemingly stable borders from within. The movement of conscious awareness, of sensation which fills the void of this question, tends to be quite robust.

Learning to be an individual who has a body with stable boundaries is the first type of work we do. This sort of radical atomisation of the (possible) collective into dis-embodied individuals is necessary for capitalism and the identities we develop therein. '[B]y alluding to a peculiar dialectic of atomization and collectivity' (Ross 1988: 100), Nietzsche, in his critique of the ideology of work, concludes:

In winter we shall travel in a little pink railway carriage  
With blue cushions.  
We'll be comfortable. A nest of mad kisses lies in wait  
In each soft corner.

You will close your eyes so as not to see through the window  
The evening shadows grimacing,  
Those snarling monsters, a swarm  
Of black devils and black wolves.

Then you will feel your cheek scratched ...  
A little kiss, like a mad spider,  
Will run about your neck ...

And you'll say to me "Find it!" bending your head,  
—And we'll take a long time to find that creature  
—Who travels far ...<sup>1</sup>

Behind the glorification of "work" and this tireless talk of the "blessing of work" I find the same thought as behind the praise of impersonal activity for the public benefit: the fear of everything individual. At bottom, one now feels when confronted with work—and what is invariably meant is relentless industry, from early till late—that such work is the best police, that it keeps everybody in harness and powerfully obstructs the development of reason, of covetousness, of the desire for independence. For it uses up a tremendous amount of nervous energy and takes it away from reflection, brooding, dreaming, worry, love, and hatred; it always sets a small goal before one's eyes and permits easy and regular satisfaction (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn* (1881), quoted in Ross (1988: 100)).<sup>2</sup>

This sort of 'relentless industry, from early till late' can easily be located in each individual body that is legible, that we allow to pass us unremarkably in the street, that we call human. Shoring up the borders and boundaries of our bodies requires a huge amount of

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, 'A Dream for Winter' (1870), quoted in Ross (1988: 33–35). This translation of 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' is from *Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, translated and edited by Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> The quotation from *Morgenröte* is from *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954).

work, a process of monitoring the fear, anxiety, shame and embarrassment which have somehow become the most ‘human’ traits, as they enable the over-rationalisation of everything. Sensation is only allowed in the prescribed ways. The individualism of capitalism is suffocating, dulling, disconnecting.

That which breaks down those imagined bodily borders <that we work so hard at maintaining so we can hold onto the privilege of continuing to do that work we believe makes us human>, like insects crawling within, spurring a horrifyingly beautiful, buzzing, vibrating de-territorialisation, is the potential for becoming-other; A liberation from ‘the individualism that animates capitalist society’ (Ross 1988: 101);

A move toward the swarm.

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# *Skepsi*

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