

amino essays

t w e n t y s h o r t p e r f o r m a n c e p a p e r s

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1 preface

In a preface to a book of her own essays, Kathy Acker notes an uncertainty about writing about her journalistic and theoretical work, saying: “I’m not sure I like my essays.” Indeed, this leads her to question the motivation for writing at all (“Why write in such a time as this?”) and she compares the activity of essay writing to the relative freedom she finds in fiction writing:

I trust neither my ability to know nor what I think I know. Moreover, the excitement of writing, for me, is that of a journey into strangeness: to write down what one thinks one knows is to destroy possibilities for joy. (viii)

She is asking questions about knowledge and language and she articulates an ambivalence about the essay form - the kind of question that artists often ask about the place of speaking or writing about their work. The question of knowledge links to the concept of history as a progression, as a form of time that is heading, in the end, towards something, towards its own ending. She considers the event of writing and reading as change, rhythm, movement:

Need writing end? If history, that kind of time, does end, what kind or kinds of time will there be? Since such time wouldn't be linear, it might be happening now. If writing is time, as I suspect, what would writing look like outside of linear narrative or time? What does this writing look like outside of linear narrative or time? (ix-x)

She is looking towards an approach to a way of telling about writing and the necessary tensions present in the destabilising possibilities of writing:

I am thinking about the difference between history and myth. Or between expression and vision. The need for narrative and the simultaneous need to escape the prison-house of the story - to misquote. What is the essay in this situation? (ix-x)

And before releasing the reader into the collection of essays, she voices another deliberate uncertainty: "I question the works you're about to read." (ix-x)

2 artist talks (part one)¹

Cue the tape at a random point.

In that first moment when the image assembles itself and we recognize it, we never see only one thing happening.

Before the mind makes its decisions, we see the differences, irreconcilable, we see the bodies, the familiar and strange activities, we see a multiple image that aggregates into this: something funny at which we fail to laugh.

Let us say this phenomenon has its roots in bodiness, and accept this aspect of the dancer's material: imperfectibility.

Matthew Goulish *Unwinding Kindergarten*²

- ¹ This section and some others that follow have been developed from an earlier live 'performance paper' *slowly kissing down with tears*, presented at the Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) 2003 conference.
- ² (Goulish 2002: 95). In *Unwinding Kindergarten* (written in response to the weekend event of a Conference on German Expressionist Dance, *Grounded in Europe*) Matthew Goulish is writing about "insoluble problems of dance", copying, imitation, being "counterfeit" and - referring, here in the example, to watching Pina Bausch's work - dealing with the material facts and peculiarities of the physicality of bodies in performance.

The 'performance paper' presents the live event of the artist standing up to show a video of herself performing - negotiating the ease and the awkwardness of the act of finding a place to perform herself, beside herself, next to her own performing video image on screen. The performance of the paper seeks to emphasise the fact of the presence of the speaker's body as it is seen and heard by an audience. The proposal of a spoken 'talk' was a way of placing the written 'paper' alongside the playing of the video recording, and to foreground this as an event; an embodied act of documentation. A presentation and another representation; something that is about something else and instead of something else. Telling versions of a thinking body. Another way of telling, told elsewhere. Other versions of an uncertain body. And context is everything.

The video was a way of recording some of what was happening.

The writing is a way of recording some of what is happening.

Can I write about this by writing about something else?

The artist might show an audience the video document, the evidence of her performance work, and simultaneously pretend that her own body is not in the room. She might meet people who have seen the video elsewhere, in another time zone even, when she was not there at all.

Or, as the speaker, she might simply load the video, press play and go to sit in the audience to watch with them, as if she was one of them, looking straight ahead, looking like they look.

How do I watch myself? Shall I watch myself - or not? Sit or stand - in front of or next to the picture? Sitting next to or almost on stage with the projected screen image, arranging myself beside myself. Sometimes her body on the video is the same size as me in the flesh, depending on the projection set-up or the particular shot - close up or distant. Will I watch vaguely or purposefully? Turning my head to see myself. Scrutinising interestedly and looking briefly - gazing or *glancing*?

I can copy myself, and become more of me, positioned just off screen, outside of the frame, catch the audience attention, increase the simultaneity, make them choose - which me? I am inclined to get naked live, in response to an audience watching me get naked on screen. What then happens to the artist's naked video body? What is the difference? The video body, or this body? A smaller or larger body? Doubling and multiplying. Single image or split-screen (two of her now and then). A second, or even a third body? Remember talking about a sense of body-memories triggered when watching 'video' me (me on the video) moving, remembering a movement "... as if its just to the side of me or something" she said. Watching the audience as they see their own bodies "arranged around the edges of the picture" I said.

Generally, I cannot look easily at cameras or at my photo or video image.³ This time I find myself with a video of the performance that I can, after all, watch. Our pictures often seem to us to be too much and not enough. We look for the (what's missing?) inadequacies and inaccuracies. We look for the (where did that come from?) additional and unexpected discoveries and the returning pleasures of images.⁴

The video itself seems at first to track the performance in 'real time', but the edit does not follow the sequence of events. It traces an outline of the performance and selects and samples example moments but the live work was twice the length. We agree on two edits: different versions. The new *re-working* of the video works on deconstructions and reconstructions. It is intentionally incomplete and deliberately partial. I notice that there is a whole section of movement material gone.

What is missing from the final edits? Am I starting to forget?

Is this a memento?

Is this a deliberate relic?

- 3 In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes describes his response to having his photograph taken and the act of posing, knowingly, for the camera:

I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image (10). I don't know how to work upon my skin from within. I decide to "let drift" over my lips and in my eyes a faint smile which I mean to be "indefinable" (11).

He notes how the photograph presents the self to the self, differently than a painting might (and differently than the reflection in the mirror). Here, he connects the moment of photography to death and he links the photographic operation to the movement and measurement of time:

I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sense of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (13). I am neither a subject nor an object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter (14). For me the noise of Time is not sad: I love bells, clocks, watches [...] cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing (15). (Barthes 1993)

- 4 Writing about the operations of representation Peggy Phelan notes that:

Representation follows two laws: it always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing. The "excess" meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant readings possible. Despite this excess, representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly. (Phelan 1993: 2)

3 gasp/jump text

The starting position is like a preparatory move. Waiting to begin. Low, here - like this, both hands - arms held behind, like a bird, like a diver; something like the moment that comes just before take off.

Here is the bracing position of the swimmer, crouching down, poised ready to let fly, to dive in and start swimming. But instead of flinging the body forwards the movement sends the body backwards, upper body flexed and leaning forwards, while jumping away, jumping backwards, with only the arms flying forwards, hands last to follow, as if backwards is downwards and jumping away is like falling away (the image as if from a movie scene, falling down a lift shaft or sucked through a space craft airlock into outer space) while still reaching (for a hand to save). Reaching towards while moving away from the start place.

Arms open, hands open, as if there were something or someone to clasp onto. Hanging just a moment in mid-air. Not diving in and not flying forwards. Falling backwards. Blown backwards. Back turned towards the direction of the movement pathway.

A sharp intake of breath. Gasping for breath as if the breath has been knocked out and now the only option is to take in air after an emptying out of the lungs; drawing breath.

Arms open, mouth open, throat open; a gasp.

Breathing in and in and in with each jump, launching the body away. Lungs filling with the movement of air. Entering the spaces on the inside, the inside side of the skin, the side that faces in, where the sound of the air shoots in, filling narrow cavities and swelling surface areas to volumes that move bones. Breathing out and out and out with each fall into gravity and the ground. Grounding. Falling into line. Landing a short distance away, behind the starting position, returning to the half-crouch, arms tucked behind, re-assuming and imitating the initial body-gesture; the re-set, reiterating the pose, before moving off, launching and leaving the ground again.

Momentum swings the arms forwards, contrary to the direction of the momentum of body mass jumping backwards and integral to the opening up and closing down logic of the whole move and its particular, peculiar motion.

Breath becomes bound to movement. Breathing necessarily interrupts the trajectory of the gesture, forming, spacing and punctuating its choreography. Inhaling a sharp new breath. Exhaling a soft expiration of now-used-up breath. Air enters the body through a closing throat on a perceptible gasp of resonating vocal chords as the feet leave the floor, so quietly. Air exits the body as the weight sounds heavily into the floor and the release of breath empties like a loud sigh misting onto a mirror surface.

4 breathe me

What if I think of writing as something like breathing: it needs a gap, leaves a space, in between itself, here and there, opening and closing, filling and emptying. Starting and stopping. Pausing on the page and pausing for breath. Breathing into the space between words, breathing into the space between the body and words. Writing into interruptions, words as fragments constantly broken up and falling down gaps. Running out of breath and writing with uncertainty. Writing without pausing for breath. Forgetting to breathe or forgetting to write. Not knowing what to write. Writing from an uncertain body with uneven breathing. Not knowing what to read. Reading an uncertain presence on the page, one who seems to be both here and not here - as I, the reader certainly am in the now - the unknown author-figure here and not here in the words and in the spaces. A certain and particular body who has now disappeared, not writing this now, expired with a kind of last breath into some kind of silence.⁵

Only when the breath has finally left the body do we know that some-body and their voice are gone. At the end of a life is silence and the body comes apart: the invisible movement of de-composition begins. At the end of a breath is a pause and the body recollects itself as breath is drawn. At the very end of exhalation the breath must be drawn to recover, to speak more, to laugh loud - or to laugh silently, as in church - to shout, to cry out, to sob harder. An intuitive knowing about breathing, followed later by a knowing about speaking that takes grammar for granted. We know what to do and breathing makes sense. But what about breathing that doesn't make sense? Or breathing underwater, as in Chris Burden's 1974 performance *Velvet Water* where the artist proposed and attempted to demonstrate the notion that he might deliberately breathe water. An impossible inversion of drowning presented as if the image of his submerged head - interrupted by a gasping as his body resists the proposal and he suddenly, repeatedly comes up for air - might actually reveal the transformation of human biology and perform a new reality.⁶

5 "Silence, however, as John Cage proved in the Harvard anechoic chamber, is impossible unless it is the silence of death; it is merely a space in which one may listen to the nervous and circulatory workings of one's own body." (Cesare 2004: 20)

6 I cannot tell what happened to the water-breathing hypothesis in the end (I wasn't there at the time) and I only know that this action happened because in his narrated introduction to the video document of *Velvet Water* Chris Burden describes the work (as "a video performance") and in the recording of the live event he tells the audience:

"Today I'm going to breathe water, which is the exact opposite to drowning, because when you breathe water you believe the water to be a thicker, richer oxygen capable of sustaining life."

The piece took place just out of sight of the audience who viewed the live performance mediated via video monitors. The edited video documentation shows the image of Burden leaning over a small hand-washing sink accompanied by the (difficult to listen to) sound of his choking and failing struggle to breathe water – the sound of drowning but not drowning. (Text transcribed from video *Chris Burden 1971-1974*, produced by Chris Burden, 1975, distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York)

Burden holds his own head underwater on video, while in Goat Island's performance *It's Shifting Hank* I watched (I was there at the time, at the Arnolfini in Bristol, as I remember on two consecutive nights, probably 1993) the live event of a performer, Greg or Tim McCain - or perhaps, both, alternating - kneeling and ducking his head under the surface of a glass tank of water. Just the head was held underwater by another performer, Matthew Goulish. Here the proposition was not to try to breathe water, but rather to demonstrate not breathing, a holding of the breath, perhaps for as long as possible or at least for a set amount of time (as the underwater swimmer might measure lung capacity or race a length without breathing even once). The moment seemed to carry the particular silence that accompanies the disappearance of a body underwater, which even if it is still in view, seems gone, temporarily lost and absent. Although the image was theatrical - the two 'divers' are big men clearly capable of resisting the strength of the hand holding them down and only the head had 'disappeared' while the rest of their bodies were free to resist - the physical gesture of plunging the head into the tank of water is a performed task and a repeated action. We are presented with physical possibilities, the limitations of the body. A body temporarily silenced, yet we know, sounding different to itself, made more aware of its own pulse, the hearing amplified and sounds carrying underwater (submerging in the bath, blood pounding in the ears) separated from the world above. A body more than ready to breathe, waiting to surface, seeking the next breath made urgent by the effort of demonstrating not-breathing.

5 enthusiastic bodies / quiet bodies

The noise that the gasping body makes is physical and visceral.

The sound of language in the body.

Language coming out of the body.

Enthusiasm and ecstasy travelling from inside the body.

Trajectories that pull towards the outside of the body.

We hear the details of journeys of movements slipping past flesh.

Heading inwards and outwards.

Voice disappears as it leaves the body.

Body disappears as it leaves the performance.

What is heard emitting from the internal spaces of the body is a reminder of what might be seen and felt of secretions and orifices. What is saved and recorded of the sounding (singing, speaking) body acts on the listening, audience body, later, differently. What is invisible keeps on sounding on the audio recording, eating up air and time, opening up spaces and pulling the trace of surfaces and textures from inside the body, time and again.

What keeps on coming to light and becoming exposed to view on silent photo documents might convince visually and satisfy the evidence-seeking eye. And yet, available to scrutiny though it is, it might also seem more closed, perhaps less available than the sound recording, quieter in more than one way, the surfaces of images sealed like the skin and the clothing, captured, stilled and less disruptive now. We might write of 'the body' (whose body? Your body? My body?) and note the slight or unruly openings, the moments where clean, scrubbed, dry, manageable exterior moves to slippery, wet, demanding cavity. We have and will read of leaky, easily pierced and undeniably fleshy anatomies. But what if the now-still and forever quiet skins of the figures on the photo simply appear as self-contained, quite sealed now? The organ of the skin, always tangibly there (look, here, at the edges of my vision if not right in front of my eyes) and yet, in a sense, often untouched, incidental in its call on our attention, almost forgotten and unimaginable in its capacity. The skin does its work with quiet devotion, interfacing with 'out there', accommodating the demands of preservation and presentation, holding the organs and miscellany of the viscera, outlining the skeleton, giving shape with a well regulated and controlled surface area. This skin becomes an extensive, capable screen, such a good cover that a body might imagine itself to be a closed book.

6 trembling and disappearing

Visually the film is an uncanny mix of stasis and movement, bluntness and complexity, minimalism and excess. In its subdued colours the image-poverty of the film cuts against the immense scope of its human content. The film acts as an extraordinary visual testimony in which Hsieh's body rapidly mutates and trembles in the grip of a relentless machinic condensation of time.

Adrian Heathfield *End Time Now (in 6 parts)*

Writing about Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance* (1980/81), Adrian Heathfield evokes the image of a body that is barely there, a "flickering" body saved on a flickering 16mm film. He describes the ways in which the film document of the work presents a collapsing together of the public and private time of the body. The film records the process of a taking-over of a body's rhythms by scheduled 'work' time and the imposed regime of the performance proposition which saw the continual recording of the image of Hsieh punching an hourly time clock all day everyday for a year in his own home. This durational work continues to work for an audience as and through its time-lapse documentation but this record questions its own status as it "is neither performance, nor photograph, nor film; the work itself exists somewhere in the fusion and clash of its constituent forms." (Heathfield 2000: 88). This trace of the performance draws attention to the social rule of linear time and the giving over of the self to the certainty of this regulation. We see time passing - we watch his hair grow, his posture seems to alter significantly - and, as Heathfield observes, we discern cycles in the image "for as much as the piece indicates time's arrow, progression and growth, it is also full of repetitions and returns" (90).

On several occasions over the years I have been able to watch the film of *One Year Performance* and each time I remember noticing the impact of the moment when the film ended and his shaking, shimmering body disappeared from view and the screen went blank. I had the sensation that I had been holding my breath throughout the 6 minutes and 2 seconds duration of the document. The performance offers an intense (and moving) image of time compressed. The image is of a body simply standing yet appearing to be moving rapidly across the thousands of single still frames taken across the hours and days of a whole year. Hsieh's body moves through what I cannot help but read as varying states of exhaustion, working at being in place and in time but without any apparent purpose beyond the performance of the proposition to record his own presence (and absence) in this way. He was certainly there, as far as I know, for an incredible year's worth of being there but his disciplined presence in the film is indeed uncertain, often irregular and difficult to grasp.

Peggy Phelan, like others in the field of performance studies, approaches the practice of theorising *as* performance. She works largely through the study of the visual and our ways of seeing, especially our seeing of other bodies.⁷ Reading through psychoanalysis and poststructuralist ideas she dwells on the ephemerality, impermanence and uncertainty inherent in the live event of performance, its un-reproducibility and its alternative 'economy of exchange'. There is an emphasis on absence and disappearance within the experience of the looker as looking (and failing) always to recognise their own image:

The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs to be always remembered. (Phelan 1993: 147)

She discusses vision and "the desire to see the self *through* the image of the other" (16). Her book *Unmarked: the politics of performance* opens with words of love, faith, memory and loss:

The question of belief always enters critical writing and perhaps never more urgently than when one's subject resists vision and may not be "really there" at all. (Phelan 1993: 1)

7 Through writing about representation she points to the apparent promise of the visible to deliver a clear and unambiguous view, cautioning that: "If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture." (1993: 10). And yet: "There is an important difference between willfully failing to appear and never being summoned" (11).

In an earlier piece, *Money Talks, Again* Phelan presents an analysis of the debates and developments in the “censorship wars” surrounding the US arts funding system: “A debate about money and aesthetics. But bodies soak through language: this debate is stained with the bodies of panicked men.” (1990: 131). Identifying “an anxiety about unruly sexual bodies” in the shift of (political) critical attacks on (National Endowment for the Arts) funding of artists from photographers towards performance artists she argued:

Unlike the representational economy of photography and finance, live performance implicates the real through presence, and particularly through the presence of bodies [...] It saves nothing it only spends.” (Phelan 1990: 133)

Not long after this time I saw Peggy Phelan give a paper in the UK at Bristol University. She was talking about theatre and architecture and archaeology and within this she was speaking of criticism and the ways in which the critic, when writing about performance must necessarily be working with an “anxiety” of loss. I have remembered this as suggesting that - read through a psychoanalytic perspective - the loss of the subject (or object) of criticism is already saturating the audience-critic as the performer departs the performance space and time-frame.

Each time a performance moment disappears we are reminded that the performance did, once, begin. The beginning moment was the end of what came before, that which was not the performance. We gather ourselves, we know what to do, we ease ourselves into the moment, the space between ease and anxiety.⁸

“There is an important difference between wilfully failing to appear and never being summoned” (11).

⁸ *beginning with uncertainty:*

ease shot through with signs of anxiety
involuntary shakes
trembling bodies

unpredictable physiological responses
sudden lack or loss of control

unaccountable and unrecognisable movements
unexpected temperatures

unsure flesh, too wet or too dry

the shaking hand reaching for a glass of water can be the first sign that the pulse rate is up
it surprises the body that the hand belongs to as the water spills from the rim of the glass onto dry lips
a small and explicit moment of uncertainty

(Wright 2002a: 88-89)

7 looking at looking

Where do we begin, how do we begin, to engage a critical mind?

Matthew Goulish *39 Microlectures* (2000: 43)

Performance and writing are connected by the body and uncertainty. Speaking of looking is leading to speaking of theorising. And *theory* - the “‘theoretical’ (that is, visual)”⁹ - must lead to speaking of looking.

I say I am looking *through* my own performance practice and experience. To look *through* implies that something is in the way, interrupting a clear view. Something to view *through* or *via* will layer with opacity, some obscuring of the object under study, giving a less than clear, incomplete image. Looking through water instead of air changes everything.

9 Writing on the *Spatial Practices* of urban living in *Walking in the City*, Michel de Certeau observes: “The panorama-city is a “theoretical” (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture...” (De Certeau 1984: 93). In his *Praise of Theory* speech Hans-Georg Gadamer observes that:

It seems helpful to recall here the original Greek sense of theory, *theoria*. The word means observing (the constellations, for example), being an onlooker (at a play, for instance), or a delegate participating in a festival. It does not mean a mere “seeing” that establishes what is present or stores up information. [...] It is “being present” in the lovely double sense that means that the person is not only present but completely present. [...] Thus theory is not in the first instance a behaviour whereby we control an object or put it at our disposal by explaining it. (Gadamer 1998: 31)

Seeing through water her focus is taken away, transforming everything to perpetual surface.

Moving through the different medium of water the swimmer is burning more energy, spending effort differently.

Transparency stands close to opacity. Glass might be transparent, but glass might not be all it seems.

Matthew Goulish uses *The Example of Glass* to acknowledge the problem of the immense heterogeneity and complexity of the cross-disciplinary practices that our studies and critical thinking will inevitably encounter. He also seeks to demonstrate the necessity for holding difference rather than to be thinking in terms of blurring boundaries. Old glass windows in European cathedrals have been found to be thicker at the bottom, transforming over centuries:

Glass flows in the direction of the pull of gravity, exhibiting the behaviour of liquid. Thus one cannot conclusively define glass without the inclusion of time [...] The problem of glass forces us to accept the inaccuracy of the traditional distinctions of solid or liquid. While the qualities of solidity and liquidity retain their difference, glass in fact is both, depending on the duration of observation, thus proving that these two states inextricably coexist.
(Goulish 2000: 44)

We might now see glass differently, apparently in terms of time. We might read performance differently - through other fields of practice; in terms of photography, archaeology, architecture, urban planning. We are looking *through* alternate practices and cross-disciplinary theoretical frameworks; transposing different thinking from other subjects, bringing ideas into contact with our subjects from other subject areas. Sometimes turning to listening as a way of speaking - or seeing the time and memory in the stillness of a photograph as a way of looking towards the appearance and disappearance of performances.

Concerned with change and how we understand, how we learn, Goulish also observes that criticism, with the intention of causing change in the artwork, very often might only really function to change the critic. He proposes an attitude of looking for “moments of exhilaration” to respond with. He wishes to “treat the work of art, in the words of South African composer Kevin Volans, not as an object in this world but as a window into another world.” (2000: 45). In this way, he positions the process of the critique as not so unlike the process of the artwork in that it is personalised, conceptual and exploratory in its discovery too. (47).¹⁰

¹⁰ In her 1964 essay *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag cautioned against the *replacing* of the work of art with acts of interpretation in criticism. She questions the method of defining and reducing the work to a manageable interpretation that “takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted” and fixes on a definitive meaning. Rather, she calls on criticism to “recover our senses”, let go of the preoccupation with hermeneutics and seek a new more self-reflexive “erotics of art”. (Sontag 1987)

8 DEMONSTRATIVE

A performance memory, no doubt mis-remembered: Nancy Reilly performing (I think in Glasgow and I guess in 1990) a solo monologue. She was sitting with composure, one foot in its high-heeled shoe, resting, glamorously, precariously, on the rim of a fish tank of water and then slipping, inevitably, into the water, as I remember it, as the narrative reached its climax or *denouement* and the main character slips and falls into water - off a jetty perhaps? I cannot remember the story, which was possibly spun around some more or less romantic encounter - perhaps unravelling and terminating at the moment of the absurd incident. But there she was: Nancy Reilly, with her leg in a tank of water in Glasgow. A solo woman performer speaking and moving very little, still attached to the now rather disembodied lower leg with a shoe on the foot, submerged underwater. Very little other memory-detail surfaces as significant.

This becomes linked to another memory, more easily located and verified, in a chapter sub-titled *Simple Demonstrations of the Laws of Physics*, from a book about the working methods of The Wooster Group. In discussing the idea of the *lecture-demonstration* David Savran observes that the performed classroom experiment can only use somewhat reduced and usually distorting metaphors to represent the isolated study of a phenomenon outside of the time and space and complexity of its found context:

Thus, as an explanation of the movement of waves, the water-wave tank may be a useful visualization, illuminating the principles of wave interaction. But the demonstration itself will not, if only because of its scale, provide a realistic representation of the play of ocean surf. Or yet again, Brownian motion (the random movement of microscopic particles in a gas or liquid) can be represented by using a tray of mechanically agitated steel balls. This visualization may help the viewer understand what Brownian motion is, although it operates according to entirely different principles. (Savran 1986: 48)

Experimental performance often turns to this kind of borrowing of performed metaphorical devices; the stand-in, the imitation, the impossible demonstration. A basic functional task will be emphasised - seemingly relocated out of context and without a necessarily utilitarian or relevant purpose outside of the performance of it as event. The action might then become inserted into the time of the performance and take on new, unforeseen meanings. In this way, as David Savran indicates, a company like The Wooster Group can potentially problematise and critically 'deconstruct' the method in and of itself, deliberately questioning the assumptions of theatrical illusion and apparently linear depictions of time held within narrative progressions. By drawing attention to the actions themselves, mimicking certain modes and conventions of delivery and execution, the performance might present apparently recognisable behaviour that "confronts the audience not with the transparency of language and spectacle, but with their opacity." (49).

9 i was dancing (fragment)

I was dancing, repeating a movement I have been starting and stopping for years.

I was dragging my own body weight measured in salt, breathing hard and sweating.

I was jumping backwards, copying the postures in Muybridge's *Man Performing Standing Broad Jump* sequence.

I was falling, and gasping, pretending that I was a woman in an imaginary Muybridge photograph.

I was rolling, using a movement that I had taught myself when I watched a television documentary about a journey made by an Indian Sadhu who rolled 4000 km, accompanied by his chanting followers.

I was crawling, with a mirror in my mouth, averting my eyes.

I was brushing salt out of the grazes on my knees, especially the right knee, which was bleeding slightly.

I was dancing, wearing pink shoes that I cannot walk in.

I was performing the 'quivering bird arms' movement, walking on toes with fluttering hands.

10 watching dancing

They remind us we live in the body-house.
Living 'in' the body. But where else could we live?
Dancing as the realm of freedom, that's less than half the story.
Eating as the realm of necessity. Not necessarily.
What about eating idyllically
(as in Paris?).
Everyone eats, not everyone dances (alas).
I watch dance, with pleasure. I don't watch eating.
If I watch someone eating when hungry, I wish it were I eating.
A meal watched by a hungry person is always savoury.
If I watch someone eating when full, I may turn away.
You can dance for me. (You do the dancing in my place,
I'll just watch.) You can't eat for me. Not much pleasure there.

Susan Sontag *In Memory of Their Feelings in Dancers on a Plane* (1990: 13-14)

What happens when we watch someone dancing?

We might say that kinaesthetics happens. A sense of movement in the body, certainly for the dancer.

We might say that aesthetics happens. A bodily experience of sense perception for the watcher - a sense of and a sense within.

Proprioception also happens, all the time, telling us how to know where our body is in space and how it is *in this space*. Without it we would need to rely on the visual image of our own body to maintain stability, consciously watching our every move, continually looking at our own body to hold onto orientation, always sleeping with the light on in case we wake up in darkness and cannot find ourselves.

One thing that is usually happening to the viewer as they watch the dancer dancing is that they see, in their periphery vision, as well as fragments of the other people in the audience, parts of the surface of their own body, around the edges of their own visual field.

If watching is difficult, for example if we are bored, we might find ourselves thrown back on our own body, made to work quite hard just to be in this skin. Perhaps it is in these moments that we encounter and recognise our own stance, what we loosely call 'posture'; this habitual carriage, this lived in place we know so well, from which we look out onto, interface with, receive from and extend into the world. Even if the audience has never laid eyes on the performer before, it will be through observing the stance of the inhabited body, the ways of carrying the specifics of this particular frame, that they will come to know, to recognise this moving body.

11 some questions about dancing

Becky Edmunds is asking me a question about dancing.
She is making a video documentary called:

“Have you started dancing yet?”

She will interview me but first she sets the task and I am asked to “demonstrate dancing” for the camera. On a winter’s day we go to the coast and onto the beach. I walk far away from the camera and I walk towards, too near, the camera. We record my bare feet in the sand and then, before we leave, dogs racing and shepherding people ecstatically along the shoreline in the distance. Later we record my hands in salt, drawing on red velvet, on the kitchen table and I answer questions.

I am thinking about beginning to dance.

When does the dancing begin? *Where* does the dancing begin? How to locate the origin of a movement. We notice how the reach of a hand seems to begin in the shoulder and can be felt much further away. The arms, depending on how I look at them, seem barely attached to the main skeleton, almost floating above the ribcage, but at the same time bound onto the body from deep inside the lower torso. Is the dancer standing up or lying down? What happens as the dancer works to source the movement will depend on the organisation of her body in space. Posture, at its most fundamental is the organisation of structure around a central axis and this, seen from way across a wind-swept beach or standing next to the kitchen sink on the other side of the table will give us our moment of recognition.

Where is the movement coming from?

I am thinking about starting to dance. How do we know that she has begun for sure?

The moment when someone gets up to perform, however informal the situation, is to some extent, a moment of formality, somehow set aside. Someone appears to make a move from the movement language of preparation to the specific moment of dancing the dance itself, perhaps *stylised*, beginning a new and different movement task. They are beginning a different moment and it seems to matter. Drawing our attention with a different kind of performing. This can be observed in movies - not necessarily in the musical genre - where someone steps forward, briefly prepares, assumes a position, composes herself, and gives a performance, a 'number', and, usually, we are watching an audience watching. How does the process of beginning become revealed in those moments? How does the *picture* arrive? Even while we know that the 'functional' is also performed - for example dressing and undressing - we see something shift and sometimes, dancing has begun.

Rather than the implication of definition in the reply to the question “what is dance?” - to which I must answer “everything and anything” - the question “have you started dancing yet?” brings a reflective pause where the weight of the idea of questioning the moment of beginning and ending can be felt, especially when the question that follows, sometime later, is: “have you stopped dancing?”

We watch her body as if it is an archive.

You often have to deal with the actual weight of your body.

You have to deal with this body and all the dancing and not dancing it has seen.

She had stopped dancing.

She was asking questions about dancing.

She was asked questions about not dancing.

She had returned to dancing, she was asked to.

She has started dancing again.

12 watching watching

In the photograph, the bodies on the screens appear to be mainly in close-up, mostly faces, eyes, watching, looming larger than life, looking down onto the performers and the surrounding audience. The bodies, some on horseback, are performing the traditional popular play in the middle of the space. The bodies of the present audience are watching the faces projected all around the space as they, in turn, watch the live action of the play.

The newspaper article describes the performance of the *Ta'ziyeh*, a kind of passion play, directed by the filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, taking place in a hexagonal, open-air theatre in Rome. Images of an Iranian village audience, recorded as they watched a previous performance of this production are projected onto six large screens surrounding the live action in the centre, which the live audience are watching.

I read that the edited film version of the first audience shows people becoming increasingly emotional as the Islamic tragedy, a depiction of the martyrdom of Hussein, progresses “and eyes begin to fill with tears. One woman sobs uncontrollably... men rock, head in hands, or beat their breasts in grief.”

“We watch the play, and a version of ourselves.” (Marshall 2003)

Kiarostami states: “It comes down to innocence: the innocence of the Iranian spectator, of his reaction... and the innocence of western audiences, who feel inadequate when confronted with that type of reaction to the very same show that they are watching.”

“They weep, in part, because they have seen it many times. People want to weep. Pathos in the form of narrative does not wear out.” (Sontag 2003: 74)

I read about how Kiarostami has framed and multiplied documentary evidence of another possible experience of and response to the play, which emanates from a live, oral tradition.

Not for the first time, I am fascinated by a performance I have not seen. I imagine watching it and not crying.

Watching someone else's eyes crying might
make you think of your own eyes crying.

Watching someone else's eyes crying might
make you think of your own eyes watching.

You can cry for me. (You do the crying in my place, I'll just watch.)

13 *hearts and minds: digressions*

The methodical task of writing distracts me from the present state of men. The certitude that everything has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms. I know of districts in which the young men prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages in a barbarous manner, but they do not know how to decipher a single letter. [...] but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret.

Jorge Luis Borges *The Library of Babel, in Labyrinths*

13.1

In an essay called *Benjamin's Aura and the Broken Heart of Modernity* Carsten Strathausen alights on “the heart metaphor” as applicable to Walter Benjamin’s complex circulation of connected ideas about modern experience, philosophy and aesthetics. While acknowledging that Benjamin would work with resistance to notions of thought that assume a centre or origin separated from any historical trajectory, Strathausen states that for Benjamin “to return to the heart of any subject matter is to think along its peripheries.” (Patt 2001: 1)

13.2

In *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes dwells on the image of the edge, the cut, the gap:

What pleasure wants is the site of loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. Culture thus recurs as an edge: in no matter what form. (1975: 7)

Moments of “intermittence” might be read as disruptions of ideas about completeness and certainty; moments of discontinuity and breaks in the supposed “unveiling of truth” of narrative - flashes of interruption:

Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?
...the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes 1975: 9-10)

13.3

Yve Lomax's *Move* text writes through and around the movement of thinking, thinking of folding instead of cutting and the possibility of difference as non-oppositional. She writes around a citation of Michel Serres' writing on the image of the movements and pathways of grazing animals:

They wander, they stray, they divagate yet such acts of continual turning only become deviations once the path of oppositional difference becomes cut and built upon foundations of stone. Beneath this foundation, however, we can discover another sort of foundation, one that is founded upon movement: "The oxen straying in sweet grass leave a complex curve under their hooves, all folded in on itself, like a protein - implicated, duplicated, traversed, crushed, streaked, variegated, tiger-striped, zebra striped, damasked, watered... This is the streaked multiplicity... the de-differentiated." (Lomax 2000: 185)

14 artist talks (part two)

This is the grip, like this:
Both hands. You can close
Your eyes if you like. When I say,
“Now,” it’s time. Don’t wait
or it’s all over. But not
too soon, either - just right.
Don’t worry. Let’s go.
Both hands.

William Stafford *Survival Course*¹¹

The ‘performance lecture’ (for some) can perhaps provide - at least for the performer - an enactment of the tensions between the letting go of and the holding onto the artwork. An event, located somewhere between the work of art and its documents. The issue might be described as the tension between making and resisting an archive. The performance lecture here might be a means of letting go of, while also drawing attention to, where the art making itself and its documents join, coincide and come apart.

¹¹ (Stafford 1994: 35)

The performance lecture might allow for collisions of possible conventions - both a performance and a lecture.

The performance lecture might give you a license to cross over formats, play outside of and around your habitual modes of address and find alternative registers of performance - and for you the audience, you might drift across different modes of reading, listening and attending.

Theory is practice - and you might get to play the professor. Reveal your passions, your obsessions and eccentricities, become the inventor, provide an exposition, offer a demonstration, present the artefact, the thinking and the *work* of art, the *endeavour*.

Stay in control, get out of breath, become distracted, interrupt yourself, switch to a new visual aid, try simultaneity - talking and showing at the same time. Work to control breathing and speaking. Try something out live for the first time. Dance a little, speak a little. Misjudge the effect of physical demonstrations on speaking. Underestimate the effect of speaking on other activities when handling objects, operating devices and manipulating materials.

Find out that the time it takes to read this many words out loud to an audience is different to the time it takes to read this silently on a train journey.

15 lying

Move forward, knees soften to a crouch. Negotiate the weight of the upper body onto the hands as they reach for the ground, weight emptying like water from legs into arms, distributed across from two to four standing points now. Measure my body length carefully, lay my self down, lower the front of my body onto a space on the floor no larger than a coffin or a narrow bed might be. Lie down on a more or less horizontal surface, grounded and in a different relationship to gravitational pull. Skeleton rearranged in a prostration: large sections of skin surface touch the earth, face meets ground. Passive, quiet, inactive, shallow breath. Now I'm a landscape.

Here I lie.
There I lay.
Laying down a shaking body.
Laying down a still body.
Lying and lying.
Lying in, lying in state.
Deceitful, falsely, lyingly.
Lying low, low-lying.

Those young men prostrated and kissing their books.
Out of their heads, out of your mind, out of this body.

Warrior tears - weak and strong. They died where they lay.
At someone's feet. I think I need to lie down.

Lying down to perform being a woman lying on the floor or lying on the table.
This body is not where it ought to be. The reclining woman is a recognisable image, her pose endlessly familiar and yet now easily situated incongruously, without appropriate props and surroundings, out of place, dis-located.

Or the body lying on the table is usually a dead body. Or the body lying on the table, curled around itself, on its side, comfortably relaxed, is usually a cat, sleeping soundly.

16 artist talks (part three)

“She is comfortably relaxed, she knows that she is seen.”¹²

I write that the work is: “A body of texts, which are inevitably personalised and yet deliberately unconfessional and, of course, knowingly, purposefully incomplete.” (2002b: 39). Meaning that it is specific to this performer-self. This body and its ways and actions are *particularised*. The telling is inevitably self-reflexive yet resistant to biographical conventions. The point is not to be doing (auto)biography - the objective of which is usually to be in that very mode of telling *the* life story, to be writing history, to be uncovering and revealing some more whole or complete ‘truth’. Although, bodies do constantly and cannot help but confess themselves through their own presence, through their own acts and traces.

¹² In her article *Revising the Body* Elizabeth Dempster cites Barbara Freedman (in *Staging the Gaze*) on a discussion of the theatrical and Albrecht Dürer's *Man Drawing Reclining Woman* woodcut. (Dempster 1993: 14 & 27)

How to tell this? How to tell how this is, well, *going*? How to tell how all the words and actions of others get soaked up and absorbed? How to weigh the affects of the works of others? And how to weigh these *bodies* of work? As if they can be presented as some kind of object of study, as if they could become named items, finished and left to stand outside of time and outside of the process of the making. The performance of the practice is given a past by its own accumulated and unfinished documents but this is not necessarily held still in the chronological and predictable marking of time that reassures us that we know what will happen next, most of the time, safe in the knowledge that nothing too unlikely will occur. Here and now, the artwork works through the endeavour of making over time, becoming the not-yet-known, still interrupting time, still opening up time. Work of art as verb then, rather than determined by its noun.¹³

13 Writing in response to Monica Ross' exhibition *justfornow* Yve Lomax considers the *experience* and *experimentation* of "this temporality, which brings the activity of innovation". The artwork as an intervention in our calculated and safely measured prediction of what future-time will bring:

"I say 'art work' but here the words are not speaking a noun; what these words are speaking is the activity of the verb. And it is this verbal activity that produces and gives me the affect of an interruption, which is, in itself, nothing but an instance of uncontrolled time." (Ross 2004: 9)

17 artist talks (part four)

She had acted it out for long enough, but who is to say that beneath all that which has been put upon her, the clothes which have covered her up, there is something waiting to make its true and naked entry, without fancy, metaphor or style - as if it were just a matter of removing all those frames and outer-layers, all those wellworn metaphors, clothes and habits! As if we can still expect to find the Truth, clean and simple!

Yve Lomax *Writing the Image*¹⁴

I will not say whether I will be taking my clothes off and getting naked here today.¹⁵ I will not say whether I will be getting down on my hands and knees here. I will not be discussing pillars of salt nor “the saltiness that passes through bodily membranes”. But I will say this: I make a new move towards an articulation of the ideas. Another version. Another act of dissemination. A snapshot of where the work is at now and how the work is *doing*. A picture of this moment in the research. The image is of a body - a body which moves between knowing and not knowing, and is also *knowing* about this.¹⁶

¹⁴ (Lomax 2000: 10)

¹⁵ And anyway, where would nakedness be without clothes? (Lomax 2000: 10)

¹⁶ (Wright 2002b)

You will not know me from this and I will not say that this is what I know. I will not say that there is anything here that is not citation. And I can't say that I know that this is for sure. But I will say this:

A mostly 'solo' body needs other bodies. All those others, known and unknown, met through their own appearing and disappearing. All those others met recently or never met, except through the appearance and disappearance of their productions and artworks and documents.

Trusting this and trusting the work of others.¹⁷

17 Writing on questions of authorship and collaboration Lin Hixson considers the workings of participation and inter-dependence in art making and teaching and the place of trust as a vital possibility in discovering new and potential configurations of material. These issues are familiar to her in her experience of collaborative performance making within *Goat Island* performance company. In her *Lecture 7, Trust, Construction, Digestion* she notes the meanings of the verb trust as encompassing the idea of relying and depending on and also having confidence and hope. These ideas, she suggests are integral to a process that takes account of the individual contribution and the act of inspiration and the interaction of this through exchange and pooling of experience and ideas. She cites an image of an impossibly ecstatic body 'joining in':

"Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, tells an Indian story about a grain of salt that wanted to know just how salty the ocean was, so it jumped in and became one with the water of the ocean. In this way, the grain of salt gained perfect understanding."
(Hixson, 1997: 92)

In this intense (excessive, joyful, optimistic) picture of a self dispersed and shared, received and receiving, I read a description of a moment of knowing and not knowing. Through the crazy wisdom of the act of dissolving the grain of salt grasped the possibility of experiencing the saltiness of all the ocean; the possibility of swimming with all those known and unknown others.

18 citings from emails
and a translation

(and a word about nakedness)

It's fucking amazing.

I'm going to watch it again.

Can't wait.

My body itself identifies (with) much of it, almost like your actions were triggering body memories of mine, my muscles literally straining inside my skin with a weird recognition.

How can I say this?

Performance resembled a lecture where lecture breaks the academic code by starting to handle images created by the issues.

At moments I felt like I was watching myself, what is that?

But then that familiarity would slide away suddenly and I would find myself somewhere else, no reference points in a strange place.

So wish I had been present, well, maybe you do it here.

Tensions pulling between ease and almost anxiety, that's not the right word at all but perhaps my fleshy anxieties...

Strength and vulnerability.

- but this is slippery.

She let the spectator read the language of her body when she stood up to perform her issues by physical means of expression.

It is often the less clear acts (like the cutting) that I want to talk about.

And, can you imagine a time when you won't do this, like this?

Even then she maintains the controlled mastering of the situation as when reading.

Its been ricocheting around my head -
feeling someone else's movement by looking.

Performance broke the belief that hard issue must be expressed violently.

Its been ricocheting around my head -
feeling someone else's movement by looking.

*In her androgyne essence and expression she has the
purity which makes everything she does to look poetic.*

- so I can't see it and be sure of it
as I struggle for words
as I am watching you (video you) and being you
(me identifying with you with my physical self).

The way she reads, drinks, undresses and is naked at the stage persuades to use the word innocence. However, behind the issues there is a bitter taste of life. Body doesn't lie, experiences, wishes and fears can be seen through the surface, even calm.

tender and delicate, its there its gone, I cannot hold onto it and then
once again I feel like I am in a dream and am watching me and
then no, back with the utter unknown and that familiarity is gone
entirely and I experience you (video you) as a stranger almost.

Performance was so captivate that audience followed it in total silence.

small detail (like the attitude, the flickering of the self conscious
confidence and holding the body in certain ways when naked
in front of audience) watching you, your moving/dancing
in a sort of different version no doubt.
...but then how do you tell?

19 bodyweights

A *polypeptide* contains a large number of amino acids. Proteins are polypeptides that contain as few as 50 or as many as 2000 amino acids. Because each variation in the number and sequence of amino acids produces a different protein, a great variety of proteins is possible. The situation is similar to using an alphabet of 20 letters to form words. Each letter would be equivalent to an amino acid, and each word would be a different protein.

(Reynolds Grabowski & Tortora 2001: 33)

She was moving.

She was moving the equivalent mass of her own body weight measured in salt; shifting

something like but not like this structure of blood-flesh and bones and skin.

The 54kg of salt was a deadweight, too heavy to lift she finds and twice her weight as a girl she guesses.

And just a handful, like a salt cellar full, or 250g, is the approximate amount of salt contained in the average (some) body.

A full mouthful of water poured, or spat out or swallowed, measured in a small spirit glass full - like a large shot of tequila - is approximately 50ml.

And she read this somewhere too: this average someone's body holds 2500ml of water, to be lost and replaced, daily.

That's 50 mouthfuls to be swallowed.

She was swallowing.

Re-placing her self.

She was moving.

She was moving her body cells around. Moving the proteins; shifting the combinations of 20 types (10 essential and 10 nonessential) amino acids. The proteins must be moving anyway, polypeptides folded and twisted together to form and give each protein a shape, each one knitted in somewhere, three-dimensional and unique. Building-up, breaking down in basal metabolics (all the time). Comings and goings (think pixels). Breathing to move chemicals. Sudden rushes. Body at rest, sated, even.

The some-body keeps re-arranging itself,
moving, changing shape.

Re-writing the self across time,
palimpsest-like.

Here is a constant erasure; the picture of the performer starting again.

20 POSTSCRIPT

The kitchen window looks out onto the back of the red brick museum building and on the top floor are shelves of boxes housing rows of archives.¹⁸ I can see into rooms that I have never been in. The lights are always left on in one stairwell and on all four floors, positioned above each doorway, is an electronic display, visible from outside, still moving. Repeated on each floor, the words running from right to left to be read from left to right it is left running all night, announcing in orange letters:

“The Museum is now closing... The Museum is now closing... The Museum is now closing... The Museum is now closing...”

¹⁸ On what ‘table’, according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? [...] There is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things. (Foucault 1974: xix-xx)

¹⁹ Spoken performance text (Wright 1995)

P.S.¹⁹

Trust me,

I've done something like this before

I've been somewhere like this before

But this will never happen the same way again

- not like this, here with you

And remember

whatever happens,

no matter what happens

I

will

always

love

you

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