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Editorial

This issue of *Platform* takes as its theme representations of the human, a topic that developed out of a symposium hosted by Royal Holloway's Department of Drama and Theatre in 2011 entitled 'Who Do We Think We Are: Representing the Human'. The question underpinning that symposium, the question of who 'we' are as humans, affects many areas of human (and nonhuman) concern: politics, ethics, history, religion, economics, the environment, science, technology and, of course, literature, drama, theatre, performance and dance, to name only a few. Who or what humans are thought to be and the stories that locate them shape how people behave, treat others, construct laws, inflict punishments, educate and so on. Representations of humans in the arts thereby offer rich and, potentially, influential repositories of ways in which humans have been, and are, conceived and reconceived. Catherine Belsey explains that although '[f]ictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a social body', they do articulate 'the meanings its members understand and contest' about 'the human' (5). This being so, Belsey takes the view, as do we, the editors, that fictional representations of humans in literature, theatre and performance constitute possible places 'from which to begin an analysis of what it means to be a person […] at a specific historical moment' (ibid).

'The human' in this edition's title nods towards the twentieth century's liberal humanist subject and to its corresponding European critical tradition. This tradition had dominated literary discourse up until the rise of (primarily Francophone and poststructuralist) theory in the 1960s and '70s, when writers such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and later commentators such as Elinor Fuchs announced the death of 'the human'. Roundly and rightly vilified by its antihumanist critics (feminists, postcolonialists, gender theorists, poststructuralists, etc.), the liberal humanist subject was revealed as denoting nothing more universal than a historically privileged and ideal form of 'the human': specifically, a white, educated, logocentric,

and European male subject. Towards the end of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first, the posthumanists came to prominence as they worked to move beyond 'the human' as conceived in liberal humanist terms. Building upon the political indignation and theoretical insights of the antihumanists, writers and researchers such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, and Cary Wolfe focused their work, variously, on the political and ontological implications of technology for the human species, as well as addressing ethical concerns pertaining to the ontology and status of animals.

The critical tradition has demonstrated a shift, then, from (white male) anthropocentrism towards accounting for multiple and polyvalent representations of the human. Advocates of this shift have looked to decentre the idea of 'the human' as some unified and autonomous individual; instead, discourses of obsolescence, adaptability, mutability and enhancement have emerged which work to reveal the human's intimate kinship with animals and machines in a landscape that is resistant to anthropocentrism, essentialism and immutability.

And yet, despite all these theoretical attacks, 'the human' seems to persist as a subject of representation in theatre and performance. This is not to suggest that human representations are not changing forms, behaviours, and identities, but that identifiable individual agents nonetheless appear to endure on our 'stages'. In this sense, 'the human' of this edition's title serves as a provocation, challenging its writers and readers to characterise, reflect upon and evaluate what it is to be human, what it *means* to be human, and what it takes to *represent* the human both on and off the stage, page, screen and gallery wall.

The edition opens with a transcript of a conversation between Tim Crouch and Dan Rebellato exploring the nature and form of the human as represented in Crouch's work as a contemporary dramatist and performer. Speaking last year at 'Who Do We Think We Are: Representing the Human', Crouch reveals himself to be deeply critical of the traditional conception of the human as a rational and unified origin of meaning. Reacting strongly against this model, which underpins conventional

acting approaches in the tradition of psychological realism, Crouch speaks about the ways in which his formal and performance-based experiments with representing characters posit a human that is provisional and fundamentally connected to its given circumstances. In Crouch's insistence upon the creative potential of its audience to construct meanings and identities in performance contexts that aim to be democratic, his representation of the human reveals itself to be a fluid and participatory matter and, in this sense, may be called political.

In her article, 'Tearing and Wearing the Skin: Negotiation Beyond Genders', Yu-Chien Wu engages with current issues surrounding gender, sexuality and performance. The article examines ways in which conceptualisations of gender are mediated through the skin, which is conceived as a tool of sensation, representation, and misrecognition. Charging the work of gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam with neglecting the skin as a gender mediator, the author brings much needed attention to the ways this organ functions as an image, a screen and a mirror: all ripe concepts with exciting implications for the fields of theatre and performance studies to apply and expand. In 'Prosthetics Imagery: Negotiating the Identity of Enhanced Bodies', Maria Neicu picks up on comparable discourses of the body, but instead of addressing the skin she takes as her subject the enhancement of human limbs. Her case study examines a series of portraits by Howard Schatz of the athlete and model, Aimee Mullins, focusing in particular on the viewer's encounter with prosthetics. The article refigures notions of disability and 'lack' in the context of technological enhancement. In many ways, then, the article might be understood to pick up on the work of the Frankfurt School, in particular the notion of aesthetic space functioning as a potential catalyst for social change. In this light, we might understand the author's 'invitation' for the reader to re-consider the *status quo* which impacts upon and defines understandings of beauty, lack and otherness.

In 'The Duality of Heroic Identity in Fielding's Tom Thumb', Máire MacNeill addresses precisely the kind of 'rich

repository' we spoke of earlier concerning how representations of the human in the arts – in this case, on the eighteenth century stage – are relationally bound to a particular historical and socio-cultural milieu. Her subject is the genre of heroic tragedy, and her point of departure the satirical burlesquing of this genre in Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb*. The archival research evident in this article is both valuable and compelling; in excess of this, though, the article unearths a number of themes pertinent to this edition, particularly through discussing how notions of heroism and masculinity are constructed and deconstructed via the protagonist's encounters with highly stereotyped caricatures within the play. These encounters are rendered all the more pertinent in the context of a representative system turned in on itself through the satirical wit of the dramatist. It is not just the representation of a fictionalized human which is analysed, then, but the representational system itself.

The 'Performance Documents' section includes two articles documenting performance practice. In 'Multiplied Trajectories – A Traveller's Dinner', Molly Beth Seremet uses performative writing to continue in the same explorative vein as the practice-as-research event she looks to document. Her cross-cultural practice engages with themes of cosmopolitanism and ethnicity by means of cooking and eating the national dish of Jordan, *mansaf*. Anne-Pauline van der A introduces us to her clown persona and alter-ego Annot in 'Becoming Annot: Identity Through Clown'. This 'document', with the help of visual aids, focuses on the tension between the supposedly coherent and contained self and the formation of a clown persona. Her practice evidences both an examination of the self in relation to representations of the self (or the human in relation to a representation of itself as a human) as well as a ludic means of playing with and against a social context.

As ever, and especially so in the context of financial pressures under which so many within the academy are currently straining, *Platform* would like to offer a special note of thanks to the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, for their ongoing financial

and practical support. We also thank our peer reviewers; the thought and time invested in offering astute and constructive support is strongly valued by the journal. *Platform* is now searchable via EBSCO and we thank them for working with us. We would also like to thank Intellect, Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge for providing books for review. Finally, thank you to all who shared their research and practice by contributing to this edition of *Platform*.

Adam Alston (Editor) and Louise LePage (Guest Editor)

Works Cited

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Notes on Contributors

Jeremy Bidgood is a puppeteer and researcher. He is currently undertaking a practice-led PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, investigating the influence of Japanese *ningyō jōruri* on British theatre practice. Jeremy also runs the award-winning puppetry company, Pangolins Teatime, which performs across the UK. He is a regular contributor to the puppetry magazine *Animations Online*.

Tim Crouch was an actor for many years before starting to write – and still performs in much of his work. His plays include *My Arm, ENGLAND* (a play for galleries), the OBIE-winning *An Oak Tree* and *The Author*, joint winner of the 2010 John Whiting Award. Tim tours his work nationally and internationally. He has also written for younger audiences, including a series of five plays inspired by Shakespeare's lesser characters. For the RSC, Tim has directed *The Taming of the Shrew* and this year directs *King Lear* and *I, Cinna (the Poet)* – a performance for young audiences. *Tim Crouch: Plays One* is published by Oberon Books.

Charlotte Keys is a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is currently working on her thesis, which examines Shakespeare's plays in light of existentialist philosophy. She is also interested in Renaissance thinkers such as Montaigne, Donne, and Pico. Charlotte is editor of *Exegesis*, an academic e-journal based at Royal Holloway's Department of English.

Louise LePage recently submitted her PhD thesis (Royal Holloway, University of London), which was entitled, 'Beyond Character: A Post/humanist Approach to Character in Modern Theatre'. She has published on Katie Mitchell and Sarah Kane. Louise is a regular board member of *Platform*, the postgraduate and peer-reviewed journal based at Royal Holloway's Drama and Theatre Department, and is guest editing this issue, 'Representing the Human'. For the last six years, Louise has been a Visiting Lecturer at Royal Holloway and was previously an A Level Drama teacher and freelance theatre critic for *Irish Theatre Magazine*.

Máire MacNeill is a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research addresses early eighteenth-century beliefs and concerns about masculinity by studying cultural and theatrical representations of duellists and duelling during the period. She has spoken at conferences in England and America on the subject of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drama and culture.

Maria Neicu finished her first MA at Maastricht University (2009-2010), being a *Nuffic Huygens Scholarship Alumna*. Her thesis examined grassroots innovation and interactional expertise in technology design. Her second MA in 'International Performance Research' (MAIPR, Erasmus Mundus) focused on emerging technologies for human enhancement, and their representation in artistic practice through scenario-making. Currently, Maria is a researcher for European climate and energy policy at E3G Brussels. Prior to this, she was a trainee at DG Research & Innovation in the European Commission and focused on communication, lay decision-making and the ethics of nanoscience and nanotechnology projects.

Dan Rebellato is Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, and his books include *Contemporary European Directors Theatre, Theatre & Globalization*, and *1956 and All That*. His book on British playwriting in the 2000s – which includes a chapter on Tim Crouch – will be published by Methuen Drama in 2013. He is also a playwright and his plays include *Chekhov in Hell, Static*, and *Here's What I Did With My Body One Day*.

Molly Beth Seremet is a devised theatre maker and writer based in New York. She holds a MRes with distinction in Performance and Creative Research from University of Roehampton. She has toured her recent devised theatre piece, *Martin's (words lost)*, in Europe and the US. Her academic and performance interests are bound up in investigations of memory, autobiography, monologue and sensory engagement. Her essay 'Strange Attractors, Strange Repellers' has recently been published in the 'Chaos' edition of *Stimulus: Respond*.

Melina Theocharidou is a multilingual actor, director and translator. She also works as an editor at Oberon Books and as

a Greek script reader for the National Theatre and the Royal Court. Melina has a BA in French and Italian from University College London and a MA in Text and Performance Studies from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and King's College, University of London. As an actor, she has worked in both text-based and physical theatre productions in London, Edinburgh and Athens. Her film credits include *Tough Love and Somewhere New*. Melina directed the UK premiere of *Pamela!* and the world premieres of *Princess, Dream* and *Red in the Forest*. She was the Assistant Text Expert at Shakespeare's Globe in 2010 and was commissioned as a translator by the Donmar Warehouse. *www.melinatheo.com*

Anne-Pauline van der A holds a MPhil in Classics and Literature (Leiden University) and a MA in International Performance Research (MAIPR, Erasmus Mundus). Her last thesis explored the concept of performativity in relation to the figure of the modern clown in the performances of Charlie Chaplin and Jacques Tati. After attending various theatre workshops and masterclasses in the Netherlands, she trained at TEATRO Theatre School with Alan Gill (RSC, National Youth Theatre). She has performed with Guillermo Gómez-Peña's La Pocha Nostra troupe.

Yu-Chien Wu completed a MRes at Royal Holloway, University of London, in 2008 and is currently a PhD candidate at Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz in Germany. Her thesis traces the practice of self-cutting in contemporary performance into the 1990s and thereafter, examining the role of the skin from the perspective of psychoanalysis, feminist theory and post-human discourse.

Tim Crouch and Dan Rebellato in Conversation.

Edited by Louise LePage

On 19 March 2011, postgraduates from the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, hosted a symposium titled 'Who Do We Think We Are: Representing the Human' at the Centre for Creative Collaboration in London – a symposium out of which this edition of *Platform* has grown. What follows is a transcript of a conversation which took place that day between writer and scholar Dan Rebellato and the playwright and performance maker Tim Crouch. The Q&A which followed was chaired by Louise LePage.

Dan Rebellato: What is particularly relevant for this symposium is of course the fact that, I think, in those four shows that you've premiered in the last ten years, the adult shows, each one, in a very different way, makes a specific attempt to try to reconvene the way we represent human beings on stage and I thought it might just be a good idea to go through each one just thinking about what the process is, what the journey is, and what the implied, I suppose, image of the world is – if that's not too grand a way of thinking about it. Just starting with *My Arm* –

Tim Crouch: Yes.

DR: The central device, for those of you who maybe haven't seen it, is that it's a one-man show, a first person monologue describing a boy who decides one day to put his arm in the air and then never thereafter takes it down again until he dies from complications caused by holding your arm in the air for sixteen years or however many –

TC: More: thirty years.

DR: Thirty years. Theatrically, of course, the weird device is that at no point in the show does Tim Crouch, who is playing

this character, put his arm in the air: so the audience is faced with a kind of theatrical puzzle. Was that the starting point?

TC: So, thinking about the theme of the day ['Representing the Human']: having been an actor for my 20s and most of my 30s, I was encouraged to explore notions of humanity and humanness in a very particular process, a psychologically driven process, which takes as its fundamental a sort of notion of psychological action, you know, that psychology is the reason for our actions. I became increasingly disenchanted, I suppose, with that process and so *My Arm* is a very strong reaction to that process: by presenting a series of sort of models that refute that psychological basis. There's an action, a big action, the action of a boy who actually puts his arm above his head, but there is never any attempt to psychologically explain that action or explore that action. Everything that happens happens *to* that action, not from *within* that action, if that makes sense. And maybe traditional processes would want to go into the action and work backwards from the action and then try and explain or excuse the action. There's no attempt in *My Arm* to do that; also, formally, that statement is picked up by objects that are used, that are supplied by the audience at the beginning of the show, and those objects are selected entirely at random to represent or portray the main characters in the story, the other main characters in the story – mother, father, brother. And also other objects of art are represented by randomly selected objects. And that's another sort of poke in the eye, I think, for all that kind of stuff that was getting me so down in my 30s. By trying not to think, I suppose, by the performer trying not to think, or the performer trying not to feel, as well, but in such a context whereby thought and feeling is engendered predominantly in the audience rather than on stage. So all these performances, all these pieces are very simple for me to perform on one level in that I don't, *at all*, go through those routes and those practices that I had been doing in my 20s and 30s. I don't need to do that anymore. I feel very militant in a way about not needing to do that anymore. So, yeah, *My Arm* takes that on as a full frontal assault, I think. Go on –

DR: When you said that the work is done by the audience, one of the things of course that happens is that we *do* see the image of

the boy with his arm in the air because you have an Action Man on a table at the side and you put his arm in the air and there's a video camera, so we're seeing that image quite clearly. So, in a sense, there's a kind of multiplication of the human: we're having to condense or combine two images together and in fact there are other kinds of representations –

TC: Yeah, yeah –

DR: Video and –

TC: But it's a mediatisation of the human in a way: layers being placed in-between me and me, me and the other me. I mean, on a very basic level, the absence of any empirical evidence is another kind of mediatisation or a way of disjointing me from what I am representing myself as, if that makes sense –

DR: A lack of empirical evidence of –

TC: I don't have my arm above my head.

DR: I see what you mean.

TC: Do you know what I mean? I indicate a finger that's been amputated and the finger is still there; I indicate a scar on my back and there is no scar on my back. These are all kinds of disjuncture for an audience, I hope, partly to stop an audience from loving itself into an easily sort of rendered reality, I think. And then that's happening in terms of scale with a figure, a doll, that is the only one that literally does that action and then there are those other objects I've taken from the audience [which] are also presented under the glare of a camera. The boy, the doll, is also under a camera; there's a feed to a TV like you said. So, we're looking at different scales, at the human scale, of the abstracted human scale, of the *super* abstracted human scale, which might be a cigarette packet or a mobile phone being my mother. And I'm excited about how, again, how impossible it is for a mobile phone to commit to a psychological action. [*Laughter*] So what's happening, then, for an audience is a free-wheeling, I hope, or free-ranging process of

association for themselves on those abstractions or those disjunctures. And that seems to then crack open some space, you know, in the performance terrain and into that space or into those gaps, I hope, comes a little bit more activity from the audience: thought and authorship from the audience.

DR: Obviously, when you first did that show, there must have been a part of you that thought, 'Is the audience just going to be completely baffled by it?' I mean, I imagine you will have had multiple kinds of reaction from an audience because on the one hand I think there are those very clear sort of, let's call them, alienation effects.

TC: Yes, yes.

DR: But on the other hand, when you say something like how hard it is for a mobile phone to commit to some sort of motivation, on the other hand, as an audience, you can kind of invest in almost anything.

TC: You can, yes you can.

DR: Some kind of emotional effect.

TC: I mean, I always say it's no more unusual, really, saying that this mobile phone is my mother, than saying that I am the Prince of Denmark. I mean, maybe there's a slight difference there, a *slight* difference, but it's still a request that is made to an audience to believe that what I am is not what I am. And so I think that with *My Arm* I just, very effortlessly on my part, I pushed that to a very far extreme and, yeah, the surprise and the joy has been how willing people are, like you say, prepared, to just invest: people coming in tears at the end because their watch was the mother and the mother in the story dies. Ideas of audience participation become very keen for me I think in this, in *all* the pieces, not, as in, come up on stage and make an idiot of yourself, but how you get an audience to actively participate in the fabric of the piece. So you find that in *My Arm* where investment comes entirely from the audience. I make a point of not selecting the objects to type, you know, I don't

find a feminine object to represent a mother; I don't find a masculine object to present a father. I'm most excited, in a way, when my hand randomly selects a lipstick and that's my dad because then there's just a lot more work for you to do, there's a lot more interest, I think, and again the crack gets wider and you, I hope, pour into it, you know, you fill the spaces without me as a performer. I think when I was in my 20s and 30s I was trained to fill the spaces for you.

DR: Right. That idea of audience participation and somebody getting up on stage, while that's not the exact situation in *An Oak Tree*, what you have in *An Oak Tree* – again, if you haven't seen it, it's a show, it's a two-hander; Tim is one of the performers; the other performer has never seen or read the play before, is basically, sort of, booked or –

TC: Uh, booked, yeah. I don't need to know who's booked but people book actors.

[…]

DR: And you guide them through the whole performance: sometimes you hand them bits of script, sometimes to a headset – you are communicating directly with them, and sometimes you just say it for them. […] And you've had male actors, female actors, black, white, young, and old and there's very much, rather like in *My Arm*, there's an arbitrary relation between –

TC: Yes, very important.

DR: The image and the sort of fictional reality. Why did that emerge as a particular device, that sort of… It's like getting the objects from the audience but now a person.

TC: Well, you've started that question… That's where it started, in the idea of the objects and then a long discussion with my friend Andy Smith, a smith, who is one of the co-directors of my work. Having hit upon a whole series of ideas that were sprung from *My Arm* […]. So, yeah, the idea of taking not an object but a human

being… I initially asked Andy if he would play the character. The character is a 46 year-old father, a grieving father, and I didn't want an actor to play that part. I'd had considerations of 'How could I not have an actor play that part? Someone who would not do all those ghastly things that I found myself doing in my 20s and 30s? How could I prevent that without it being an object?' So I thought of Andy Smith who is not an object [*laughter*] but he's also not an actor. He's an extremely *true* person, if that makes sense? He doesn't really do deceit or pretence, really. And Andy and I, in a conversation, hit upon the idea of bringing a different actor in every time, which is an idea that I had fleetingly thought about and thought was not possible. Then, in rehearsal for that play, *An Oak Tree*, we always stopped at the end of the day and would test whether the device was gonna remain just a device or whether it would actually be a deepening technique for the telling of the story and I think it is that, that the actor, who doesn't know the play, plays a character who doesn't know their world, from grief, really, and that character is played by someone who doesn't know their world, by not knowing the play they're in, so there is a nice constant sort of movement back and forward between those two things. And in the spirit of the nonhuman, one particular actor I'd worked with in my 30s who had just come out of Drama Centre who had been inducted fully in the Drama Centre process, you know, the carrying round a book with objectives and transitive verbs and the whole thing. And I worked with him on a Mark Ravenhill play, actually, and had a very difficult time with him and in a way *An Oak Tree* was kind of written for him. Not that I ever wanted him to do it but I was excited about showing how a performance could be made without all that nonsense. […] And so how exciting to think about theatre as not being a by-product of that or an end product of that process but of theatre being something more live and something more alert to the moment, rather than alert to a process that has been carefully considered and developed and rehearsed. So, the character of the father, whose name in the play is Andy Smith, in honour of Andy Smith who, in rehearsal, was always that actor and then, when we got more confident, [we] moved out and we brought people in. So that's, yeah, it's very exciting for me that there can be something generated which, for me, is very narratively grounded, ideologically grounded, and performatively grounded

in terms of what I might think a theatre performance should be about, which is transformation and transformation taking place without any of the sort of due processes that have become so central to many of the more mainstream schools of theatre.

[…]

DR: You mention that it's, that you're using a device but in a sense retaining some of the virtues, let's say, of dramatic theatre in that it's a very moving story. It's a good story –

TC: Yeah, it's a good story, *great* story.

[*Laughter*]

DR: It builds to that. There's a particular moment where, it seems to me, it's kind of where everything – for me, anyway – comes together where the father, who has lost his daughter, has formed the view that his daughter has been transformed into an oak tree.

TC: A tree, a tree next to where his daughter was killed; he has transformed that tree into his daughter. It's connected to a work of art called *An Oak Tree* by Michael Craig Martin who transforms a glass of water into a tree. In *An Oak Tree* a tree is transformed through loss and through an uncensored artistic impulse, really, an unconscious artistic impulse to transform something, to deal with absence.

DR: And that moment culminates, doesn't it, in a scene where what we are looking at is you and this other arbitrary actor pointing at a piano stool and one of you is saying, 'It's just an oak tree' and the other is saying, 'No, it's –

TC: 'It's a daughter'.

DR: 'It's a daughter'.

TC: Yeah.

DR: And we're looking at a piano stool and there are these different levels, layers of –

TC: But […] I, at that moment of the play, am actually playing the father's wife. I'm holding a chair to my hip and the chair is playing a five year-old girl called Marcy. Earlier on in the play the actor in the script says, 'Do we ever get to see her?' and I say, 'Yes, she appears as a chair'. So later on I fulfil my prophecy. I am Dawn, the wife; the chair is Marcy, the girl; the piano stool is, from my point of view, a tree: so the mantra is, 'That is a tree, I am your wife, this is our daughter, and that is a road. This is what matters: *this*. This is what we have to deal with: *this*'. And there's a playfulness in that, in that everything she says is not true, is not true, but everything she says in the context of performance becomes true. And it was very fascinating, actually: the character's name, Dawn, became completely subconsciously rendered that name. There is a lot of reference to dusk in the play: the accident where the child dies, it happens in the dusk. It's a moment where there is an abstraction of clear light and I called the wife Dawn without really realising why I was calling her Dawn. But Dawn, she's an absolute. She wants the empirical, she wants everything named, and the play at that point kind of does her down really by pulling the rug from under all her emphatic statements.

DR: And in *My Arm*, as you said, there are some very large-scale projections –

TC: As big as we can get them.

DR: That's right. And one of the things that kind of struck me then is in a sense that across the four shows there is almost a move *towards* the human scale rather than… Because, you know, as you say – as large as you can – that image dominates the stage, which makes the human figure seem small and I think in quite a lot of multimedia work, to use that rather ugly phrase, […] in something like Katie Mitchell's *Attempts on Her Life*, the image dominates and minimises the figure of the human being […]. Whereas you seem to have moved in another direction, you don't seem that interested in –

TC: No, I'm very excited about *The Author* being the last in that sequence, in a way. It is a profoundly human scale because there is no stage at all. The scale that we operate on is one-to-one. That's the scale, you know, because in that play, if you don't know it, the audience sit in two banks of seating facing each other. There is no stage in-between although it's interesting how often reviewers or audience members go, 'Why didn't you use the stage?' And you go, 'Well, this is the fucking stage, this *is* the stage, *this* is the stage'. So in terms of, yes, scale, there is no […] perspective in *The Author*. It's like one of those old paintings where there was no perspective. Everything was that and everything was this and that's that and this is this and they are one and the same thing, I think.

DR: But then, of course, it's very complicated because it's almost the opposite of *My Arm*, because in *My Arm* lots of different images are having to be mentally combined into one; in *The Author* I am having to sort of, when I am in the audience, I am having to sort of disaggregate you into the person of the character, the author, and so on –

TC: Yes, okay. But I'd say that was very similar to *My Arm*. So, I see big connections between the two plays in that in *My Arm* it's me and it isn't me and there is no, there is nothing that is gonna help you, that will be manifested to help you in this disaggregation of me and other me and it's the same with *The Author*: there's me and there is other me and there is nothing physically and materially that will help you in the transformation. So it's throwing the emphasis onto your abilities.

[…]

DR: Rather like the moments in *My Arm* that you mention where you say, you know, my finger was amputated and –

TC: And *this* is the finger –

DR: That was amputated: there's a different sort of pressure, isn't there, put on *The Author* because, I mean, you're talking, you're saying you're Tim Crouch, you're saying you're a playwright.

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If people don't follow your work as nerdishly as I do, they won't necessarily know that the play you're talking about is not one you've written, and then of course you do, I suppose, basically, a quite dangerous thing in the end where you have the character talk about watching Internet paedophile pornography and, of course, you're forcing an audience to sort of go, 'Could he really have…? Is that…? Maybe he's confessing something'.

TC: Yeah.

DR: 'To us…?' And I suppose it's only the point where, of course, you have the character kill himself: that's the point where, unless you're really slow…

[*Laughter*]

TC: Er, we've met a lot of slow people.

[*Laughter*]

DR: So, I mean, did you think, 'God, this is a dangerous thing to do. I don't, you know?' Who wants to have people go around thinking that?

TC: Yeah, yeah, golly, that's a good question. No, I think it's really important. […] [I]t felt very important that the author should – *an*-author, *un*-author – should be held responsible. So that's kind of what that final statement is, really, in the play, is that we are, we have to understand our responsibilities and they are not glibly to be located in another alternative reality or an easily demarcated character or a fictional location. The responsibilities are here in us and they are now in *The Author*, they are in the performers, they're in the audience and I hope with *The Author* we flatten the division as much as possible, so that we all understand how close we all are in terms of our responsibilities. […] [T]here is no neat tying up [at the end of *The Author*]; there is no neat tying up of the character. He says – the character of Tim Crouch, says – some profoundly questionable things at the very end. He says, 'Nobody was hurt': which is kind of a big, big shout to the audience to confront those

thoughts and those ideas. And yes, interesting in that that character looks like me and speaks like me and has my name. But then with *My Arm*, people who don't know my work will come to see that play and, for the first thirty minutes, will think it's my story. *My Arm* is kind of more helpful. *An Oak Tree* is really helpful in terms of explaining what the rules are. *ENGLAND*, to a degree, also explains the rules. It takes a little longer for an audience to understand where they are in the second act of *ENGLAND* but in *The Author* no rules are explained at all.

DR: Moving on to think about *ENGLAND*, I mean, the device, there, […] certainly in the first half, [is] that one character is played by two people: a man and a woman.

TC: Yes.

DR: So what we experience for the first – well, for the whole play – is we get a really well realised, fully developed sense of a person.

TC: Yeah.

DR: Whose gender we don't know.

TC: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. That's really good for today, isn't it? [*Laughter*] I hadn't really thought about it. *That's* why I'm here!

DR: Yeah, so –

TC: Good.

DR: It's noticeable, isn't it, that some of the reviews just decided –

TC: Yeah, just decide it's a man, it's a woman, they're gay, they're straight. I think we worked really hard to remove any, any kind of definite, definitive ascription of gender to that character and I'm excited about that, about, again, making a character. We talk about, you know, the container or the vessel for a character, the actor being a container for the idea of the character and interest for me, as a theatre-goer, is to see the idea of the character embodied in

the idea of the actor. That's exciting. But in *ENGLAND* there is no easily identifiable container; it sort of vibrates between myself and Hannah Ringham who is the other performer in the production of the play that we do. And it's, again, it's a bit like, you know, the threads are all there in all the other pieces: it's about whatever you make of it; you are welcome to make that. We can't say that you are wrong if you think it's a man; we can't say you're wrong if you think it's a woman. I can't say you're wrong if you think I really did watch Internet child pornography because, of course, I'm opening that out as a possibility. And I want *you* to have to navigate *your* journey rather than have that journey navigated for you by the actors on stage.

DR: Is the idea – or maybe the idea is not something that was particularly focused on in terms of what you thought it might mean – but you could see this device where you sort of… You create a person but imaginatively are subtracting gender and sexuality from them as being a way of creating a character that is, in a sense, more like a *human*, as it were, than an individual person.

TC: Okay, yes, an idea of a –

DR: Or it could be a partial person, if you see what I mean: so it could be kind of less than a person or more than a person.

TC: Maybe. I think it is. Again, I don't know, crassly, if it's about empowerment as well. It can be anything and everything. This person can be anything and everything and as soon as I start to prescribe then anything and everything becomes prescribed and restricted to some degree: so the idea that that character is yours for the making, not ours. […] *ENGLAND* takes place in a gallery of work and there are certain moments of rewriting that reference the gallery but, by and large, whatever association you have in relation to the artwork and the narrative is entirely yours. So that play has been performed at the Andy Warhol museum in Pittsburgh where the theme of Warhol just screamed, you know, just hit the theme of that play with huge force. We performed that play in the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven where there were Constables and Turners and the themes of those pieces of Empire and history

and Englishness hit the play with huge force, but completely differently. So rather than making a fixed piece that sort of controls what it means on stage, I'm trying, I hope, to make an open piece, or a fluid piece, that allows interpretive meaning to come and go. I think art should be pretty subjective in that respect and should be moving, should always be moving and if you try and sort of fix it and go, 'That's why he did that; that's why that character did that', it feels reductive.

DR: That links to a question I wanted to ask you about performance style because, basically, from *My Arm* right the way through, you, personally, have a kind of performance style which, I guess, is about trying to, in a certain way, be blank.

TC: Yeah, to a certain degree, in the knowledge that that's kind of probably not possible.

DR: But maybe psychologically?

[…]

TC: I am 47 now and there's been that length of time to find the style that I feel is pertinent to this work. And […] that style has not only come from the work, but the work has also come from the style, if that makes sense. So in terms of thinking about how a performer is on stage and that sense of distance, neutrality, perhaps? Of the absence of ownership. You know, to see a performer own their character is a problem for me because, actually, the person who I want to own character should be the audience. That's where I want ownership to exist, really, and there are performances that I will see where I don't feel like I'm allowed to own any of that stuff. I am so not needed in what you are doing on stage. So, trying to then generate a style where you are needed – you as an audience are absolutely needed – to make complexity here where I will give you simplicity as much as possible in the knowledge that the simplicity is a generative thing for complexity.

[During the Q&A, Louise LePage asked Tim the following question:]

Louise LePage: Tim, it strikes me that your characters and performers, to a degree, are inherently plastic; they're acted upon by spaces, by other people, such that they affect them and how they behave and how they feel. I'm really struck by, in *The Author*, how there are two characters, Esther and Vic, who are actors who talk about their process of a kind of immersive –

TC: Yeah

LP: Psychological process into these abused and abusive characters and that, very powerfully, it strikes me, you're showing them as being transformed as people.

TC: Yes.

LP: Particularly Vic who, having started a *really* nice man becomes really hideously abusive himself because he's been affected by his character. So I'm just really interested in how much thought you've given to where the borders of each of us, as individuals, *are*. Are they fixed? Because it seems to me, what you seem to be suggesting is that we are actually inherently plastic people, connected to our environments, to our technologies, to our friends, to our families, and we change. Is that –

TC: Yeah, it's funny: the phrase that comes to mind is the given circumstances, which is a great Stanislavskian phrase. You know, what is an actor? What is a character? A character is just you but in a fictional set of given circumstances and you respond, as an actor, as a human being, to those fictional given circumstances and there, lo and behold, is character. *There* it becomes. It's not that you are transformed into someone other than yourself, but it's the circumstances, the external circumstances, the given circumstances, that have the transformatory impact on you. Does that make sense?

LP: Sort of. It's just that for me it seems to be that for Vic and Esther, they can't let go, they can't take the costume off, you know, the characters off with the costume. It's something more fundamental than –

TC: But what happens to Vic and Esther is not so much, not only to do with the characters they are playing, they are made to play in this other, in this abusive play, but it's how they are treated by me. Do you know what I mean? The given circumstances they find themselves in, not just in performance but actually in their lives, how they are inducted to a de-sensitisation, I suppose, and it's *that*. It's nothing to do with the play that they are in but the context that they are placed in. I mean there's so much stuff in *The Author* which is me working through my demons about that kind of world, really: being placed in those situations, those situations where unethical treatment is excused for the purpose of making good art, you know? So, there's a big, big issue for me in that play of having had those experiences and less about the characters I've been made to play but more the character of the actor in the rehearsal and the character of the director in the rehearsal who is acting upon *me*, altering *me*. So, yeah, going into a rehearsal process with a fixed understanding of self is kind of ridiculous; of course it's nonsense, but that idea of self then becomes the currency for rehearsal process. It also becomes the currency for the play you're in. And that sense of self, I suppose, is stretched and battered and abused in those situations for Vic and Esther.

LP: Thank you.

An MP3 recording of the entire and unedited conversation is available at:
http://www.rhul.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/media/whodowe/timcrouchconversation-web.mp3

Tearing and Wearing the Skin: Negotiation Beyond Genders

By Yu-Chien Wu

Abstract
Judith Butler argues that it is on and through bodily surface that gender identification sediments and consolidates as an imaginary morphology; Judith Halberstam, meanwhile, stresses the metaphor of an identity mask in relation to skin. While their ideas continue to be important to the discourse of gendered identity, I assert the need for reconsidering the role of skin as 'mirror/screen' that goes beyond an invariable topography or a superficial mask. Didier Anzieu's theoretical work, *Skin Ego*, departs from the notion of seeing skin as a two-dimensional interface and, instead, it asks the reader to view it as the screen of sensations received and also as a projection of the psyche. Through the medium of skin, notions of gender and the sexed body intersect with each other. In this article, I will be discussing the failed surgery of the transsexual artist Nina Arsenault, and also the projects of two heterosexual artist couples, Breyer P-Orridge and SUKA OFF, who attempt to break down gender categories with the idea of 'becoming one'. By analysing these works, I demonstrate how the unmaking of gender identity is approached through the skin as a nexus that, on the one hand, is configured by social norms and, on the other, reflects a possible glitch in the process of normalisation once the skin is seen as the crossover where the senses and self-identification collide.

Judith Halberstam traces the notion and trajectory of horror through her readings of Gothic texts, covering nineteenth-century fiction and contemporary horror films. Horror was once constituted by the monster whose physical traits would carry and communicate the readers' imagination of racial, class, gender, and sexual deviants, but now it reflects 'an identity crisis' (6). The identity crisis today, which is staged on and through the skin, turns skin into the site of fear and danger. It is the surface whereupon the power relations between institutions and criminals, as well as the border between body and mind, are crossed.

Despite the fact that, for Halberstam, the colour and shape of skin 'mean everything within a semiotic of monstrosity' (7), its significance in the history of making monsters has changed. It was the ultimate boundary between inside and outside, as explored by Gothic fiction; in late twentieth century Hollywood splatter movies, the idea of the monstrosity of surface eating into the depth or essence of humanity has been exposed. According to Halberstam, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) marks this shift. The serial murderer, Buffalo Bill, tailors a woman-suit with pieces of skin stripped from his female victims, and tries it on before a mirror. Halberstam claims that in this scene Buffalo Bill's outfit is a 'sutured beast, a patchwork of gender, sex, and sexuality, [which] becomes a layered body, a body of many surfaces laid one upon the other' (1). Identity here is understood as nothing more than 'skin deep' (1). Halberstam's rendering so far resonates with Judith Butler's theory of the performative, according to which no ontological core stands behind gender expressions; rather, gender is the 'stylized repetition of acts' (*Gender Trouble* 34 and 191).

In alignment with this viewpoint, it might be suggested that the woman-suit signifies a desired gender and it is, in fact, a gendered performance which does not correspond to a hidden interior; it resembles a mask concealing no face behind it, but, instead, becomes the face itself. Butler connects the foundation of her gender identity theory to Freud's notion of melancholia in the development of ego in which one overcomes loss by an act of identification with the loved other, carried out by internalisation. From this point of view, it is understood that the idea of putting on a mask is to go through the process of incorporation by which the attributes of the loved one, who was once desired but now refused, are inscribed *on* the body (Butler *Gender Trouble* 78-89). Halberstam parts from Butler regarding the mask as result of incorporation when she moves on to her examples of the 'face-off' scenes in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986) to present the equation between gender and skin-as-mask in a metaphorical sense; here, she exposes the mobility and permeability upon which the concept of gender is based. For example, regarding the scene where the chainsaw murderer, Leatherface, holds the face of his male victim and asks Stretch, the woman who eventually survives the massacre, to wear it, Halberstam argues that Stretch is not male

under the mask of a man; rather, 'her gender becomes ambiguous' for the reason that 'she becomes literally a "stretch" between genders' (151).

In fact, the association between skin/mask and identity against the background of performativity is well noted in the history of performance art. Between 1990 and 1993 the French artist ORLAN had her face reconfigured in reference to five Western art history icons. The project was carried out over nine surgeries entitled *Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*. Kate Ince connects the relevance of performativity to ORLAN's work, pointing out the 'action and transformation with material effects' in her successive surgeries (113). ORLAN launched a radical revolution in terms of the conception of identity; however, there are also misgivings concerning her work.

In response to her assertion that 'by refiguring my face, I feel I'm actually taking off a mask', Jay Prosser argues that 'if skin is a mask, where is the self in relation to the body's surface?' (61-2).* Having identified some of ORLAN's work and the issues she raises, in this article I shall add something new to previous discussions by looking at the works of a Canadian artist called Nina Arsenault, and the artist couples Breyer P-Orridge and SUKA OFF. I intend to revisit the issue of skin structure to frame the repetition that constitutes the power of performativity in the distance between the field of vision and the grasp of sensation. I shall also identify a spatial-based scheme of performativity in my analysis of life-long performance projects and short stage performances. If ORLAN's *surgical project* enacts what Parveen Adams calls 'emptiness of image' because 'ORLAN uses her head quite literally to demonstrate […]: *there is nothing behind the mask*' (145), it also echoes Butler's ideas about identity, which she compares to a mask. Yet, from the viewpoint of Butler, the skin is merely the site where identities flow in the process of (re-)incorporation; any further aspects of skin are left untouched. As I shall go on to demonstrate, the gender fixities are disturbed through the levels of sense overlapped in the skin. I read Butler and Halberstam juxtaposed to illustrate the emergence

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* C. Jill O'Bryan tries to allay Prosser's suspicions and emphasises the double-edged function of a mask: 'although the mask is generally an object that can be worn or removed at will, it invents a complex register of identity; it conceals one identity at the same time that it reveals another' (89).

of the subject as the synthesis of layers of skin masks, and the palpable agency found in-between.

The Failure in 'A Laborious Stitching'

It should be noted that I am not suggesting skin bears various identities in terms of race, class or gender; instead, I view layered skin as the intersection of the appearance in visual representation and the marker of somatic experiences. As will become more evident in the course of this paper, the debate between Shimizu Akiko, an exponent of Butler's theory of the performative, and Prosser, who places more importance on the realm of sexual identity in the secured referents of bodily sensations, derives from a lacuna, where either the body is reduced to an unitary bodily surface, or the skin as a sense organ is relegated to the body that anchors the sexed feelings. Their conflict forms an endless circle since the ontology of a pre-discursive body, which is implicit in Prosser's text, is central to what the performative criticisms have been attacking.

Prosser, trying to draw attention back to the embodied experiences in transsexual narratives, criticises Butler's theory for the way it is ocularcentric and prioritises visual images of the body in a manner informed by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic articulation of the mirror stage. Prosser also suggests a misinterpretation of Butler's in her reverse reading of a passage in Sigmund Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, where she 'conflates corporeal materiality with imaginary projection' (Prosser 41).* In so doing, Butler is able to theorise sex, through her thread of melancholic identification, as being a 'phantasmatic' effect encoded or sedimented on the surface of the body. Following on from this point, Prosser claims that 'any *feeling* of being sexed or gendered […] is designated phantasmatic' (43).

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* I cite Prosser's passage in full here: 'Butler replaces the reference "it" in the subsequent part of the cited sentence, *which in Freud clearly refers back to the ego as bodily ego* ("The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it…"), with the word (square bracketed, demoted – in my citation of Butler's note – to parenthetical) "body". […] The body itself becomes commensurable with the psychic projection of the body. Whereas Freud's original assertion maintains a distinction between the body's real surface and the body image as a mental projection of this surface (a distinction between corporeal referent and psychic signified), Butler's recitation collapses bodily surface into the psychic projection of the body, conflates corporeal materiality with imaginary projection' (41).

He therefore tries to disclose a weakness in Butler's theory which seems to suggest that transsexuals are those 'girls who *look like* boys and boys who *look like* girls', and then adds that the experience of '*feel[ing]* differently gendered' identifies the transsexual better than the visual result that surgical change might result in (Prosser 43). From another point of view, Shimizu Akiko criticises Prosser's intention to return to Freud's perspective, by which he assumes that bodily sensations are real and 'un-phantasmatic', or outside symbolic signification (13-15).*

Based on what Kaja Silverman calls 'a laborious stitching', which is an act of integrating the visual image seen in the mirror and the perceived body form in order to bring the 'unified bodily ego' into being, Akiko further argues that the visual image 'locates itself' in the body with reference to the pronoun 'I'. The moment of this locating thus forms the subject, who contains an 'I' as always an Other (24-25). In addition, Silverman resituates Lacan's theory of the gaze back onto the relation between the visual image and the perceived body, where she argues that the 'image/screen' in Lacan's scopic field should be reconceptualised as 'the site at which social and historical difference enters the field of vision' (Silverman qtd. in Akiko, 27). In other words, to see means to become subject to the 'image' of an object, while the object is the 'site of social intervention on the gaze that enables the look of the "I"' (Akiko 27). On this ground, Akiko lays the precondition for understanding the mirror stage as a 'three-way transaction' (29), which means social prohibitions are involved in this pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic stage (27). Although the visual bodily ego proposed by Akiko does not directly add to my analysis of the performances, her methodology inspires me to revisit Didier Anzieu's idea of 'skin ego' in order to take the social gaze into account. Furthermore, I will unpick the theory on skin in relation to the complex process of deconstructing gender identity.

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* In response to Prosser's critique, Akiko asks: 'if what is felt [according to Prosser] is phantasmatic, how can the feeling be real?' (13). By way of this cogent question, Akiko rejects the ontological position of bodily reality, arguing that the 'material reality of the imaginary' that is subjectively experienced by not only transsexuals, but also any others, is not different from the 'imaginariness of material reality' (14).

Skin that Mirrors

Transsexual artist Nina Arsenault has undergone more than sixty surgeries but has retained male genitals. A series of her portraits, entitled *Transformation* (2006), exhibit the combination of three Greek mythological icons: Aphrodite, the Goddess of Beauty, who arose from the sea foam into which the god Cronus had thrown his father's castrated genitals; Artemis, the Goddess of the Hunt, whose image with a breast cut off was represented by her Amazonian worshippers; and Hecate, the Goddess of Magic, who was imagined to be invisible and cloaked in darkness (Arsenault 'Transformation'). The portraits were shot after a failed breast augmentation resulting in sensory loss, which prompted another surgery in order to remove the implant. As a consequence, the scar on the flattened left breast is a disturbing image, which topples the authenticity of both the perfectly round right breast and the penis lower down. If cross-dressing in drag shows disrupts the continuity of gender manner and gender identity by the double inversion,* Arsenault pushes the issue even further to challenge the transcendent status of appearance as well as the authority of the body parts with which feminine or masculine identities are associated. Similarly to how Halberstam describes the gender performance of Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, these portraits ignite an 'intense blast of interference that messes up once and for all the generic identity codes that read femininity into tits and ass and masculinity into penises' (160). However, unlike the figurative expression of putting on another's face in the film, the artist shakes gender fixities with the image of the wounded body against bloody red splashes on the wall. The emptied left breast records the struggle toward the 'ideal' feminised body while the successfully implanted right breast attests to the fabrication therein; the penis gives as little clue to the anatomical sex as the breasts.

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* Butler quotes a section from Esther Newton's *Mother Camp: Female Impressions in America* to argue that the subversive power of drag performance consists in the contradictory juxtaposition of appearance and illusion. The original text reads: 'drag says "my 'inside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' [the body] is masculine". At the same time it symbolizes an inversion; "my appearance 'inside' [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [myself] is feminine"' (Newton qtd. in Butler, *Gender Trouble* 186).

Skin tells Arsenault's transsexual narrative, as the scar tears the gender mask.

Considering how gender mask has manipulated the body, we shall turn to Butler's rewriting of Lacanian imaginary morphology whereby body surfaces are not limited by 'prohibition and pain' as 'the forcible and materialized effects of regulatory power' (*Bodies that Matter* 64). As a result, the hegemonic heterosexual matrix, based on the prohibition of homosexuality, produces a sexed morphology which is thus incorporated as a 'fetishistic mask', and so it becomes an imaginary scheme which appears to determine the bodily contour (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 65). In spite of the Freudian influence that can be detected here, Butler links the notion of bodily contour to the ego in Lacan's mirror stage, stating that the mirror offers the self with a 'frame' or 'the spatial delineation' dividing what belongs to it from what does not (*Bodies that Matter* 74). Since it is for the purpose of refiguring sexual signification, Butler needs to emphasise the aspect of ego as the result of identification with a social signifying system in order to call for alternatives to the dominant imaginary schemes (i.e., those of Freud and Lacan) which gain their power from the reiteration of heterosexual norms. Therefore, the formation of ego is channelled through the mirror which is already disrupted by the Symbolic order. The mirror produces the paradigm, the ideal morphology as a 'delirious effect', which the subject is forced to live up to during their lifetime (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 90-1). From this perspective, we tend to identify with the mirrored image which naturalises and valorises our belief in the bodily contour, as if it had been the gender mask we were born with.

Butler rejects the idea that we may find a subversive force in the Imaginary order.* However, I question her perspective since the bodily surface, as the mediator between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, is far more productive than she assumes. For instance, the role of skin in the phase of 'skin ego' is both the inner envelope, the infant's bodily surface that sends off signals, and a place receiving feedback from the mothering figure.

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* For Butler there is no space which can be at the same time representable and outside of symbolisation, including the 'semiotic' proposed by Kristeva to refer to the poetic language that resists the domination of the Symbolic (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 70).

Julia Kristeva, not unlike Akiko or Elizabeth Grosz, highlights the protean condition of the Imaginary in connection with the Symbolic by adding a 'third pole' to the 'mother/child dyad'. Hence she reads the mirror stage against the model of 'skin ego': 'Skin as a surface of perception and projection of the ego is the substrata of the mirror, the first container able to reassure, to calm, to give the child a certain autonomy, on which the narcissistic image may be supported and without which the mirror will smash into pieces' (53). I suggest that the gaze is at the place where the mother stands so that the 'I' the child can feel as itself is nothing more than a gestalt formed by the feedback that the maternal environment provides.

More precisely, the skin serves as simultaneously the 'image' and 'screen': if I *feel* like anything as what I am, it is always in the form of how the (m)Other treats me.* If the mirror stage happens on the bodily surface, social conditioning can be considered via the skin as it is the site where the (mis)recognition takes place. Thus, the sexed morphology is not as singular and static as it appears in Butler's vision.

To challenge Butler, I would like to return to the example of Buffalo Bill's woman-suit, now departing from Halberstam's emphasis on how Buffalo Bill presents gender as a 'sewing job', in order to address its unfinished status that the mechanism of incorporation fails to reflect. In the film, the last victim is rescued by the young FBI agent Starling before she is flayed, thus leaving the murderer without his desired piece of flesh. In this respect, the woman-suit is more than simply a stitched cloth design, ready to dress any given body. Rather, the missing part confers on the woman-suit a sense of instability lurking in gender categories that, according to Butler, are sedimentary effects. The wound found in the portrait of Arsenault lends itself to a rendering of the woman-suit as a sexed morphology that shows her endeavour to sustain the tension between how she should and is expected to feel or look like (i.e., the 'screen'), and the ideal morphology which makes her body real (i.e., the 'image'). Skin, in her artistic practice, warrants a distance for mediation that cannot be *skinned* over.

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* To put into perspective how I apply Lacan's 'image/screen' to the model of *Skin Ego*, I rephrase Lacan's text, which reads: 'if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot [the gaze]' (*Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 97).

In reply to the question regarding her penis, Arsenault says 'it's not something I think about getting rid of. I believe I am a woman *inside*, there's no doubt about that. It's more important to be socially accepted as a woman and *look like* a woman' (Arsenault 'Sexy transsexual', my emphasis). The most compelling part of this statement is that if skin is both the 'screen' and 'image', the two pairs of binaries – inside/outside and body/morphology – will inevitably collapse because skin is both the internal layer of the 'skin ego' emerging as an 'image' and the 'screen' projected from an external point, the gaze. By juxtaposing the 'inside' and the 'look like', the penis and the breast, the breast and a wound, a series of multiple inversions and displacements are set up. Arsenault plays with an endless circuit concerning skin: the outside is feminine, constructed and ideal, the inside is masculine, real but bruised; the outside is made of the penis but it is real, too. Between what she has crafted and what she continues to desire, in accordance with the desire of the Other (meaning the socially accepted woman she is expected to be) there is an ongoing mediation. Within this mediation the artist runs the risk of being unwittingly captured by the trap of the 'screen' – as the socially ideal morphology – once she ceases to construct and deconstruct femininity. Arsenault has stated, 'I know that because I came into the world in a biologically male body I was born with a spiritual wound. I don't know what to name that wound, but I believe that out of this wound springs many things – ideas, images, masquerades, fashion, self-portraits, stories I want to tell, performances I want to do' (Arsenault 'Fey'). Does the wound here not imply the fraying edge of the woman-suit, which Buffalo Bill never got the chance to sew up? Rather than the failed surgery represented on the picture, it is the spiritual wound that reminds us of, and maintains, the disharmony involved in the (mis)recognition of 'I' and the 'not-I'.

Breyer P-Orridge is so named to refer to the couple Jacqueline Breyer, who are individually known as Lady Jaye and Genesis P-Orridge. As recalled by Genesis P-Orridge, the initial idea for their projects *Breaking Sex* and *Pandrogeny* (1996-2007), came into existence so that they could be 'each other's other half and only together (…) whole' (P-Orridge, 'Meaning of the Universe' n.p.). When taken at face value, the statement seems to reinforce the heterosexual economy of exchange or desire, which bolsters

its binding power; however, the idea of their symbiosis raises another question: can the traces of crossing and construction of gender become visible without appropriating the experience of transgender? The theme of drag ball in the film *Paris is Burning* is taken up by Butler, who states that agency might emerge during the slippage within the repetition (*Bodies that Matter* 137). Venus Xtravaganza is one of the leading figures in the film who strives for a sex transformation which, she thinks, promises a new social place free of poverty, racism and sexual discrimination. But she is killed before her dream can become a reality. In her analysis, Butler claims this death is a direct result of the character's 'tragic misreading of the social map of power' that deceives her into believing that a sex reassignment leads to a liberation from the social repression (*Bodies that Matter* 129-33). According to Prosser, the death of Venus is used by Butler as a powerful lever to articulate the key to unlocking the normative technique of heterosexuality. He departs from Butler's work when stating that 'in her desire to complete this trajectory (to acquire a vagina), […] Venus would cancel out this potential and succumb to the embrace of hegemonic naturalization' (49). Thus, Prosser accuses Butler of misappropriating the transsexual for her syllogism that 'transgender = gender performativity = queer = subversive,' and its antithesis: 'nontransgender = gender constativity = straight = naturalizing' (33). I would like to examine the project of Breyer P-Orridge in the light of Prosser's criticism.

During the course of the project, Lady Jaye and P-Orridge decided to undergo surgical procedures so that they could work towards resembling each other such that a third entity, requiring both bodies, might come into being (see Doorne). The precarious status of the project, one revealing double exclusion (neither Lady Jaye nor P-Orridge, but both of them), makes it difficult to subsume this work to current threads of understanding. Their work cuts across the binary syllogisms that have been mentioned above. Like a two-way turnstile, their project can be read from either direction: it has potential to contest the limits of gender boundaries but it also runs the risk of reinforcing hegemonic constraints. Although both of them are committed to achieving the phantasmatic image of the third being, it cannot be achieved by either couple in their efforts to imitate one another. What Breyer P-Orridge look for, in a certain sense, is an imagined idealisation which wields its power

to carve out the body that it would inhabit. Lady Jaye had her nose and chin altered, Genesis P-Orridge had his cheeks changed, and both of them had breast implants to look more alike. The more alike they looked, the more integrated they felt, and the more difficult it would become to define where the skins of the couple ended and where that of Breyer P-Orridge began. What we see in the project is a common skin upon which the 'screen' and 'image' perpetually reflect each other; as P-Orridge recalls, 'she told me she saw me as a mirror image of her' ('Ballad of Genesis' n.p.). As such, both Lady Jaye and P-Orridge are elements of the image of Breyer P-Orridge, whilst they are situated at the mirror position, or the gaze, and in doing so are reflecting each other. Furthermore, their skins also embody the mirror image of Breyer P-Orridge which they can identify with, while at the same time it pushes the 'I' and 'not-I' of the couple towards indeterminacy in the identification process. There is no predictable outcome.

Skin in depth
tranSfera (2011), produced by the Polish performance group SUKA OFF, is a live performance representing a ritual of self-alteration through which 'the man and woman try to become one' (*tranSfera*). At the beginning of the show, the two performers, Piotr Wegrzynski and Sylvia Lajbig, appear covered by a layer of transparent latex which gives their bodies a gloss effect. They slowly walk toward each other, caressing their own faces, neck and arms in a peaceful atmosphere, the two bodies falling into a deep embrace, twisting together. The separation that follows stretches the latex before it is partially torn, and subsequently each performer begins picking scraps of the membrane off the other's body and putting them into their mouth. When the mouth is full, they sit back on chairs situated at opposite ends of a long table, where the scraps of latex are pulled out piece by piece and thrown into two glass containers, which look like formalin jars. They share the second skin, while the act of stuffing the rags into their mouths and spitting them out shows their refusal to incorporate another into oneself. Like the two-layered structure of 'skin ego', their common skin is the inseparable material that makes a more intense fusion possible, although its presence as an interface divides the two subjects in a literal sense.

In the following scenes, Lajbig stays in the darkness, and Wegrzynski sits in the spotlight behind a monitor which conceals his groin, transmitting the image of Lajbig's hand rubbing her labia. After a while, they exchange the seats as Lajbig takes the place of Wegrzynski, whose act of masturbation is projected on the monitor as being carried out upon Lajbig's body. As Wegrzynski sits under the spotlight, he slides his hand from the neck across the chest, tilting the head up; Lajbig repeats the same movements when she takes her turn to sit before the audience. The use of synchronic recording and projection in this scene causes a redistribution of sensual investment; the mechanism of (mis)recognition one goes through with the mirror image is divided into two parts on the monitor. As long as the performers intend to become one, they shall logically recognise the body – whether as a whole or as parts – of the other as themselves; however, the transmission of the images is interrupted by the time-deferral because they show up by turns. As one performer comes into the light, half of the procedure is shown. From the perspective of the audience through the monitor, a man is caressing himself and *his* labia is subject to masturbation; or a woman touches herself and *her* penis is being rubbed. Thus, the monitor is the point of identification for the audience's gaze. The performer receives the pleasure of touch on the skin where the audience may well project sites of 'erotogenisation' and, if the performer recognises their body through the gaze of others, they must experience the sensation of being touched upon the body (face, neck or chest) and their sexual organ which is not their own becomes a part of them and they feel aroused.

Lajbig and Wegrzynski cross sexual and gender boundaries insofar as they invert two sets of identificatory relations, between the pre-social, visual or tactile ego, and the symbolised self, by using the skin as the nexus. The skin remembers the fantasy of union during their hug at the beginning of the show as the latex is ripped, and thereby registers a re-identification. Elizabeth Grosz argues that during the mirror stage the image that is seen by one is, or can be, the 'object of another's perspective' and to adopt the image as one's self means that one 'has adopted the perspective of exteriority on itself' (38). The artists' skin functions as a mirror that reflects both the gaze and the touch from the outside – the 'not-I' – and thus crosses the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

I want to return here, by way of conclusion, to the portraits of Arsenault. Each shot, before and after the surgeries, marks a significant turning point in the trajectory that Arsenault struggles through; at the same time, new elements are put into play in the circulation of signifiers that she creates in the course of her career as an artist, on which she has commented: 'These cultural signifiers have lost most of their sexual implications to me now and they represent an aesthetic puzzle I assemble daily. This body, although I am ageing, is primarily an image I built years ago. It does not speak to the interior "fantasy woman" I want to be currently' (Arsenault, 'Fey' n.p.). She is always in a deferral. Taking the view that skin is the mirror, I have identified in all three performances an enactment of the potential that can be achieved during the mirror stage, which Grosz defines as something 'partial, wishful, anticipated, *put off into the future, delayed*' (40). The delay rejects symmetrical or identifiable relations between the subject that the skin represents and any already gendered body that it enacts. Furthermore, the artists show their efforts to negotiate with the skin, which is implicated with the feelings and the images of the self and others. The issue of gender is not skin-deep, but it is deconstructed and represented through skin in-depth.

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Prosthetics Imagery: Negotiating the Identity of Enhanced Bodies

By Maria Neicu

Abstract

'Prosthetics Imagery: Negotiating the Identity of Enhanced Bodies' is an explorative journey of an art gallery space, following social narratives of perfecting the human body through technological intervention. It is an invitation to re-consider notions of 'normality', 'autonomy' and 'beauty'.

Motivated by the need to create an open, transdisciplinary debate on the controversial subject of human enhancement, I argue that bioart can be used as tactical media for exposing the sociocultural narratives that currently frame technical development. For exploring how 'identity' becomes a poly-semantic concept, negotiated at the intersection between biology and technology, my chosen case-study is the *HUMAN+: The Future of Our Species* (2011) exhibition from Science Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin – namely the artistic photo series by Howard Schatz of Aimee Mullins and her designer-signed prosthetics.

Setting the scene: an invitation to rethink Otherness

In 1999, during London Fashion Week, Aimee Mullins was a runway model for designer Alexander McQueen. Few knew that the long brown boots with baroque design were actually wooden legs, and that Mullins was a double-amputee. Besides being a double champion sprinter in the Paralympics, a model and an actress, Aimee Mullins is also a world-famous activist in re-branding 'invalidity', transforming the category of *unable* into *superable*.

Displaying twelve leg prototypes (designed by Alexander McQueen) during a highly popular, viral Internet *Ted* talk, Mullins describes her own incentive to 'move away from the need to replicate human-ness as the only aesthetic ideal' (Mullins 'Aimee Mullins and her 12 pairs of legs') as a plea for an idealised form of free and unified humanity. Her public appearances usually provoke the public and generate ethical discussions; Mullins succeeded in opening a battlefield not only for value-sensitive design in human

enhancement devices, but also in changing the conventional parameters of beauty – with deep echoes questioning the social *status quo* defining a 'lacking' body as a disabled body.

My research comes from a fascination with how hybrid, technologically modified human bodies are imagined, represented, and inscribed with politics and power. In particular, I will examine the *Portraits of Aimee Mullins* exhibit from the *HUMAN+: The Future of our Species* curatorial project (Sciencegallery.com), at Dublin Science Gallery, in 2011. The *Portraits of Aimee Mullins* invites rich critical interrogation; a double amputee, Mullins does not overcome her disability by hiding it, but instead re-fashions her own body, exploring new human identities. Doing so, she can be seen to open new ground for exploring the social acceptability of enhancement practices and technologies.

From development to implementation, technology is anything but neutral; values constantly shape scientific practices and technological artefacts. Twenty-first century technologies are already transforming our everyday life, perhaps irreversibly affecting values, beliefs, mental models and social interactions. The fusion of digital and biological technologies expands the realms of the (scientifically) possible, ushering in new breakthroughs, while simultaneously signalling new ethical and moral concerns.

Consider the already existing examples of enhancement technologies that are currently challenging the public domain in fields like medicine, design, education and law: limb prosthetics with additional functions to natural limbs, engineering of intelligent artefacts, personality modification through pharmaco-therapy, deep brain stimulation, tissue engineering, gene doping, patenting life and even designing babies. Most importantly, as the convergence of *GRIN* technologies – genetics, robotics, information technology and nanotechnology – is expected to enable us to create anything we please (Garreau 120), human enhancement may even change us at an ontological level. New identity patterns could emerge, softening the social precepts of the 'normal' and thus changing the power relations that assess Otherness.

Therefore, this article approaches two primary questions: how might human enhancement practices construct new forms of Otherness, re-negotiating identity? And how can artistic work influence the socio-cultural perception of enhanced bodies? At the core

of this analysis is the theoretical conceptualisation of bioart (art using life as a medium) and an examination of the role of social imaginaries (a fixed set of normative assumptions, corresponding to a specific society). In the following, I will sketch an overview of the institutional setting of displaying the *Portraits of Aimee Mullins*, in order to explore the gallery as an empowering instrument of scenario-making, using the concept of social narratives. Continuing with a focus on prosthetics as enhancement artefacts, I will be framing *Portraits of Aimee Mullins* in the context of biopolitical theory. I will analyse the subjective construction of normality of the human body, in order to assess bioart as a practice that changes the condition of spectatorship, empowering the viewer to reassess his/her own identity.

The objective of *HUMAN+* is to mediate universal and contextual modes of knowledge-making. In a critical and engaging way, the *HUMAN+* exhibition reveals socio-technical scenarios, visions and expectations inspired by the promises and threats of human enhancement technologies. It explores the philosophy of human-media relations in terms of poly-semantic conceptualisations of identity, personhood, autonomy, accountability and privacy in a *HUMAN+* era.

Described by Michael John Gorman, the Science Gallery Director, as 'a combination of a sweet shop and a pharmacy, an Alice-in-Wonderland world of pills, promises and prosthetics' (7), the *HUMAN+* is a 'state-of-the-art public participation tool'. Attempting to frame a snapshot of the intertwined relations between the social, the biological and the technical, the gallery can be seen to participate in the construction of these relations, as an institutional actor. It becomes part of shaping the discourse by unsettling the viewers and putting moral imagination at work. In the following, I will start by depicting the context of uncertainty in relation to socio-technical developments in order to show that imaginative exercises are essential at early stages of innovation.

Opening up a field of speculation: fictional insights into real technological developments

According to Donna Haraway ('The Promises of Monsters'), nature itself is not an objective 'given', but a negotiation field, a trading zone;

it has a constructed character, rather than a simple descriptive facticity. Analysing how scientific practices are continuously shaped by sociocultural practices and tacit knowledge, Haraway's 'biopolitics of postmodern bodies' explores 'the ways in which the notion of an agential, intentional, self-aware and autonomous subject is variously instituted into a range of contexts within contemporary technoscience' (Thacker 305). However, starting with an intense medicalisation of society (Conrad), the distinction between 'making people better' and 'making better people' becomes a problematic one. Notions of *normality* in terms of intelligence, abilities and behaviour are constantly shifting historically and culturally, now being at the border of reshaping the very definition of *humanity*. Consequently, a new set of ethical and political questions emerge upon life fulfilment (for example prolonged lifespan, enhanced body and mind functions, potential to genetically redesign ourselves or our children), thus opening new paths for the pluralisation and diversifications of health norms as social conditions. Media productions and science fiction literature propose images of enhanced humans as transhumans (humans with distinguishable non-human characteristics, such as inter-species traits) or posthumans (beings that completely surpassed the human condition in a new evolutionary era). How can we assess the ontological differences between these categories, and what will be the social status of unenhanced humans?

A possible answer is given in *The Social Control of Technology*, where David Collingridge explains how, at an early technological development stage, when applications are still in formation and thus can be influenced in one direction or another, we usually lack the relevant knowledge for deciding the best direction for society. In the case of human enhancement, the intertwinement of biology and technology opens not only ethical and scientific uncertainty about shaping one's identity but also new moral concerns in political, philosophical, cultural and aesthetic debates. The possibility of changing humans at the somatic, cognitive and even existential level opens 'the phenomena of the unclassifiable', drawing on a liquid normative culture (as philosopher Zygmunt Bauman defined late modernity) with complex ethical questions that cannot be answered.*

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* See Zygmunt Bauman 'Liquid Modernity'.

In the frame of the *HUMAN+* exhibition, I argue that artistic exercises of imagination and scenario making are part of a process of early reflection, enriching the ethical assessment of emerging technologies. With its speculative approach, bioart can be read as an empowering tool for gallery-goers, encouraging them to question not only the scientific habits of thinking, but also social and political assumptions surrounding technologically modified biologies (such as foreignness, or of being 'less than a human').

Heralding the human fetish for competition and perfection, the debate on human enhancement is constantly exposed to ambivalence between fiction and fact. Even if some enhancement technological applications do not yet exist in material reality, in the form of 'dreams, with all their metaphysical, ideological, and popular and other dimensions, they are already' here (Dupuy 243). Fiction draws a boundary-pushing playground, 'kick-starting our thinking' (Garreau 109-111). The *HUMAN+* exhibition explores the underlying social assumption behind enabling technologies (or, in Žižek's terms, the 'unknown knowns' (*The Reality of the Virtual*) – the pervasive values invisibly interfering with the knowledge-making process) as fictionalised truths. The speculative approach stimulates critical awareness, thus offering a locus for rehearsing a moral response towards a possible state of facts, before the facts have even been established.

From utopian perspectives to apocalyptic scenarios, opponents and proponents of human enhancement have raced to offer 'collected fables of the future' (Garreau 110). Valuable resources at a very early stage of socio-technical development, these stories not only unfold possible consequences of our current decisions, but also expose the narratives we live by and the way they shape our perception.*

Deliberative processes using scenario-making techniques are based on the idea that stories play a vital role in our personal and social lives. Narratives offer thinking structure for organising experiences that otherwise might seem ungraspable. This remains valid in the context of human enhancement – where each future scenario is an attempt to tame the uncommon; an exercise of coherence, of integrating Otherness or the Indefinable; an attempt to locate things and, most importantly, our own moral position in relation to them.

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* See Lakoff and Johnson 'Metaphors we live by'.

Demystification of scientific knowledge requires new forms of praxis; thus, in epistemological terms, I understand the *HUMAN+* exhibition as an institutional context for *meta-knowledge* (Grunwald 2004): knowledge about the creation of knowledge, namely social assumptions, scientific premises, conditions of validity, tensions and uncertainties of decision-making and ethical evaluation of enabling technologies. However, the chosen approach is to connect different 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai 7) across the scientific and artistic knowledge-making communities, unfolding their vocabularies of engagement and justification grammars.

As an attempt to advance the critical discussion on normative ambiguity, connecting the 'imagined worlds' across the scientific and artistic knowledge-making communities might seem uncertain work. Arjun Appadurai's 'social imaginaries' (*Modernity at Large*), inspired by Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (*Imagined Communities*), defines imagination as a social practice: 'imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order' (Appadurai 31). Therefore, in the context of bioart, I argue that understanding how 'fantasy often runs away with fact' (Hagoort 'Cognitive Perfection') frames each gallery-goer's imagination as a preamble form of agency. The reason for linking two theoretical discourses, social imagination and agency, is to reveal how imagination can potentially be a premise of agency.

Using life as an artistic medium, bioart reveals the affective charge of enhancement practices, along with modes of crisis and concern that, in Robert Mitchell's view, are often ignored by both lay and expert decision-makers. It thus impacts on the perception of spectators by creating critical consciousness (63). Allowing the viewer to have the position of 'experimenter' of the new identities represented (ibid), bioart's means of identification change the condition of spectatorship. According to Mitchell, bioart creates an *embodied sense of spectatorship*; viewers become instantly aware of their status as biologic entities and the socio-political capital attached.*

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* The regime of spectatorship changes when the subject (the owner of the gaze) recognises itself in the object of the gaze: something that could be interpreted as an unsettling 'coming-out of one's self' and a simultaneous return. In the case of *Portraits of Aimee Mullins*, they witness the alteration of Life as they experience it. The biology of spectators is connected to that of the work of art; but life is

Bioart encourages a sense of life as emergence (Mitchell 11) and, by framing spectatorship as a medium, triggers a sense of becoming-a-medium (70). Mitchell places an emphasis on the embodied nature of the gallery-goers' experience, in the oscillation between an embodied sense of being-an-agent and an embodied sense of being-a-medium (71). In my interpretation, the becoming-a-medium and becoming-an-agent translate simultaneously a feeling of vulnerability and a feeling of empowerment. A feeling of vulnerability for being constituted and imagined (a moment of Althusserian understanding of oppression); a feeling of empowerment for being the owner of that imagination. The spectator, simultaneously a subject and an agent, is caught in-between.

In order to both narrow the focus on technologically-modified bodies and draw a contextual analysis of *Portraits of Aimee Mullins*, finally revealing its imagery potential for changing social narratives, I will depict one of the emerging ramifications of human enhancement: prosthetics, as a reframing of therapy versus enhancement. Prosthetic interventions increasingly extend the performance of human biology towards 'hyper-abilities', revealing a new consciousness of the human body. Aesthetically and functionally augmented, prosthetic devices demand a revolutionary re-territorialisation of the body, questioning things which might otherwise be taken for granted. In doing so, they produce an increased awareness not only of the body's potential, but also of its new limits in the context of enhancement, where the body exceeds its functionality, yet it remains biological.* The result is 'a strange body that is constantly surpassing itself, a body-more-than-a-body' (Thacker 268), no longer limited to the biological parameters and its material sources.

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no longer a simple *fact* held in common by the gallery-goers and the represented enhanced bodies. In my interpretation, life's artistic exploration cancels its facticity. Being used as a medium, it becomes the subject of a transformative process.

* Often, there is no visible separation between the digital (software) and the physical (hardware) integration of technology within the body (wetware), hence the importance of studying the competing significances, representations and imaginations of the body as hybrid space, where boundaries between therapy (as a restorative practice) and enhancement (as an overcoming practice) are challenged. If medical treatment is regarded as assuring the functioning of the body on species-typical parameters, enhancement means moving beyond them (Daniels).

Giving up the therapeutic mind-set and accepting a re-contextualisation of the body results in considering its potential to be re-designed in a new configuration. In the following, I will argue that imagination is a precondition of agency, an empowering tool for exposing and perhaps radicalising the underlying social assumptions on normality and disability.

Imagination as a premise for agency: unsettling sociocultural assumptions in value-laden technological design

What we think of as 'natural' biological parameters cannot be reduced to socially neutral categories. Social narratives determine what is defined as a body or mental ability, whether a particular individual owns that ability (or has the *right* to), and how and to what extent should she/he be allowed to pursue it further. These narratives are undoubtedly powerful determinant factors of our reality once our actions are based on them. In this sense, as the conceptual battle takes place in the realm of the social imaginary, foresight narratives of enabling technologies are empowering tools; thus, imagination can be understood as a preamble form of agency.

I find an enriching perspective coming from *The De-Scription of Technical Objects* (Akrich 1992), where technology sociologist Madeleine Akrich's notion of the 'design script' of technological artefacts shows how devices have incorporated programmes of social action. Akrich provides an in-depth analysis of how the designers are 'inscribing the vision of the world in the technical content of an object' (Akrich 208), thus redirecting the user's moral aspirations to political profiles. This view is recurrent in Knorr Cetina's research on how 'semiotics, rhetoric, and the metaphor of society as behavioural text, have led to specific methods of how facts are constructed' (147). However, if designed artefacts are in conformity with specific social scripts (determined by cultural, economic and political assumptions), this does not mean that the end user cannot be empowered to shape these scripts.

Portraits of Aimee Mullins reveal her as simultaneously an active writer and a performer of the design script according to which her own body relates to the prosthetic, subverting the common views on amputee bodies. Her imaginative use of prosthetics challenges notions of therapy and enhancement, announcing the advent of bodies falling under new medical categories, changing

the way the body's biology is treated and perceived in relationship with technology. Mullins attaches to her cutting-edge prosthetics a strong aesthetic and political statement. By questioning whether disability is a body property or actually a social status granted by others, she stimulates 'new developed arenas of medical knowledge' (Conrad 15-16).

Therefore, being actively empowered to shape social imaginaries can be a way to answer our stringent ethical concerns on human nature and its newly performed identity. Born without shinbones, Aimee Mullins can be seen to refuse to subscribe her body to the social paradigm of 'lack', instead proposing creative alternatives to social assumptions. From wooden sculpted legs, optic fibre and even soil legs with growing potatoes, the imaginative experimentation with replacement tests and pushes possibilities for social acceptance.

The epistemic and normative boundaries between humans and nonhumans are challenged by the eccentric, the non-conformist, and the unusual analogy with feline-shaped prosthetics. In a radical sense, these types of enhancement offer significant non-human designed features. During her TED speech, Aimee Mullins stated that the *anthropomorphic shape* should no longer be a point of reference. The whimsical, fanciful devices reveal human enhancement as actually augmenting the body's capacity not only for functionality but also for expressivity (the blunt 'body ornamentation'), as a relational-conversational art between the viewer and the wearer.

Performing multiple identities and inviting prosthetic designers to 'stop compartmenting form, function and aesthetic' by walking casually with her wearable sculptures, Mullins opens the possibility of new expressions using her own ('lacking') body: 'Poetry matters. Poetry is what elevates the banal and neglected object to the realm of art' (Mullins 'Aimee Mullins and her 12 pairs of legs'). And poetry is not only present in the extensions she wears, or their gripping design, but also in her own 'lacking' body and the ways in which she performs it, with a constant ability to redefine what a body can be. By rejecting the conventional definition of 'less', the absence of limbs becomes an open-ended possibility to reconfigure the appearance and the functionality of human biology in unprecedented ways, thus disturbing social precepts.

As portrayed by Howard Schatz, Mullins' *Cheetah Legs* exemplifies a subverted social condition: the prosthetic limb does not represent a need to hide or replace the biological loss with a disguised normality (life *imitatio*). On the contrary, by refusing conformation to social expectations, it stands as a symbol of a power to create whatever it is that the wearer wants to create in that space.* What medical practice still labels as 'disabled' can now become architects of their own identities, redesigning their bodies from a place of empowerment (Mullins 'Aimee Mullins and her 12 pairs of legs').** Once again, imagination and artistic experimentation reveal a locus of agency, of ethical critique. From the line of thought of *Feminist Disability Studies*, 'this fantasy of the malleable body conforms to modernity's notion that the body is a neutral instrument of the omnipotent individual will, an instrument of agency that is both pliable and invulnerable, that we can control and alter' (Garland-Thomson 13).

By contrast, our 'able' bodies seem to bear more limited means of expression. Supportive technology for limb replacement is re-branded from simply maintenance to a complex augmentation of the body and hence its social construction and self-perception. Having replaced the visible priority of 'supporting' or 'assisting' as such, the basic idea of replacing function where it has been lost is not concealed, but enhanced with *value-sensitive design*. The aesthetic and value-laden choices can now be main drives in the development of prosthetic technology. The recent dramatic change

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* Or, alternatively, opt for no substitute at all, showing how a 'lacking' female body is no less beautiful. Aesthetic value belongs not only to regulated, 'normalized' subjects' (see Garland-Thomson *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*).

** With her carbon fibre cheetah legs, Mullins won two world records in her athletics career. However, vociferous critics debate technological augmentation as a possible threat to 'regular' athletes. Torbjörn Tännsjö makes a compelling reference to the sports philosopher Warren Fraleigh's notion of the 'sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome' (Tännsjö, 'Medical Enhancement' 320). Commenting on the tendency of applying prosthetics restrictions to avoid diluting the 'uncertainty' of victory, Tännsjö considers that 'it must have something to do with an aspect of the ethos which is not reducible to a simple matter of competition or aesthetics' (322). As a way of exploring human limits, the social substance of sports competitions is given by a notion of justice. Nevertheless, substituting therapy with enhancement and 'improving performance is *not* necessarily toxic to virtue. It simply shifts how virtue manifests' and thus does not deprive life from challenges (Caplan 206).

in prosthetics development demonstrates that 'it is no longer a conversation about overcoming deficiency. It's a conversation about augmentation. It's a conversation about potential' (Mullins 'Aimee Mullins and her 12 pairs of legs').

Subverting normality: the right to be unwell
Life as a concept became the new object of political reflection in the 1960-1970s. Michel Foucault's 'The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century' (*The Foucault Reader*) defines the body as a biopolitical reality and depicts medicine as a biopolitical strategy. The philosopher described the 'subtle colonization' of medical knowledge (Esposito 27), showing how not only population as a living entity but also humans as species become the object of political power. As a writer who has explored power relations, Foucault revealed the biopolitical institutionalized mechanism of enforcing discipline upon individuals by taking control of their bodies (i.e. the *docile bodies* of militarized men, programmed in a correct utilization and posture of the body, or the birth-control policies initiated by the state). Modern biopolitics becomes a continuous attack on the possibility of politics (Vatter 7).

By questioning how far the individual will have the right to be unwell, genetically flawed or old, Foucault's notion of biopower is highly relevant for the growing trend of the medicalization of society. This describes a process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses and disorders (Conrad 4). In other words, nonconformity with social mandates related to identity, personal and social fulfilment (such as not having charisma) becomes pathologised and thus considered 'curable', without being *ipso facto* a medical problem (5-6).

Under the auspices of our constant drive for perfectibility, I will return to what is biopolitically framed as *imperfection*, exploring in the following the notion of disability; my argument will distinguish between (1) what is scientifically defined as the medical condition of disability and (2) its attached socio-cultural capital, one operating with images of a downgraded social status. The following paragraph will explore the potential of new medical categories to influence normative assumptions of the human body.

As depicted in the work of Italian contemporary philosopher

Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, the disabled body has been territorialised by definitions of normality. Contingent on Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* and Jürgen Habermas' *The Future of Human Nature*, Esposito analyses the politicisation of biology through a 'paradigm of immunisation'. A passionate de-constructivist, he proposes *Bios* as a political philosophy of life, where life and politics circumscribe a paradigm of socio-political immunisation.

For Esposito, *Immunitas* is the opposite of *Communitas*. In the contemporary immunity paradigm, life is preserved only by being enclosed (Esposito 69) as modern 'sovereign power is linked theoretically to communal self-preservation and self-negation' (Campbell xii). However, inside the borders, the possibilities to evolve and improve are closed; thus, I interpret the non-immunisation potential as an affirmative absorption of the normative diversity. Applying Esposito's line of thought, it becomes visible how the social milieu is circumscribed to a tacit knowledge associating physical disability with social disadvantage, determining a negation of the 'abnormal': a rejection of Otherness. Assuming 'disability' to be biological *malus*, a visible 'lack' impacts upon the way one performs his/her own body in public, performing the rhetoric of social stigma and internalising it.*

My argument is that the advent of new medical categories directly corresponds to a value shift concerning the social assumptions behind what is defined as 'normal'. I find relevant the view of Gilles Deleuze on the distinction between difference and diversity. The philosopher claims that 'difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse' (Deleuze 222). In this sense, images of Aimee Mullins can be read as an attempt to show how factual disability and factual ability should not be different from one another, but diverse. If bio-technological enhancement would determine a real (desirable) paradigm shift on what we think of as 'biologically normal' at the level of social construction,

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* The 'lacking body' is thus shaped by a heavily medicalised societal discourse, where 'disability' is fashionably regulated as a reduction; this shows how the notion of 'impairment' is not isolated from its political signification. Lennard J. Davis, specialist in disability studies and human development, claims a strong connection between disability and the preservation of social status quo. Davis reminds us that disability '*must (…) be seen as ideology and not as knowledge*' (6).

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this would imply no normative difference in the way the diverse is given and perceived not as different, but as diverse. By overcoming normative difference, normative diversity enlarges the circle of social acceptability. A relevant interrogation can bring into discussion portrayals of prosthetics athletes in the mainstream media, especially in the context of the Paralympics. Here, the intention to bring forth normative diversity is dwarfed by the positive stereotyped angle of heroic achievement, which aligns the message to the general rhetoric of normative difference, despite its intention.*

In the broad category of those medically labelled as normatively different ('physically impaired'), Aimee Mullins makes a strong statement for bodies with prosthetics: a medical condition is not necessarily objectively confining the human condition, and the normality of a human body is nothing but a social construction. Under the same social constructivism fall technological 'alterations' of the body, in the way our social perceptions are intertwined with the technological script of a body-attached device and the scientific practice behind it. In Deleuzian terms, by changing the way the diverse is being given, Mullins' artistic explorations of prosthetics have actively re-written the design script of prosthetics as enhancement devices.

Posthumanist Bioart: changing the condition of spectatorship
For the *HUMAN+* exhibition, Aimee Mullins' choice of agency is to invite gallery-goers to revisit their own assumptions of disability, normality and even beauty. Her portraits frame the lacking body as a promising body: a liminal space for enhanced body functions (high-speed athletic abilities) and, possibly, improved social acceptability (imagining a value shift). For the latter, Mullins' enhanced body and beauty challenges assumptions of disabled bodies as Otherness. This ambiguous view of the human body is reminiscent of what W.F. May describes as an 'openness' to the so-called 'unbidden' (Sandel 80), challenging that which 'semantically

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* Media representations of people with disabilities usually fall into two categories: either heroic postures of high-achievers (such as Paralympians) or victimhood. Both can be criticised from a standpoint similar to Renzo Martens' provocative film, *Enjoy poverty, please!* where the artist challenges the complicity of the viewer in reiterating the inferiority of Otherness through exploitations of pity.

constitute[s]' (Harris 153) 'normal' anatomic functioning, and rejecting the traditional perspective of 'medicalising' society.

Her photographs have a glossy, fashion magazine style. By choosing to represent her body as aligned with mainstream beauty norms, the photographer creates a semantic basis for communicating alternative views on disability. For example, Mullins' prosthetics do not remove her femininity, but enhance it. I argue that she heralds a contemporary female identity, countering what might be understood as a socially prevalent denial of one aspect of the disabled female body: sexuality (Garland-Thomson 19). By placing emphasis on the aesthetic value of a technologically modified body, the photographer Howard Schatz harnesses the affective and intuitive perception of enhancement practices. By circumscribing them to an ethical dimension, the artist shows how Mullins' absence of limbs 'both intensifies and attenuates the cultural scripts of femininity' (Garland-Thomson *Integrating Disability*).

Mullins does not overcome her disability by hiding it. The cheetah-shaped prosthetics applied to her body draws an analogy between the subjective perception of beauty and the subjective construction of normality.* Her strategy provides an important insight into the social dynamics and the perceived moral orders driving social acceptability. Experiencing a deconstruction of the 'normal', the reflective spectator becomes aware of how ethical narratives of enhancement are being shaped, as well as acknowledging the resources that she/he brings to bear on this process, as 'critical consciousness' (Mitchell 63).

From the discursive perspective of agency (displayed by empowered subjects changing social scripts, transforming fixity in uncertainty and proposing the unprecedented), *Portraits of Aimee Mullins* can be read as subversive. Using fiction as a fertile ground in a debate marked by ambiguity and ignorance. Instead of encouraging reflection from an isolated, protected space, bioart immerses the gallery-goer in a curated experience in which s/he becomes aware of his or her own social body in relation to the on-going construction of reality with all its affective resonances, particularly with regard to responsibility and empowerment; as in

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* Contemporary notions of an ideal female body have also been 'framed as a moral imperative' (Garland-Thomson 14).

the words of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'it is a way of describing the inherent instability of the embodied self' (1).

Arguably, bioart produces a feeling of tension, mediating social institutions, technical devices, and embodied individuals in new ways (Mitchell 113). The regime of spectatorship changes when the subject (the owner of the gaze) identifies with the object of the gaze (the portrait of a technologically-enhanced body). Posthumanist art is unsettling, because the object of representation, the body of a future *Other*, is a stand-in for the real, present body, establishing an ontological proximity between the two: Aimee Mullins' portraits 'encourage in spectators a sense of reality' (78), pushing the boundaries of social acceptability. Therefore, to my mind, as the spectator becomes a key element in the process, there is a direct connection between the bioart approach and the notion of empirical ethics, as the experience of *HUMAN+* creates awareness of the moral opinions, values and reasoning patterns that divide us or bring us together, both as individuals and as communities. Encountering difference, we become aware of ourselves. It can be both exciting and disturbing. But what remains at the very core of this experience is an essential rethinking of ourselves and others, provoking new questions and approaches towards the living. This provides a new perspective about an emerging constellation of people, communities, technological artefacts, scientific practices, political frames and organisations. By taking the privilege of articulating their frames of 'posthumanity', the exhibition shows how ethics is context-sensitive. The narrative engages the gallery-goers and confronts them with their own identity as biological subjects, reorienting what being human means and how it can be experienced reflectively.

Conclusion
This article has looked to unfold non-identitarian ways of conceptualising human bodies as technologically enhanced through an exploration of current and alternative understandings of prosthetics as an enhancement device; it has worked towards revealing how knowledge and power are deeply embedded in post- and/or trans-conceptualisations of human biology.

Howard Schatz' Portraits of Aimee Mullins opens human corporeality towards fictive, unfixed, liminal expressions of what

could further be accepted as 'able' or without 'lack' in the future, when enhancement practices might well become embedded in society and their cultural capital crystallised. Aimee Mullins' story is an invitation to 'celebrate all those glorious disabilities that we all have' (Mullins 'Aimee Mullins and her 12 pairs of legs'), rejecting the traditional perspective of 'medicalising' society by harnessing the normative difference between ability and disability. We do not share a common understanding of 'normality' or the 'essence' of humanity. Nor is there any common understanding of 'perfection' or of 'human flourishing'.

The exhibit enabled a different criteria for representing how spectators, as autonomous, biological subjects, are caught in the wider structure of the social body and are, potentially, becoming critically aware of what separates them from the reality of other bodies. Thus, on however small a scale, by entering the Science Gallery and placing themselves in a context of meaning-making, the gallery-goers may contribute with their own resources, expertise and tacit knowledge to the development of an ethical discourse.

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The Duality of Heroic Identity in Fielding's *Tom Thumb*

By Máire MacNeill

Abstract

This paper examines Henry Fielding's 1730 burlesque afterpiece *Tom Thumb* as a dual narrative performance which seeks to satirise the heroic tragedies of the 1710s and '20s while simultaneously presenting itself as a serious contribution to the same genre. The piece thus speaks to two audiences: an imagined audience who accept Tom Thumb as a genuine tragic hero, as well as a real audience who recognise the clichés of heroic tragedy and are consequently able to laugh at both the performance and the imagined audience. As such, I will look at the regularity of plot in *Tom Thumb* in spite of its absurd logic, overblown dialogue, and the counter-casting of a female child as an adult male hero. I will then consider how Tom Thumb both subverts and contributes to expectations of heroic appearance and behaviour, looking at his conduct when fighting, as well as discussing how the other characters view him.

During the 1710s and '20s, the genre of heroic tragedy experienced a great revival on the stage. Shakespearean drama and the most popular tragedies of the Restoration vied with more recent works, such as *Cato* and *Jane Shore*, to appear in the London theatres. Although the locations of these plays were frequently separated by time and distance – ranging from classical Greece and the Roman republic (*The Rival Queens*, *Tamerlane*, and *Cato*) to late medieval Britain (*Jane Shore* and *Richard III*) and occasionally further afield, to India and the Americas (*Aurengzebe* and *Oroonoko*) – there were sets of values common to most of them. The importance of patriotic duty and public spiritedness was one of these (Kelsall 158). For example, Cato's 'What pity is it / That we can die but once to serve our country!' (Addison IV:IV 80-2) is comparable with the bodily sacrifice of Jane Shore and Hastings, the latter of whom 'die[s] with pleasure for my country's good' (Rowe III:I 262).

Furthermore, popular tragic heroes rarely faced any real moral contradiction: their enemies were corrupt and self-interested

while their supporters – Juba in *Cato*, Belmour and Dumont in *Jane Shore* – agreed with them almost fanatically. Inevitably, such a prevailing and influential genre garnered a parodic response, but in spite of numerous attempts to replicate the success of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, the first real victory was Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, a short burlesque written as an afterpiece to *The Author's Farce* in 1730. Incredibly popular at the time – playing for thirty-three nights during its first run (Rivero 54) – this is a play that deserves discussion as an example of how serious and farcical examples of the same genre coexist.

Set in the court of King Arthur, *Tom Thumb* mimics the basic plot structure and dramatic blank verse of heroic tragedies. Much of the play is made up of a patchwork of dialogue taken from authors ranging widely from Dryden to Gay (Morrissey 4). The title character is represented as a celebrated warrior who wins the hand of the princess following his triumph in battle. However, a jealous enemy, Lord Grizzle, plots against him. Although his schemes come to nothing, Thumb is swallowed by a cow, is revived as a ghost, and is finally killed again by Grizzle. The final scene sees a mass slaughter as each character in the play is killed by another before, finally, King Arthur kills himself.

The burlesquing of the heroic genre lies in both the lowness of the subject matter and the deployment of Tom Thumb's physical form; a female child was usually cast in the role, in the case of the initial run, a Miss Jones (Highfill Jr., Burnim, and Langhams 226-7). Here, Fielding 'uses ridicule of a character's compromised masculinity to associate that character with the compromising of traditional political, cultural, or social standards' (Campbell 59). Campbell's discussion of *Tom Thumb* is chiefly within the context of feminine intrusion upon conventional masculine roles, particularly on the subject of contemporary claims that Queen Caroline was attempting to rule England through George II. We can see that Queen Dollalolla's special preferment of Tom Thumb mimics Queen Caroline's perceived preferment of Walpole (Campbell 58; Morrissey 4). By using a deliberately unheroic hero in the place of the muscular warrior, Tom Thumb can be read as an attempt to draw attention to the absurdities of heroic tragedy, thus extending our understanding of compromised masculinity.

Tom Thumb was a standard chapbook character who was

familiar to his audience, and therefore an excellent choice of mock hero; set in the distant past like *Cato*, *The Rival Queens*, and *The Briton*, Thumb may be mythologised and used as an expression of a tragi-heroic story. Indeed, Fielding's use of Tom Thumb follows in the footsteps of William Wagstaffe's *A Comment Upon the History of Tom Thumb*, written to satirise Steele's admiring critique of *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*.

Tom Thumb is presented as a genuine contribution to heroic tragedy in the same tradition as the serious plays of the same genre, and the logic that runs through it, though absurd, is consistent from start to finish. This is a society in which a diminutive hero may conceivably overcome giants and appear as a desirable matrimonial partner. Tom Thumb's characterisation as a hero is met with the full belief of the other characters in the play. Even Lord Grizzle's schemes are founded upon the concept of Thumb as a hero, and Queen Dollalolla's response to his doubts reinforce the fundamental belief in Thumb as a warrior:

> QUEEN: Hence! from my Sight! thou Traytor, hie away;
> By all my Stars! thou enviest Tom Thumb.
> Go, Sirrah! go; hie away! hie! – thou art
> A Setting Dog – and like one I use thee. (I:IV 45-8)

The inarticulate horror and confusion she expresses here suggests that she cannot understand Lord Grizzle's suggestion that Thumb might not be a hero, and she is not alone in this. There is no sense of the spectacle among the characters of the play; each partakes in the comic absurdity with great candour.

Although similar speeches appear in serious heroic tragedy (Morrissey 4), no audience could mistake the play as a sincere attempt at the genre, and the dual narratives – one tragic, one farcical – occurring onstage while *Tom Thumb* is being performed would be clear to all. In the first narrative, Thumb is genuinely a tragic hero, dominating a story about his downfall, and the (imagined) audience is one of poor taste, willing to accept the clichés and absurdities of the plot.

In the second narrative, Thumb is obviously a farcical hero, and the conventions of heroic tragedy are outraged in order to draw attention to the flaws and clichés of the genre. The (real)

audience here is more sophisticated, and in recognising the plot inanities so admired by the first audience as stock formulas of heroic tragedy, they are able to laugh at the events on stage. This second, silent narrative rests heavily on the first: there is an implied understanding in the absence of 'fourth wall' dialogic commentary that if *Tom Thumb* is performed without explicit comic interruption, it may join the ranks of other heroic tragedies. Indeed, Fielding's use of lines from other plays acts as a levelling device, suggesting that serious heroic tragedy and the idiotic, overwrought *Tom Thumb* of the first narrative can be considered to be of the same artistic quality. In this case, the real audience of the second narrative is being asked to accept the inherent outlandishness of heroic tragedy.

If *Tom Thumb* is to be recognised as both a contribution to and a satire on heroic tragedy, we must try to understand how Thumb himself fits into both categories. His heroic behaviour is certainly a dominant characteristic, but his physical form is also the subject of much discussion. He is compared to Alexander, Caesar, and Scipio (I:III 39-42), men famed for their military prowess in other heroic tragedies; so when likened to a piece of gristle his friend cries, 'Wou'd Arthur's Subjects were such Gristle, all!' (I:I 20). In spite of the nonsense beliefs which dominate the play, the characters are not actually wrong in understanding Thumb as a hero; Thumb *is* a successful warrior, even though he does not look the part. By refusing to have the other characters directly recognise Thumb's unheroic qualities, Fielding is obliged to rely on the audience's assumptions about the nature of heroism, and thus poses the question: is the *belief* of the collective in the protagonist's heroism in fact the force that confers heroism upon him?

The assumptions about heroic appearance and behaviour that contribute to the audience's belief in the actor playing the part are suggested in contemporary memoirs and histories of the eighteenth century stage. For example, in *The Life of Mr. James Quin*, his contemporary Robert Wilks is described as 'a very handsome man, of a graceful mien… [and] no contemptible tragedian' (16). Here, the attractive physicality of Wilks is underscored as one of his fine qualities as an actor. In his *Apology*, Colley Cibber further stresses the connection between heroic roles and handsomeness when he describes the parts an audience would expect an ugly man to play. His example is the Restoration character actor Samuel Sandford,

who was only successful in roles in which he played a villain, 'for, having a low and crooked person, such bodily defects were too strong to be admitted into great, or amiable character' (138). If Sandford's failure to be accepted in heroic roles was attributed by his contemporaries to his lack of good looks and muscularity, this adds weight to the view that the heroic form demanded these two qualities of physical appearance.

In spite of Sandford's failure, other actors did attempt to make the transition from comic and villainous parts to those of the dramatic hero. Cibber himself had made his name as an actor with his comic fop roles but he also had some limited success as a tragedian; he was the original Gloster in *Jane Shore*, for example. Nevertheless, he remained best known for his modish Lord Foppington, while his tragic efforts were met with widespread derision, including from Fielding. For those who sought to separate masculine and feminine behaviour into two distinctive types, the fop's love of fashion, 'feminine' vanity, and lack of serious behaviour represented a serious problem. Cibber's statement that Sandford's audience was too well acquainted with him as a villain to allow him recognition as a hero might well be applied to himself. The phenomenal success of Cibber's fops meant that his demands for acceptance in serious tragic hero roles could never be fully met.

It is perhaps too much to interpret the initial point of *Tom Thumb* as having been intended as a specific burlesque on Cibber's attempts at heroic tragedy; even the satire on Cibber's appointment to the position of Poet Laureate was added after its initial run, and possibly not by Fielding himself (Morrissey 5). Nevertheless, Cibber represents a well-known example of a man associated with the malfunctioning masculinity of the fop attempting to occupy the manly handsomeness of the tragic hero. Any regular theatre-goer watching a performance of *Tom Thumb* in 1730 would have been aware of cross-character performances such as these, and we can therefore say with confidence that the childish, feminine form of Tom Thumb responds to this idea.

If part of *Tom Thumb*'s humour is founded upon the inherent absurdity of a hero lacking in traditional masculinity, Fielding poses an uncomfortable question: how incidental is virility, physical impressiveness, and good looks in the creation of the hero myth? Perhaps as a reminder of classical and Biblical figures such as

Achilles and Samson, there is an unconscious expectation that heroes should represent manliness as a physical ideal. The female child cast in the role of Thumb represents the diametric opposite: a figure of weakness, not male, not mature, not physically imposing, and lacking attractiveness and the capability to perform the male sex act.

We can explore the two narratives discussed above even further so as to understand Tom Thumb's size as a concept rather than mere pantomimic incongruity. In the first narrative, the play is understood as a serious heroic tragedy and Thumb's size is incidental. While it is mentioned in almost every scene, it is usually in an appreciative, unforced way, either likening him to earlier heroes or placing him as a physical ideal:

> NOODLE: …this mighty Hero
> (By Merlin's Art begot) has not a Bone
> Within his Skin, but is a Lump of Gristle.
> DOODLE: Wou'd Arthur's Subjects were such
> Gristle, all! (I:I 17-20)

Such endorsements of Thumb's physical appearance are important to the audience's classification of him as a warrior: who would dare challenge a second Caesar to a fight? Yet, as such, Thumb's physical form takes on an odd middle-ground, where the implications it rouses through its very unconventionality become almost irrelevant to the characters of the play. It is not that they do not observe that the physical form of their hero defies heroic norms; rather, they do notice but they do not recognise the flagrant absurdity in this. Even Lord Grizzle, no great admirer of Thumb's deeds, recognises his diminutive form – early in the play, he deplores a court that can 'ripen the vilest Insect to an Eagle' (I:IV 3) – yet he does not seek to use it as an argument against the veracity of Thumb's deeds, as he might easily do. That he is disinclined to pursue this line of argument suggests that within the world of *Tom Thumb* there is no logical incongruity that prevents dwarfish men from defeating giants. When Thumb is finally involved in onstage combat, he is, true enough, an outstanding warrior. Following attempts to arrest his friend, Noodle, for failure to pay his tailor's bill, an outraged Thumb and the Bailiff have the following exchange:

THUMB: Ha! Dogs! Arrest my Friend before my Face!
    Think you Tom Thumb will swallow this Disgrace!
    But let vain Cowards threaten by their Word,
    Tom Thumb shall show his Anger by his Sword.
                   [Kills the Bailiff]
BAILIFF: Oh, I am slain!

FOLLOWER: I'm murdered also,
    And to the Shades, the dismal Shades below
    My Bailiff's faithful Follower I go.

THUMB: Thus perish all the Bailiffs in the Land,
    'Till Debtors at Noon-day shall walk the Street,
    And no one fear a Bailiff, or his Writ. (II:II 30-40)

Thumb's heroics are clearly intended to both mirror and exaggerate those in serious drama; after all, he ends the scene declaring the righteousness of his violence. Even the language he uses reflects the bombastic speeches of the heroes of heroic tragedy. He uses imperatives and rhetorical statements to assert his position, unlike the passive declarations of the Bailiff and Follower. This is another example of Fielding's half-serious humour; the unpopularity of bailiffs made them ideal victims to be killed off in a spontaneous act of 'justice'. Who among Fielding's fashionable audience could truly condemn a man who promised that 'no one [would] fear a Bailiff, or his Writ'? Fielding himself, consistently in dire financial straits, would certainly have been amused by the idea. Indeed, Thumb's behaviour in this scene may be compared to the interpretation of 'virtue' as 'public duty' and 'patriotism' as demonstrated in *Cato* and other heroic tragedies. If Thumb is acting in the interest and for the benefit of society in his attack on the Bailiff, then this may in fact be interpreted as an act of paramount virtue.

In the second narrative, which serves to make fun of the first, Thumb's size is the point upon which the play's success hangs. For all the exaggerated dialogue, there is no greater joke than the fact that the hero so admired for his might in battle has the body of a female child, and although the appeal to popular hatred of bailiffs is apparent, the rest of the humour lies upon Thumb's behaviour as

incongruous with his physical form. His impassioned behaviour speaks to contemporary critics of male violence, who 'emphasized duellists' failure to rein in their passions, condemning them as "being full of rancour and wrath", and characterizing them as men who "strike and thrust in passion and fury"' (Shoemaker 542). Thumb's behaviour functions partly as a satire on men who behave in this manner, his height and feminine form making his wrath and violence comical; like a true hero, he seems unaffected by contemporary condemnation of passionate behaviour. Here again the casting of Thumb is of significance, for placing a five-year-old girl in a heroic role suggests a connection between the violent posturing of heroes in serious tragedy and the tantrum of a young child; it is the emotional immaturity of heroes that comes under fire, rather than mere physical immaturity.

Beyond what it suggests about expressions of impassioned violence, the casting travesty of Thumb also has implications regarding the character's desexualisation by the female characters. In spite of his battle exploits, he is described as a 'lovely Creature' (I:II 5) of 'charming Form' (I:III 26), and, less flatteringly, a 'perfect Butterfly' (I:III 16-7). Even though it is apparent from these statements that Princess Huncamunca admires Thumb for his bravery on the battlefield, she recognises that his physical form does not represent the stereotypical masculine physique. The emphasis on Thumb's femininity recalls the heroes of serious drama; for example, in *Cato*, it is the 'graceful tenderness' of Portius (Addison, I:VI 46) that makes Lucia prefer him to his over-passionate brother. It also recalls once again those actors who, like Cibber, played both foppish and heroic parts. Again, Fielding is simply inflating an existing version of heroic masculinity. It is physical and emotional restraint, combined with tenderness, which make each character sexually appealing to the heroines in the play. *Tom Thumb* takes this to its logical extreme, however, and the hero is so gentle and lacking in passion that he is emasculated, commonly perceived among women as woman-like himself.

The lack of 'proper' genitalia for the protagonist's role might be something of a running joke in burlesque theatre. The mock-hero of Carey's *The Dragon of Wantley* was played in parody by Farinelli, the famous castrato (with the role of the villainous dragon correspondingly sung by a bass). There are no formal rules

that indicate that heroes might not be castrato: only the ability to wield a sword is required to slay dragons. Nevertheless, the deliberate comical 'wrongness' of this casting, and the casting of Miss Jones in *Tom Thumb*, reveals audience expectations of heroic mythology, to which we attach the belief that a convincing hero must also count the ability to perform in the male sexual role among his accomplishments.

The cross-gender casting of Tom Thumb suggests, for Campbell, an 'absence of phallic power' (78). Indeed, if we recall the reading of the play as making fun of Queen Caroline's attempt to rule through her husband, the idea of a woman playing the part of a hero suggests an attempt to seize masculine power figuratively, in her acquisition of a traditionally male role, as well as through her possession of the phallic sword. Yet these attempts only serve to highlight Thumb's failure as a hero: there is a clear discrepancy between his heroic reputation and his physical form. The audience in the second narrative must understand, as the audience of the first narrative does not, that simply picking up a sword and making bombastic threats cannot transform a female child into a fully-grown male hero.

The burlesque hero of the second narrative must appear to have the impotent violence of a child and a woman's perceived desire for phallic power, while retaining, for the audience of the first, a reputation for great sexual and military prowess. Placed side by side, the first and second narratives reveal a troubled picture of heroic identity in eighteenth-century tragedy. The duplicity and shortcomings of tragic heroes are subjected to burlesque; to accept them at face value is a sign of poor taste and foolishness.

By presenting a tragic hero who is at once both serious and farcical, Fielding questions what his audience values in its heroes. It is not enough that Tom Thumb's origins are in a base folktale and that he is the incorrect size; to the audience of the second narrative he must be totally emasculated when played by a female child. In this way he burlesques the contradictory appearances of serious tragic heroes who are both too passionate and too gentle; overtly masculine and excessively feminine; falsely sentimental and representing Whiggish heroic patriotism. Instead, Fielding demands a tragic hero who is subjected to greater scrutiny and is not in possession of absolutist behavioural authority.

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Multiplied Trajectories: A Traveller's Dinner

By Molly Beth Seremet

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Abstract

This practice-as-research document melds performative writing about ethnic identity and cultural heritage with theories surrounding sense memory, cosmopolitanism and performance. Are ethnicity and heritage determined solely by one's family tree, or can they be flexible constructs? What stands to be learned from exploring one's own culture through the lens of another? This piece is a personal journey through the landscape of individual memory and cultural identity. This exploration draws on Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of cosmopolitanism, paired with Peggy Phelan's work on performativity, and is fed by Nadia Seremetakis' work on sensorial cultural engagement. Structured around the preparation of a meal, the work attempts to engage with ethnic identity and ambiguity on an intimate, experiential level and seeks to ingest the theoretical terrain of performing belonging.

Mansaf is the national dish of Jordan
I am not Jordanian
Mansaf is eaten in accordance with rituals of hospitality
I am in fact not Middle Eastern at all
Mansaf is eaten with the right hand
I am left-handed
Mansaf is about community
I don't belong to the community that Mansaf is made for
Mansaf is an easily decipherable symbol for Jordanians
I am engaged in a process of translation

This document is the trace that remains from a walk on London's Edgware Road, and the subsequent leftovers from the dinner party that followed.

This journey emerged from a search for origins, and although it was completed in April and May 2011, it continues its wandering trajectory as an underscore to this text. The journey that already happened has now culminated in an unexpected engagement with an audience – you. This search resumes here on this page, in time and tandem with you.

I have undertaken this small-scale journey because of a visceral association I feel between feelings of ethnic heritage and day-to-day performed elements of culture; these can include religion, language, tradition and, finally (and to me most interestingly), food. For a disposable commodity, food has tremendous significance and, in my memory at least, holds so much permanence. In this way, I have elected to imagine a space in which I possess an Arabic identity, because it feels like an identity I can perform and, perhaps in the enacting, learn something. Or possibly remember something. In an attempt to fit in on Edgware Road, I seek the sort of opening that Peggy Phelan gets at when intimating that 'the process of self-identity is a leap into the narrative that employs seeing as a way of knowing. Mimetic correspondence has a psychic appeal because one seeks a self-image within the representational frame' (5). By supposing a connection to a national identity, and making an attempt to insert myself into it through a sensory and culinary intervention, I believe that it may be possible to both blend in and reveal something within something. Conversely, there is an undercurrent in me that sees this earnest attempt to mesh with an 'other' identity (whilst acknowledging the potential for resistance to my mimetic presence) as a strategy to atone for the dispassion I feel for my 'real' identity, stemming from my inability to communicate within it.

My genealogy can be traced back to Eastern European roots, but large gaps in my family's collective history have rendered my relations untraceable after a few scant generations. While I am ostensibly Polish and Hungarian, I speak no Polish or Hungarian, and nor do my parents, or even my grandparents (the first born Americans of my lineage). I make pierogies from my great-grandmother's instructions, learned from watching my father, but I cannot read her handwritten recipe for this dish. I zero in on this felt language barrier because, as a writer and theatre-maker, language holds primacy for me. Without the ability to communicate, to not

just make myself heard, but understood, I struggle to see myself as a full member of a community, even though that community may be where my family is rooted. Without the ability to make myself heard, how can I participate? However, this emphasis on spoken language is deceptive; although I feel that my self-imposed silence restricts me from accessing my Eastern European heritage, perhaps it can invite a new kind of listening, a quiet conviviality that invites an embodied communication.

We will take a walk on London's Edgware Road and at the culmination of our journey I invite you to partake in an authentic Jordanian meal in my own home. As you are now aware, I am not of Middle Eastern descent, nor am I an expert on the landscape and character of London, as I am an American. My authority as tour-guide is spurious at best. The most important qualification I have for this job is ethnic ambiguity. I am a person who physically blends in. I tend to look like I 'belong' to a lot of places and ethnic backgrounds that I cannot rightly claim as my own. I am regularly assumed to be Latina, Arabic, Italian, often depending on my geographical location. My appearance seems to perform a multiplicity of possible identities, read by others in the context of my environment. As Peggy Phelan suggests, this performance occurs because 'self identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured because it fails to secure belief. It fails because it cannot rely on a verifiably continuous history. One's own origin is both real and imagined' (4). Being mistaken for ethnicities that I am not puts me continually in a state of flux, reevaluating and reimagining what I am, looking for context. In a sense, my ability to blend in everywhere causes me to feel like I fit nowhere. This sensation of being adrift is heightened by the inevitable breakdown of communication I create by being able to speak fluently in English only. My outward appearance (black hair, dark eyes, olive-toned skin) opens doors that my mouth cannot usher me through. My inability to articulate the possibilities that call to me renders the performance of my own identity mute.

To begin a convivial exchange, I need new language. And perhaps a new destination. Even though I cannot speak my great-grandmother's mother tongue, I feel close to her, because we loved each other in a familial way. Scanning her recipe, I do not just observe her looped writing. I also see her hands and imagine her in

the act of writing: blue pen grasped in short fingers, so like mine, the halting spill of one letter into the next, the amber ring. I am tempted to travel somewhere that reminds me of her, to make a more tangible connection to this part of my heritage. If corporal communication is to be relied upon on this journey, I need to travel somewhere where I am not tethered by sentimentality. Instead, I search for somewhere in which my roots have no origin, but rather a place where I can transplant myself to explore my own narrative in a different representational frame. A place where my journey seeks not to reconstruct my past but instead makes an attempt an invention. In this way, Kwame Anthony Appiah's conception of cosmopolitanism appeals:

> Conversations across boundaries of identity – whether national, religious, or something else – begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from someplace other than your own. (xx)

We are going to Edgware Road at the imagined urging of a friend I have drifted apart from. A Palestinian with a Jordanian passport. In my mind, this journey is a conversation started by him: stories he told of the fruit trees in the courtyard of his parents' home, coffee breaks with his Nana, driving lessons on roads with no speed limits. These mundane memories capture me, because they are so similar to my own experiences, although I grew up in the U.S. The geography changes, but the flavor of the memory stays constant. I am taking you on a journey to Edgware Road because I am caught up in a fantasy of Arabic culture – not a fetishisation, but a sense that many things across cultural divides are very nearly the same. In this way, although I would argue that I am adopting Appiah's cosmopolitan strategies in this journey, I also must admit that I am drawn to the least exotic kinds of imaginings. I am equally mute in the cultures of my belonging and of my imagining and yet I feel drawn to open up to these encounters, because I want desperately to be part of somewhere. I am characterised by both an overwhelming desire to start a conversation, and a sense of always having the wrong words on the tip of my tongue.

Language is no touchstone for our journey. To this end, traversing Edgware Road opens up a hope chest of scents, tastes and sounds, and even though they are unfamiliar, they somehow make me remember things for which I am hungry. I can translate them in relation to my own history. These experiences open a channel that my rudimentary language skills had barred. In an echo of Nadia Seremetakis, I perceive that:

> it is a mutation of meaning of memory that refracts the mutual insertion of the perceiver and perceived in historical experience and possibly their mutual alienation from public culture, official memory and formal economies. This *performance* is not *'performative'* – the instantiation of a pre-existing code. It is a *poesis*, the making of something out of that which was previously experientially and culturally unmarked or even null and void (7).

In this way, I wonder if a walk on Edgware Road will connect me with my roots as much as a trip to Hungary might, because what matters is not the physical geography I travel, but that *I am the traveller*. The external location of the journey is not as crucial as the commitment to let the journey affect me, and to be open to what it makes me remember. In this way, my journey grows out of cosmopolitan imagining, but becomes a constantly morphing performance, allowing me to be in the present of Edgware Road, and also to reach back to my past. If there is a future in all this, poesis is the key.

By undertaking this journey, I commit to conversing on a bodily level. Harkening back to the example of my grandmother's pierogies, perhaps reading the words of the recipe is not as important as immersing oneself in the physical process of mashing, rolling and folding. Outside of a few culinary delights, I was not raised immersed in the culture that claims me. Therefore, I already am engaged in a process of performing my own cultural heritage using the signs and symbols I glean to enact my identity. And, to carry through the notion of cosmopolitan performance, perhaps a dedication to 'eating' culture is a step in the right direction, an approach to letting a culture exert its influence on me. Although

I was born into the American melting pot narrative, I still feel incomplete, in need of a wider variety of ingredients, a different language. On Edgware Road, I hope to find poesis through digestion. I hope that you will join me.

In any case, welcome.

Fajr
(Dawn Prayer, London 3:13AM , Brooklyn 4:34AM)

> Not Me: *That's not mayonnaise.*
> Me: *I'm sorry?*
> Not Me: *You know what that is? It's not mayonnaise.*
> Me: *Oh thanks. I thought it would be a substitute for jameed. Do you think so?*
> Not Me: *Ah, jameed. Yes, you do know what this is. Yes, kacek is close. Kacek should work. What are you cooking?*

There is going to be a dinner party. The main course is mansaf, a traditional Jordanian dish of Bedouin origins. The history of the recipe is rich, passed down from family member to family member. Not my family however – I am the only known link in my family chain to mansaf. The recipe is simple, more time-consuming than complex. I will need a special dried goat yogurt, good quality Egyptian-style rice, and a wide array of spices for the lamb. I also require six or seven people to feed.

I am interested in the interstice that exists between who I 'am' and where I came from, divorced at this moment from personal historical fact, and instead arising from a feeling of belonging. Phelan's discourse on performativity feels apt here, stressing that 'identity emerges in the failure of the body to express fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly' (13). This feeling of belonging is predicated on my own willingness to learn the rules of the road, and to make informed choices in relation to the codes and constructs set before me. I do not expect to find my roots on Edgware Road, or to be able to triangulate my trajectory back to the Middle East and become someone new. For Appiah, 'such exposure to the range of human customs and beliefs hardly [leaves] the traveler untethered from his own' (6). I simply seek a moment where Edgware Road feels familiar, where an intangible glimpse of a home I recognize as my own emerges. I do not fit here, and *here*

does not rise up to meet me. But, in this break, perhaps I can reside, if only fleetingly. As I am ambiguous, can I experience a place to which I might belong?

In looking for belonging where no ties exist, it could be construed that your humble guide is engaged in a process of appropriation. My intentions here are different, more focused on personal identity through a cosmopolitan cultural engagement. I am choosing to focus on looking for familiarity instead of searching for exotic souvenirs. To borrow again from Appiah's strategies for cosmopolitanism, 'a cosmopolitan openness to the world is perfectly consistent with picking and choosing among the options you find in your search' (5). It strikes me that a contrapuntal relationship exists here between Appiah and Phelan. Although both theorists suggest that identity is constructed through interaction with others, they diverge on the tone of interaction that causes this poesis to occur. For Appiah, this identity emerges from a conscious process of choice, selecting elements with individual resonance to incorporate. In Phelan's estimation, however, this identity-making is what happens in the moments of disconnect, emerging in the gaps between. While not without responsibility, Phelan's conception of performativity is less about choice than about influence. My investigation wanders this gap, and forces me to remain open to what finds me.

I begin by going shopping.

Shorwwq
(Sunrise Prayer, London 5:38AM, Brooklyn 5:58AM)

> Me: *Do you sell saffron threads?*
> Not Me: *Do you want Spanish or Iranian?*
> Me: *Iranian.*
> Not me: *Yes, we have saffron.*

As an American shopper on London's Arabic Edgware Road, I was not aware that I wanted Iranian saffron, until it asserted itself as different from the Spanish variety. I felt two identities, Latina and Arabic, tug at my 'authentically' Eastern European directness, causing me to ask the Lebanese shopkeeper for the product grown in closer proximity to his native land. I was rewarded with a tiny tin of the Middle Eastern varietal. And a smile.

When travelling abroad, I feel like a tourist. When travelling in ethnic neighborhoods at home, or wherever home currently is, I sometimes feel more like an imposter. As a traveller in an unfamiliar place, I perceive a pressure to behave appropriately, so as to fit in without taking over, to comply with the rules without assuming knowledge of how the game is played. Sara Ahmed pinpoints this when describing how 'processes of homing and migration take shape through the imbrications of affective and bodily experience in broader social processes and institutions where unequal differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, among other relevant categories, are generated' (5). If I choose to disregard the conventions that exist, I ostracise myself, seeming to assert that I am exempt from (or even more problematically, above) the implied rules. Having an engaged experience in a place for me is conditional on making an earnest attempt to understand the demands that place will put on me while I am within its borders. I am not here to collect souvenirs, but rather to be a part of the landscape. To be as unnoticed as possible.

I dress carefully in the morning prior to my trip to Edgware Road. I do not want to announce myself as a tourist, nor do I want to look as though I could be expected to speak Arabic. I become very aware of my face, with sunglasses covering my eyes; in this way, I am the photographic negative of the women in their veils, with only their eyes on public view. My scarf hugs my neck, while theirs conceals the rose of their cheeks, the tilt of their lips. In shops, I hear the 'salaams' and raise them a 'shukran' on making my purchases, but leave it at that. I do not fit here, but I make the effort.

There is a dance that happens at every shop. First, a vaguely familiar woman crosses the threshold with one purpose: to buy food without making an ass of herself. She negotiates the narrow aisles, in a two-step of sense-making, eyeing the spices curiously. She cannot identify the spices by written name: كزبرة looks nothing like the 'coriander' for which she searches. She relies on smell. She holds each spiced packet to her nose, knowing not the names of individual seasonings, but rather relating each discrete odor to a tangible taste. Or place. The first packet is heavy in her hand and conjures an image of fire, not a tame indoor job, but an outdoor bonfire. She does not know that it is sumac, but can tell

you a story about a stickful of burnt marshmallows and a pair of ruined tennis shoes that the heavy tang is associated with. Our dancer buys the sumac. She navigates this interior catalogue, trusting it to help her buy the correct ingredients for bharat. In the end, she finds she lacks only cassia bark. She has no frame of reference for cassia; it is a completely unknown step combination. She stands in stillness surveying the spice shelf, now needing to find something she has no language to describe.

At this point, the dance becomes a duet. She wants the shopkeeper to tell her what cassia smells like, to describe it before she can smell it herself, and he complies. After a solo interlude, he has his answer, and tells her definitively, 'Oranges. Cassia smells like oranges'. She knows before she even inhales that she will notice citrus as a result of her partner's certainty. She almost wants to end the dance here, to linger in the pleasurable hesitation of uncertainty. But now she is too curious, and she follows her partner's lead. One deep inhale later, she smells oranges and sees the interior of a spacious church.

To her, cassia smells of the incense-infused Catholic masses of her youth and a heady dose of citrus. In this smell, her past has found a meeting-place with a possible future other. Now the dance is again a duet, but one contained under the skin of a single body. She sees two of herself bound up in the perfume, not in opposition to one another, but existing in a common frame, the current temporality. She stands in the store and now knows that it is impossible to forget what cassia smells like.

Asr
(Afternoon Prayer, London 4:59PM, Brooklyn 4:44PM)

> *His Palestinian nanna gave him a spoonful of tahini*
> *when he was ill.*
> *My Polish nan prescribed honey.*
> *We both drained our spoons while perched on the counter.*
> *We learned the same thing, just differently*

I have now gathered the spices to make bharat, the traditional herb medley which will season my mansaf. The only time I have ever been invited to a mansaf dinner was in America. My Jordanian host had received his spices in the mail from his mother, packed carefully

into a cardboard box. The individual packets were not labeled, yet he knew what every peculiar scent was. I found it curious that these spices, readily available in the United States, were somehow better when imported from one's native home. It made me very aware of my host's status as a re-rooted person. Home is not then a singular locus, but a catchment zone, simultaneously encompassing a multiplicity of places. As Sara Ahmed explains:

> We also seek to escape the immediacy of location of a discrete entity, and to blur the distinction between here and there. Where or what is 'there?' Is it necessarily *not* 'here?' How long is 'there' a significant site of connection? And for whom? How far away is there? (4).

Here and there have collided in the form of a postage-bearing parcel. The 'there' of a home in Jordan now sits in a lived-in suburban United States kitchen, to allow a recreation of one country's dinner on another country's dinner table.

Although as individuals we have the privilege and in some cases the necessity of being extremely transient, we are aided and abetted by the availability of these cultural connections to our homes (however multiplied that construct is). My mother sent me Jif peanut butter this year, and his mother mailed him cardamom pods and sage for tea. The desire is identical, though the flavors diverge. The further I am from my geographical home, the more I crave the taste of my roots. I mean crave in the most literal sense of the word. I desire ways of carrying my cultural identity within my body, through the songs I know, the perfumes I wear, and the foods I eat: 'homeland is identified as the poet's "flesh and bone" (an individual and collective body)' (Ankori 59). By eating the peanut butter in London that my loved ones are eating back home, we are one across the distance. I digest my culture to reinforce it as part of myself, both expressing my own heritage externally and reinforcing it for myself through consumption.

What happens though when the culture I am preparing to 'eat' is one to which I am an outsider? In an ethical sense, because I am borrowing a traditional dinner from another culture, do I have a responsibility to give something back? I did not travel to Jordan

to obtain my recipe for this meal, a Jordanian symbol of hospitality. What can I offer as a token of gratitude? By creating this traditional meal in my adopted London home, I hope to create a place *for* Jordan. I am not aiming to appropriate a culture that is not mine, but rather to invite it onto a shared plateau to examine it side-by-side with my identity, a hodge-podge of Eastern European cultural roots, an American birthplace and a London postcode. For Kwame Anthony Appiah:

> There are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kin, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. (xv)

Belonging, then, is not just an inherited trait, but a behavior that can be cultivated, through conscientious inquiry and engagement with others. I am not trying to appropriate Jordanian culture and serve it on my dinner table, but, rather, I am looking to use this meal to locate an entry into a small understanding of the space between here and there. Simultaneously, I cannot help but remember that the man who introduced me to mansaf and the rituals of hospitality associated with its enjoyment was not Jordanian by birth; he was born in Palestine, and his family took refuge in Jordan when he was an adolescent. A ritual designed to showcase a host's generosity takes on new significance to me when I remember that the first time I partook of this meal was at the invitation of someone who had taken refuge inside the culture.

  I will now begin the process of cooking the lamb for the mansaf and getting the feast underway.

Maghrib
(Sunset Prayer, London 8:19PM, Brooklyn 7:49PM)
   Me: *Shoo shukran salaam dood helmi layl zip hellwa*

Me in translation: *What thanks hello worm my dream*
night penis beautiful
Note: *This is all the Arabic that I speak from memory.*

Both the lamb and I have spent the past 24 hours marinating, ruminating, and drawing influence from the ether surrounding us. The lamb has taken in the salty, acidic character of the kacek (which is not mayonnaise) it soaks in. It has turned grayish, reflecting its total saturation. I have also been stewing, spending hours on YouTube watching footage surrounding the death (murder?) of Osama bin Laden, carried out upon the orders of Barack Hussein Obama, the only world leader for whom I have actively campaigned. I feel like my skin must have turned lamb-grey as I scrolled through the videos, watching the joy pervade my not-quite-hometown of New York City. I am plunged back almost ten years, when I also spent time with video documentation of celebrations surrounding human extermination: that time, I watched the festivities in pockets of the Middle East celebrating the demise of 3000 Americans.

In this moment, I begin to hate the cosmopolitan way of thinking that allows me to exist in London, New York City, and my imagined version of the Middle East simultaneously. In a sick sort of way, I am jealous of the Americans who dance in the streets today, because I am envious that to them, this death (like those that came before it) is that simple. As Appiah postulates, 'each person you know about and can affect is someone to whom you have responsibilities: to say this is just to affirm the very idea of morality' (xiii). How, then, is any further death a cause to celebrate, particularly a death brought about by a politics that I had supported through my vote in the previous election? How can I digest this painful powerlessness in the face an interminable string of 'eye for an eye for eyes'? There is an almost intolerable opposition between my status as a passport-holding American and the personal trajectory I follow as one who is drawn to imagining a place within other cultures. To me, it is much easier to live as an American outside of America, so as to not have to confront these feelings on a daily basis.

In planning this dinner party, it seems that I have invited a host of guests to sit at my table, but all of them take up only one seat: mine. I want answers from myself and for myself, but, again,

I am stymied by an insufficient knowledge of a language with which to interrogate myself. Through my performance of the rituals of this dinner, I have been attempting to model behaviors of cosmopolitan thinking that feel absent in the current actions and political climate of my home country. This dinner-for-one draws me back to Peggy Phelan's thoughts on performativity, echoing the notion that 'identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other – which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other' (13). Inviting myself to a Jordanian dinner made by my own hands feels like a small way of resisting my country's intervention in the politics of another (or multiple others). As Nadia Seremetakis intimates, 'there is a corporate communication between body and things, the person and the world, which points to the perceptual construction of truth as the involuntary disclosure of meaning through the senses' (6). In a small way, I feel as though my creation of this dinner is the most profound statement of my identity I can make; I am in agreement with Kwame Anthony Appiah on the point that responsibilities and morals are cosmopolitan questions, and ones that encourage frequent and constant reflection.

Being engaged in preparations for my mansaf dinner has brought me face to face with a reality I would rather not own up to; I am not unhappy that Bin Laden is dead, but I also cannot deny that my home country's hand in his death troubles me. Instead of taking up the celebratory cry, I instead feel myself straining to hear the voice of someone calling for solidarity. Conviviality: not as individual citizens of any given soil, but as humans, occupying shared human territory; as people who could all crowd around my table, if I could get out the way, to partake in a shared meal. That is the discourse lacking in this moment of grief mismatched with festivity. My dinner now tastes acrid. Seremetakis says that 'commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling' (37). While I have been engaged in setting a dinner table, my home nation seems to be taking a different tack with cultural conversation. I was trying to extend an invitation, while my country of birth issued an ultimatum. Death cannot redeem a prior set of deaths, but it can assert a world order, a faith in governments and world powers.

As I place my seasoned mansaf in the oven, I am overcome by a special sadness. I sense a sadness in myself that this is the condition of the world that I live in, that I will likely soon bring children into: a world where cosmopolitan curiosity and liquid identity meets the resistance of closed-mindedness and xenophobic fear. This sadness also mingles with feelings of loss. I miss my Jordanian friend, and realize that my solitary parroting of mansaf's traditions feels hollow. I feel at this point like I am co-opting, as though I am stealing this recipe to avoid visiting a Muslim nation, looking to stuff my face with culture to feed my feelings of guilt surrounding my lack of intellectual knowledge. Guilt also gnaws at me out of embarrassment for my roots: my heritage as an American and my inability to correspond with where I'm from. I see my great-grandmother's hands again and wish I could just hold on to them for while. I sense a bitter taste in my mouth that I suspect no coriander, clove and cassia combination will blunt. This dinner is now an offering, a sacrifice, a way of atoning for something I did not do, but for which I feel powerfully responsible.

Isha
(Evening Prayer, London 10:36PM, Brooklyn 9:15PM

> Not Me: *Where you from? Me, I'm Iraqi. Where you from?*
> Me: *The U.S. I live here now though.*
> Not Me: *Me, I'm Iraqi.*

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Becoming Annot: Identity Through Clown

By Anne-Pauline van der A

Abstract

This article tracks the performative creation and evolution of a clown persona, 'Annot', that I developed as part of my academic research into the construction of clown personae by their performers. To capture her I employed the medium of performance photography. Concentrating on the actions performed, my clown arose from impulses and responses to gestures. Following the definition of performativity, identity came later, through action. However, as any construction of the body is also a construction of the individual as *embodied*, my investigation of the performative construction of the figure of the clown resulted at the same time in a highly personal and therefore new and original performance. Since clowning awakens hidden aspects of the individuals involved, it allows for the integration of form and emotion as expressed by the clown performer. This article argues that it is precisely in the performance of clown that identity is revealed as an authentic expression of human embodiment.

The clown is ubiquitous. The clown is of all times and of all places. 'Clown' can describe a range of figures, behaviours and situations. The very diversity of clown makes a comprehensive definition difficult; but the persistent, recognizable notion of clown suggests that there must be some essential performative quality worth exploring. My own previous research into clown performances sparked my interest in the way in which a performer constructs and develops his clown persona.* I therefore decided to investigate how the various contemporary approaches to clown might inform such a process.

In this article I will track the performative creation and evolution of my own clown persona, Annot. Through the creative process of becoming Annot and through my own performance

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* See van der A, 'Performing Charlot/Hulot'. Both Charlot and Hulot can be seen as the inspiration for Annot's name, accordingly pronounced 'ah-NO'.

practices in both private and public space, I explored the processes of 'becoming clown' and examined the extent to which this process negotiates embodiment. My practical research on clown and on the relationship of the clown persona to the self contextualised my theoretical approach and contributed to the existing theoretical material on clowning. This article argues that precisely the construction of a clown persona and his subsequent performance permit not only an expression of the personal through clown – as his identity is revealed as a truthful and *authentic* expression of the performer's self – but also allow for the provocation that, to an extent, the clown persona can be identified as a person existing in his own right.

Drawing on my own basic clown training, I will examine the training of the modern clown performer and discuss the conceptions and techniques he acquires. I will indicate how the performer may apply these in the development of his own clown and in his interaction, or even confrontation, with the audience. In addition I will focus on the intrinsic paradox of the clown, whose incongruent performance not merely provides entertainment, but who through his performance seeks to encourage contemplation and reflection, even subversion.

This will be juxtaposed with the creation of my own clown persona, Annot, and her first experiences in the outside world. To document the actions that Annot performed and the reactions she effectuated through her performances I turn to performance photography. The art form of performance photography is both a representative of the artistic practice and an inherent part of the creative act: the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such, because its liveness exists not as a prior condition, but as a *result* of its mediatisation (Auslander 5; cf. Taylor 35).

To quote multimedia artist and writer Coco Fusco, performance photography forms 'the only means of sustaining the life of [the] performance' (62). The photographic record of Annot's performances accordingly enabled me to reflect on the figure and function of the clown, as this visual documentation showed me the performing image of this clown persona as well as her perception by the audience.

Fig.1 Annot (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

Creative clown training: how to develop an authentic persona
The initial manifestation of Annot mainly derives from a six-week
placement that I undertook in the spring of 2011 at Circomedia,
Centre for Contemporary Circus and Physical Performance
in Bristol,* where I attended classes in clowning and obtained
varied training and creative learning through observation and
participation in an area of performance practice that was largely
new to me. My introduction to the world of clown culminated in a
three-day masterclass by mask teacher Steve Jarand, during which
I was encouraged to let go of my 'imposed I-persona' by way of
the Trance Mask-method. It seems significant that by wearing a
mask I allowed myself the freedom to drop the 'mask' that I felt
society had imposed on me in recent years. I had to undergo this
personal development before my clown persona was disclosed to
me and could manifest herself; concentrating on the actions that
I performed, allowing for the 'development of the active side of
consciousness and sensations in the process of human becoming'
(Simonsen, 3), my clown arose from my own personal impulses
and responses to gestures.

Circomedia's educational philosophy is based on the
theories of French actor, mime and clown master Jacques Lecoq
(1921-1999), founder of the famous physical theatre and clown
school L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris.
The idea that each individual has one or more clowns within himself
lies at the centre of Lecoq's approach to clowning. According
to Lecoq, his students were drawn to his conception of clown
because its then novel approach permitted liberation from socially
assigned conditions (cf. Murray 62). Clowning forms a domain
of possibilities for a performer as basic modern clown training
includes attempts to reveal 'the person underneath, stripped bare
for all to see' (Lecoq 154). This suggests that the clown persona
cannot exist apart from the person performing him. The clown
performer creates a character identity which, although perhaps not
entirely that of the performer himself, is nevertheless tailored to his
needs for self-expression. Clowning allows for the integration of

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* Circomedia, the internationally-respected centre of excellence for circus and theatre
training, founded in 1994 by physical theatre expert and clown Bim Mason and
choreographer and performer Helen Crocker, was set up as a continuation of Fool Time,
the first circus school in Britain, founded in 1986. See also Gartside 13.

form and emotion as expressed by the clown performer. Following the definition of performativity, identity comes later, *through* action (Mazzone-Clementi 61). As such, the modern clown performer frequently chooses to adopt a 'performance persona' based on the off-stage 'self', on which he draws as a foundation to develop his material beyond the constraints of realist- or illusionistic-led scenes (cf. Bailes xvii). This also means that the clown performer does not convey feelings and ideas originally voiced by someone else:

> When a clown performs, the audience sees the ideas and attitude of that individual conveyed by an adopted persona that has developed out of the individual's personality and which could never be adopted and lived in the same way by anyone else. The clown is not an interpreter. In his or her performance the view of and reaction to the world is the same for the creation [...] as for the performer. (Peacock 14)

The techniques included in modern theatre training require considerable physical effort and are therefore sometimes defined as imprisoning processes of the body. Yet the paradox which lies at the heart of these techniques is that the performer, by mastering them, gains the freedom and spontaneity that are so essential for an authentic clown persona. A combination of the body techniques of clowning and (classes in) physical theatre therefore allows the clown performer to construct unique clown characteristics according to his own personal style. These clown conceptions emphasize the single, sheer creator in clown (cf. Little 55-56).

The main emphasis of clown work thus amounts to (physical) self-discovery: 'clowning awakens hidden aspects of all individuals involved' (Peacock 154). By stimulating transparency towards the world, clowning also invites the performer to reveal his shortcomings. This corresponds with the philosophy of Circomedia's Bim Mason:

> I always see teaching clowning, learning clowning, as a means to an end: it is a way for people to learn to laugh at themselves, to base it on who they are, their real personalities and their real bodies.

> What I try to do is get them easy with their imperfections. (Lidington)

As such, the role of clown also involves an exhibition of some incongruity, vulnerability, weakness or failure. As actress and clown Angela De Castro suggests: 'clowns celebrate imperfection and that makes it more real' (qtd. in Peacock 95). To become a clown one must be distorted from expectation in appearance or conduct (Klapp 158-159), ultimately resulting in a highly personal and therefore new and original performance: the clown clowns to express his personal observations about life and humanity.

Meet Annot: the creation of my own clown persona
This conception of clown as something highly personal and as dependent upon experience at a personal level is something I came across in my own performance practice as well. I started from personal exploration through performing clown play, but hardly worked according to any predetermined, academic design. Instead I sometimes found myself less in control of my research than I had envisaged: occasionally serendipity seemed to take over, prompting me to allow for the discovery of what might appear. I realised that much of the creative process seemed to happen subconsciously, such as when my clown persona introduced herself to me during my training; I suddenly 'saw' the image of a female clown, as clearly as if she had just entered the room. The name 'Annot' came to mind almost simultaneously.

Fig.2 'An Emerging Persona' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

Gradually the different forms of physicality, motion, physical accents and postures of Annot started to emerge. Putting together the appropriate costume for my clown did not primarily include conscious decisions either, but happened rather more arbitrarily, adapting garments that I could find in various wardrobes. Annot's short, white dress and black stockings underline her childishness as well as her gender, while the blue vintage jacket on top more generally emphasizes the figure's angular shoulders. The other main component of Annot's costume is an oversized, red duffle coat, which seems particularly appropriate since the colour red appears to be iconic to clown. Upon her head Annot often wears a bowler hat – another iconic clown attribute – while the glasses that I, as an individual, would otherwise wear are shadowed in the black circles around her eyes. I chose plump shoes to fit in with the rest of Annot's costume so as to accentuate my somewhat clumsy gait as well as my feet: feet that in total relaxation point almost perfectly (heels together) to the right and to the left.

Fig.3 'Out and About in Public Space' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

The effect of applying these characteristics is that the body becomes the 'stage' for the eccentricity of the clown: transgressing its own boundaries, the body plays up its own exaggeration (cf. Lachmann 146). That is, in the way that the clown presents himself by altering his physical appearance, the figure reinforces any bodily defects he might have by means of his choice of costume. As the construction of the body determines the construction of the individual as embodied, this element of clown has not so much to do with putting on a show, but forms a part of the clown that 'is like a skin' (Peacock 38). Similarly, Annot's big, brightly coloured duffle coat visually externalizes a specific bodily experience, as it is appropriate to the fact that I often feel cold. This coheres with a more postmodern performance style in which the performer draws attention to himself as an individual, not as a character (Peacock 105). It precisely 'blurs the boundaries between private and performative personae and thus displays and deconstructs the performative self' (Groot Nibbelink 306). The actions and gestures that I perform as Annot are often integrated into the everyday, blending personal identity and performance. With this in mind, I intentionally rejected the red clown's nose, as it locates the clown too emphatically within a frame of exaggeration and overt humour; the attribute can form a barrier for the performance as it might lead to a certain expectancy on the part of the audience for the performer to 'do something funny!'.

However, the transgression from the norm will be obvious enough to mark the clown as different, signifying that the clown is a clown (cf. Peacock 15). This peculiarity of the clown figure was illustrated during the production of my performance photography, when 'Annot' went for coffee at a local café; although my costumed appearance and the presence of a person with a camera (even taking pictures inside the premises) occurred within an obvious performance frame, we were ignored for a long time before we were somewhat reluctantly served. Evidently, what may not even cause someone to raise an eyebrow in one context, may arouse rather more intense reactions in another (cf. Miller 318). And the incident suits the mode: the clown's act is continuous and involves 'the never-ending and precarious dramatizing of what happens to such a [figure] when thrust into the realities of life itself' (Tyler 83). For there is always something of the 'other' about the figure of the clown, in particular an 'otherness' in his attitude to life as expressed through his performance (Peacock 2).

Fig.4 Waiting to be served (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

An identity of contrasts

Note, however, that the clown sees nothing peculiar in himself; the clown simply is (cf. Larner 114): 'The reactions of […] the audience are the strange thing. *He* is normal' (Mazzone-Clementi 63). Nevertheless the clown, distinguishing himself from others by deviating both in appearance and in physicality, is an outsider from human society. This position, however, grants him the freedom to expresses his observations on humanity and on contemporary life by commenting on the interaction between individuals and the society in which they live. By taking what is socially presumed as 'normal' and 'natural' out of its usual context, the clown explores the incongruity and inherent absurdity of his own clowning as he confronts his audience with an alternative perspective: 'a way of

looking at the world that is different, unexpected, and perhaps even disturbing' (Swortzell 2).

The result of this kind of deviant behaviour can be ambiguous, even wry. As adopted by contemporary artists, the previously comical role of clown has evolved into a more reflective performance with a more cynical figure (Fisher 30). Donald McManus even suggests that the 20th century was the century in which the character of the clown ceased to be comic. The clown has become the means through which the more tragic, modern impulse of the world can be expressed as an insight, a question, or a commentary that is rather more confrontational than it is entertaining, causing the audience to laugh *in spite of themselves.**

Fig.5 'An identity of contrasts' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

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* As Jan Jan Kott noted early in the 1960s in his essay 'King Lear or Endgame': 'When established values have been overthrown, and there is no appeal to God, Nature, or History, from the tortures by the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure' (qtd. in Schechter 100). According to Jan Kott, in *King Lear* Shakespeare moves his clown character in a new direction; Lear's Fool's stands in relation to his master as an *alter ego*. As such the figure is anachronistically like the modern clown, not simply deployed to make his audiences laugh, but ideally attuned to reveal the pain of existence, or 'what it is to be human and to be flawed' (Peacock 93).

Accordingly, clown-play can include tension, disengagement or alienation, even anxiety and hysterics, and can involve physical and emotional risks to the performer's self (Hyers 6; Callery 64; Peacock 12; cf. Schechner 82). Indeed, Schechner has remarked that the etymology of the English word 'play' includes allusions to risk and danger, as the oldest meaning of the verb is 'to vouch or stand guarantee for, to take a risk, to expose oneself to danger for someone or something' (81; cf. 80). Thus the etymology of the word 'play', so inextricably linked to clown, corroborates the notion that the performance of clown is often situated 'on the edge of self-destruction' (Manvell 27). As Kevin Kern puts it: 'Breakdowns, missteps and screw-ups are life forces that flow through clown veins' (195). These forms of failure and disaster are not necessarily always accidental or improvised, and therefore not necessarily unique or irreproducible. They may occur in scripted but also in unscripted acts (Bailes 5), as happened to me when I suffered a minor injury during the creative process of my performance photography. This was not intended or pre-conceived, but significant in connection to the awkwardness that is a defining characteristic of the clown figure in general, and of Annot specifically.

Fig.7 and 8. 'Unscripted acts' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

During the process of Annot's creation, the powerful balance of vulnerabilities and strengths that are so intrinsically linked with the clown figure required me to work out parts of myself and to deal with certain issues, uncertainties, painful aspects and fears. In fact, finding that balance was particularly challenging in my case, as I was born significantly prematurely and spent several months in an intensive care incubator that regulated my breathing, my medication, my nutrition and my body temperature.

This condition had far-reaching consequences, in that I suffered severe brain damage during the first hours of my life, which caused permanent injuries to my vestibular system (balance) and adversely affected the coordination of my limbs; in my early childhood it was a major challenge for me to learn to walk properly, and even today I cannot ride a bicycle without falling over. Simpler still, it took me almost ten years before I could put on my socks by myself. During my later childhood I was often ridiculed by people around me – children as well as adults – because of these limitations resulting from my premature birth.

The traumas of my preterm suffering, as well as the strengths demanded of me to overcome them, also constitute my personal history in performative terms: the continual medical procedures I was subjected to in the incubator and the actions I thus (forcibly) 'performed' played a determinative role in my becoming and shaped me into the person I am now. Accordingly, the vulnerabilities of my early self-emotional as well as physical, as reflected in the actual scarring on my body-have also shaped my clown persona, Annot. During the process of becoming Annot, I realised that her identity is at least partly based on the activities I cannot perform as a result of the damages sustained by my premature birth. But while 'cannot' limits me, I realise that there is a lot that I *can* do, which underscores the suitability of the name 'Annot', as opposed to the suppressive and inhibitory quality of 'cannot'. Moreover, as the name 'Annot' resembles my own given name, using it allowed me to remain close to myself.
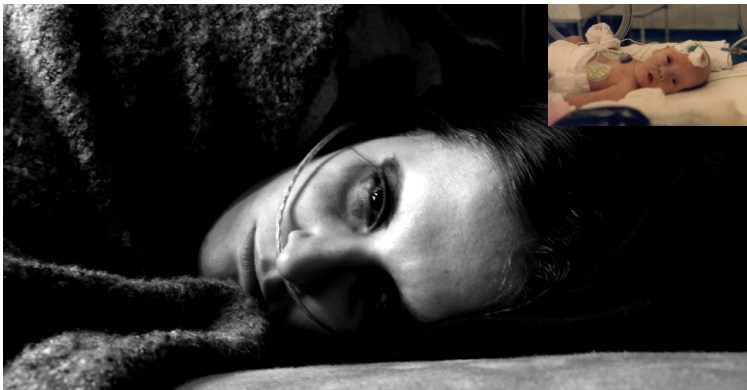

Fig.9 and 10. 'Performing the incubator' (2011) and 'In the incubator' (1985). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

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Performing the 'self': the humanity of the clown

Obviously clown does not mend any (physical) traumas. However, it does allow the clown performer to turn any personal inabilities into his main performative strength. The genius of clowning is not only the overcoming, but also the transforming of the everyday. This is why corporeality is the central axis of clown comedy; the clown's (in most cases carefully trained) lack of coordination in the physicality of his body mocks society's controlled norms and rules, and so forms his principal tool for subversion. The technical mastery of the performer in addition to the deployment and even exploitation of the individual strengths and weaknesses of the 'self' constitute a reappropriation, perhaps even a reevaluation of both. As such the discovery of one's inner clown provides a way of increasing self-awareness and a means of personal development. This allows the clown performer to find alternatives to his ways of behaving in and coping with life. The opportunity to reveal new facets of the self builds confidence and attitude, while ensuring the potential to bring about personal change in that the mode of clown 'opens up a fruitful, tragicomic ground' wherein subversion and resistance can be tried out and rehearsed by exposing what others (wish to) keep hidden (Bailes 3; Peacock 156).

My research revealed an overlap between theatre and everyday conduct, pointing to the social formation of personality by increasing the visibility on the conceptions of embodiment in human performance. For the clown performer specifically, the clowning mode both stimulates and facilitates his transparency to the world around and the world within. When clowning, the various aspects of the self are not acted out, but revealed: 'To be a clown is to create and express a total personality' (Swortzell 3). When the clown performer stands before an audience, he does so in person, not hidden behind an externally created character but revealed in a theatrical version of himself: the clown persona (Peacock 103; cf. James Naremore 11). The performer should, then, be interpreted not as one who is pretending, i.e. performing a character, but as one whose primary concern is being his individual 'self'. Because of this, usually a performer assumes his clown persona for life. When the mode requires the clown performer to reveal personal insecurities and vulnerabilities to the audience and to society, such a disclosure of the self may be confrontational.

Yet the clown's manifold moments of crisis constitute a space for recognition and sympathetic identification for the audience as well, in which the function of clowning to confront the audience with awkward, embarrassing and sometimes even painful situations is particularly resonant:

> The audience laughs at the clowns [...] but at the same time, they may be laughing *with* the clowns, internalizing elements of the experience and exploring the parallels between the clowns and themselves. (Peacock 102-103, emphasis in original)

Through the clown's display of human vulnerabilities the audience will recognize themselves as well as the emotions and imperfections of human nature. This is the crucial point about the performance of clown: the audience 'discovers' that they all are, in some sense, clowns as well (Delpech-Ramey 140).

Fig.11 'Human Vulnerability' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

As such the clown constantly deals with what it means to be human; while commenting on the absurdities of life he encourages contemplation with particular emphasis on an existentialist viewpoint (Peacock 26, 14 and 106; cf. Bailes xvi). But because the performance of the clown remains double-edged as both the comic and the tragic occur in the same experience simultaneously, any empathic identification with the figure can quickly pass into an uncomfortable reminder of personal failure when identifying too closely with the clown as victim of a seemingly comic situation (Kris 214). The status of the clown therefore represents a paradox in that the type is both depreciated and valued, rejected as well as embraced (Klapp 161). Indeed, the clown precisely *has* to be valued and taken seriously, as a situation can only be experienced as 'tragicomic' when the object of sympathy retains a minimum of dignity (Hofstadter 302; Delpech-Ramey 136).

Fig.12 'Performing the self' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

With the creation of my own clown persona, Annot, I explored performativity by means of clown. By putting on my costume I deliberately created a situation of performativity which enabled me to emphasize my 'otherness'. Annot embodies much of what I regard as my personal failures, or what had caused others to exclude me; my performances included a physicality that referred to my bodily limitations due to my premature start in life. However, the specific characteristics of my clown persona worked to turn my weaknesses into a determining strength for me as a performer and as an individual. The creative process towards becoming Annot taught me that laughter is a powerful survival tool. Performing Annot enabled me to put my personal history into perspective, to come to grips with my limitations and to accept them more easily. So Annot is an expression of (parts of) myself. Simultaneously, Annot can be seen as a person existing in her own right, which in itself poses another paradox. During my research, as well as while I was writing this article, at times I was confronted with the blurring of the two differing identities, of myself and of Annot, of the performer and of the clown. Ultimately, the authenticity of Annot manifested itself in the intriguing feeling that my creative choices seemed to be imposed by my clown persona herself.

Fig.13 'Untitled' (2011). Courtesy of Anne-Pauline van der A.

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New York: Routledge, 2011, 175 pp. (hardback)
By Charlotte Keys

Catherine Silverstone's Shakespeare, *Trauma and Contemporary Performance* is a fascinating consideration of the ambiguous ethical and political implications of enactments of trauma in Shakespearean performances. Silverstone chooses to explore four productions which were significant interventions in the performance histories of these plays: Gregory Doran's 1995 production of *Titus Andronicus*, set in South Africa; the 2001 film, *The Maori Merchant of Venice*, made in New Zealand; Philip Osment's 1988 play, *This Island's Mine*, which was performed by the London-based theatre company, Gay Sweatshop, and incorporated scenes from *The Tempest*; and Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of *Henry V*, which sought, through its aesthetic of realism, to represent the trauma of Britain's military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. All these productions deliberately set out to engage with specific, violent events and histories, and thus were intentionally charged with presentist politics. By focusing on these particular examples, Silverstone argues that the representation and reproduction of trauma on stage can both critique *and* reinforce the operation of violence. Her book is informed by her subtle awareness of the 'tension between the way in which Shakespeare's texts can be co-opted as part of a narrative of healing and reconciliation in response to trauma and how such narratives can work to elide or obscure inequalities – and thereby produce further violence' (5).

Silverstone's monograph is a timely meditation on this important topic and coincides with a recent special issue on trauma in the journal *Performance Research* (March 2011). In their editorial remarks to the issue, Mick Wallis and Patrick Duggan note that performance can be regarded 'as a privileged site for the exploration of trauma' (1). As it involves processes of replaying, reliving and re-representing events, trauma is bound up in ideas of performance and performativity. In the words of Wallis and

Duggan, 'trauma theory suggests a performative bent in traumatic suffering itself' (2). Further to this, in her more intriguing approach to developing analogies between trauma and performance, Silverstone claims that performance criticism is inherently traumatic, as it constitutes a return 'to that which it cannot fully grasp or account for' (18). She supports this view by considering how performance archives contain traumatic traces of the 'live event' of performance, and in her analysis of the four productions, she draws on a vast array of archival materials, including films, videos, DVDs, play-scripts, programmes, reviews and photographs, as well as some less frequently used but equally illuminating materials such as actors' diaries, rehearsal notes, audition tapes and prop lists. Rather than attempting to use these resources to reassemble an image of the original performance, Silverstone insists that she is more concerned with how the performance event is mediated by its material and documentary traces. These traces, she goes on to observe, are interesting and revealing because they 'privilege some subject positions and exclude others' (20).

Over the last twenty years, analyses of trauma have produced a rich and multifarious field of research, and Silverstone's book enters into a productive dialogue with other critical studies of trauma, one of the most significant being Cathy Caruth's seminal monograph, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1995), in which Caruth examines the complex interrelationship between trauma, communication and the unknowability of the event. The originality of Silverstone's study, however, stems from her nuanced historicism, not of Shakespeare's texts themselves, but of contemporary performances of Shakespearean drama that consciously tap into particular narratives of trauma. She clearly delineates the parameters of her study, stating that she does not wish 'to identify Shakespeare as an early modern trauma theorist' and is not 'interested in speculating on what his views about trauma and ideas of "treatment" might have been' (21). Many previous studies on the relationship between Shakespeare and trauma have endeavoured to contextualise notions of trauma in the early modern period. In *Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton* (2006), Thomas P. Anderson explores the 'historical transmission' (1) of trauma in early modern literary texts. By focusing on the twentieth and twenty-first century cultural and

historical circumstances that give rise to certain trauma-conscious performances instead, *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance* makes significant critical advances.

The fundamental strength of Silverstone's study, and what sets it apart from other studies in the field, is the way it insists that the negotiation and communication of trauma through Shakespearean drama is a difficult and open-ended process, often producing effects that are at odds with a production company's original intentions. Contemporary performances of some of Shakespeare's most traumatic plays are sometimes optimistic and hopeful, allowing an audience to consider 'how trauma, perhaps perversely, provides the ground from which communities might mobilise themselves to redress injuries' (24). But at the same time as allowing an audience to envisage these 'affective and effective community relationships', some performances also reveal how these new communities 'can work simultaneously to marginalise others' (24). In some ways, Silverstone's work follows Christina Wald's *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (2007), a study that is deeply concerned with the incorporation of trauma in contemporary performance (but does not focus on performances of Shakespeare in particular), and Timothy Murray's *Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance* (1997), an extensive, provocative study of the traumatic workings of ideology in early modern performance and contemporary performance, television, video and installation art. But in other ways, Silverstone's book encourages a fresh look at the issue of trauma in performance, acting as a forceful and convincing reminder of the inherently traumatic relationship between the past and the present. As Silverstone puts it, 'performances of Shakespeare's texts and their documentary traces work variously to memorialise, remember and witness violent events and histories, but (…) these processes are never neutral. Performances offer *a way* of remembering violent events and histories and invite spectators to witness theses events' (3-4).

Overall, *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance* is a useful and valuable contribution to both performance criticism and Shakespeare scholarship. The book's fluid prose is accessible and easy to follow. The study's primary thesis is outlined in the introduction and compellingly developed

in the subsequent four chapters. Anyone who has watched violent, 'traumatic' performances of Shakespeare and considered the uncomfortable, difficult ethics and politics of such performances will find Catherine Silverstone's new book a thoroughly enlightening read.

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Disaster Capitalism; Or Money Can't Buy You Love: Three Plays by Rick Mitchell
Bristol: Intellect, 2011, pp.299, (softback)
Review by Melina Theocharidou

Rick Mitchell introduces his trilogy by outlining Naomi Klein's notion of 'disaster capitalism': 'catastrophe has become a convenient rationale for gutting social and public programs, as well as for weakening safeguards meant to protect people and communities, such as union contracts, civil liberties, and environmental laws' (9). The playwright then sets out to tackle occurrences of disaster capitalism in a 'post-9/11 comedy' (19) set in Afghanistan, *Shadow Anthropology*, a play set in New Orleans and spanning the last two centuries, *Through the Roof*, and a 'sacrilegious comedy' (203) set in Los Angeles during the 1980s, *Celestial Flesh*.

The author explores the complexities of human intervention

in nature and the role it plays in precipitating or aggravating what we call 'natural disasters', as well as ways the socio-political landscape, made of conflicting state policies mixed with rogue individuals' interests, enacts capitalist exploitation resulting in the victimization of the masses. The plays are written in a post-dramatic form; Mitchell lances out against psychological realism in his introduction and defends the use of devices that favour reasoning over empathy: the 'big picture' over individual characters' plights. He is clearly an exponent of the Brechtian model but he insists that theatre should be first and foremost 'aesthetic' (13) and only thereafter political. So, are Mitchell's plays successful as pieces of theatre and does their scrutiny of the notion of disaster capitalism have depth and breadth?

The first work of the trilogy, *Shadow Anthropology*, focuses on the War on Terror in Afghanistan and the effects of US military policy on the native population; the crux of the play deals with the US government's attempts at brain-washing the population through the employment of anthropologists who collect and subsequently rewrite core stories and songs of communities. The spread of propaganda is coupled with the spread of poppy-seeds by drug warlords encouraging farmers to produce opium at a time when drought is killing off their produce: a practice that seems to be enabled and fortified by the military forces. An Afghan farmer and his university-educated daughter are jostled around by a Puerto-Rican, American-sent anthropologist with doubts as to her mission, an American soldier more interested in having a good time and profiteering than anything else and a warlord who is determined to get the upper hand. Songs and puppet shows punctuate the play, reflecting events, satirizing them, and the latter perhaps offering a meta-theatrical commentary on the politics of the play, deriding a simplified assessment of the situation. Mitchell successfully intermingles comedy (through repartees as well as situational, slapstick and phallic humour in the puppet shows) with despair and a compelling plot with unexpected twists and turns. The anthropologist's stance, however, seems inconsistent rather than consciously contradictory and the resolution feels contrived rather than earned. Finally, although dealing with how the US aids and abets (on a policy as well as a rogue soldier level) drug lords in Afghanistan who are using the drought as an opportunity to spread

the cultivation of opium, the play only in part explores the effects of 'disaster capitalism' per se.

Celestial Flesh is even more problematic in this respect; to the author's own admission in his Introduction, the play is not relevant to the concept of natural disasters, although it does grapple with the devastating effects of capitalism exercised ruthlessly by the state, without concern for human life, in tandem with vigilantes. A Central American immigrant community faces attacks by an extremist group from the community – US-supported drug dealers sending their profits to rebel groups in Nicaragua – and at the same time, the priest and a group of nuns from a Church in which the immigrants seek sanctuary are being threatened with ousting by a Cardinal in tandem with big business whose plans of profiteering are put in question. The play, an anathema to religious and state establishment and an ode to sex and love, has elements of high farce including exaggerated characters and situations, misunderstandings, slapstick, puns and a pair of misplaced spectacles. The author's formal accomplishments in terms of the comedy and his insights in terms of the subject-matter come together harmoniously, but *Celestial Flesh* does not in effect belong to a volume that explores the specific concept of 'disaster capitalism'.

Through the Roof is, in my view, the best encapsulation of the thesis that lends its name to the volume and, indeed, a play written with real panache. It cleverly juxtaposes the floods arising from dams breaking in California to the floods induced by levees breaking during Hurricane Katrina and aggregates a group of characters from three different eras – mid-nineteenth, late nineteenth and twenty-first century – all paralleling each other as 'different...but in many cases not *too* different', as the author notes (112). The thread of events runs back and forth through time, tracing the African-American Fausteaux character, his pregnant wife and his mistress (each in three different incarnations, one in each era), as well as a Mephistophelean character, always ready to exploit the floods for his own gain and often pairing up with the local police force and the state. Many of the scenes occur in flooded houses and flats, with the water rising by the second and characters fighting against drowning: a gift to the imagination of the audience and a challenge to the skills and ingenuity of the director, design team and actors. Mitchell has put together complex characters, in

complex situations, set in an ambitious and highly effective pan of history delivered through a medley of text, potent visuals and song. The notion of 'disaster capitalism' could not be better uttered than through this dialogue – simple, pure and astute:

> FAUST: We don't know what that dam's gonna do.
> RODRIG: It's gonna hold the water back, and channel it to wherever it's needed, for very low prices.
> MARELA: So the water's kinda like migrant workers?
> RODRIG: No, it's not... Because the water does exactly what we want it to do.
> FAUST: Water has a mind of its own sometimes.
> (137-138)

And therein lies the nucleus of what the writer set out to explore: the exploitation of the working, vulnerable population in capitalist endeavours that manipulate nature in ways that are bound to boomerang, as well as the victimisation of this same group when the natural disaster inevitably strikes.

The resolutions of all three plays are precipitated by self-defense murders of the oppressors by the oppressed – certainly controversial in so far as it is a recurring motif – and conclude optimistically for the latter; this, no doubt, aims to give spectators a sense of empowerment and an urge to action against the forces of subjugation and misery. Through diegesis and character profiling, Mitchell successfully targets his stories against the inhumanity of capitalism today, but only in *Through the Roof* do his arrows land bullseye on Disaster Capitalism. Nonetheless, throughout the volume, he provides an all-encompassing theatrical experience; he authoritatively orchestrates pathos, comedy, tension and the element of the unexpected using all the tools at his disposal – dialogue, imagery, music and song. Too often, theatre that engages with the socio-political *zeitgeist* sacrifices form to argument and fails to engage its audience as a piece of drama. Rick Mitchell avoids this pitfall; he proves that, just like Brecht, his 'primary concern ... [is] to create powerful theater' (17) and he presents us with a trilogy that is in turn funny and heart-rending, but always unabashedly political.

Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice by Penny Francis
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 192 pp. (softback)
By Jeremy Bidgood

Despite the meteoric rise of puppetry in European theatre practice during the last fifteen years, comparatively little writing of any note is readily available to the student, researcher, or critic who wishes to explore it further. The academic discourse that does exist tends to be 'scattered in anthologies, journals and other publications of limited circulation' (3). Previous publications such as *The Language of the Puppet* (1990) and John Bell's *Puppets and Performing Objects* (2001) have provided collections of writings with some critical insight into puppetry, but they are far from comprehensive introductions to the field.

This eagerly anticipated book, therefore, seems timely. However, Francis' book, apart from chapter six, is not a reader in the sense of a collection of significant writings on puppetry. The majority of the book is Francis' sometimes more personal than academic (see p.68 and her discussion of humanette puppets for example) account of her experiences of puppet practice, theory and history in Western Europe and North America. Frequently, this becomes almost exclusively a discussion of British puppet practice. Such Anglo-centricity is not acknowledged but quickly identifiable; for example, sixteen of the twenty-four illustrations in the book are of British productions, including two of student productions, which seem oddly out of place considering the wealth of British and international companies not referenced.

Francis is relatively open about some of the limitations of her book, admitting that the puppet practices of non-occidental countries are only discussed in relation to the influence they have had on 'modern west European' puppetry (1) and that her 'book's focus is on puppetry's evolution from the 1990s to the present' (1). The occidental focus seems a shame given that non-occidental theatre provides some of the world's most vibrant puppet forms, from the *ningyō jōruri* of Japan to the *wayang* of Indonesia, as well as equally interesting contemporary practitioners such as the recently deceased Hoichi Okamoto. Such an occidental skew again indicates the primacy of Francis' personal experiences in her writing

and makes the universality of her book's title seem rather crass.

However, universality is very much Francis' aim. Her book is aimed at every 'category of theatrophile' (4), or at least those interested in western European puppetry. Given its broad target audience, the book is not written as an academic treatise. There is no sustained argument. Instead, each chapter offers an introduction to an aspect of puppet theatre, except for chapter two which deals with related art forms: Masks, Ventriloquism and Automata. The other six chapters deal with a broad range of issues to do with puppetry, from definitions of puppet types, to the history of puppetry in Western Europe, to discussion of modes of performance and dramaturgy.

The stand-out moments of this book are when Francis starts to explain the systems that make the puppet function. Her exploration of the concept of writing in puppet theatre, which relies heavily on the ideas of Basil Jones of Handspring Puppet Company, is excellent and clearly lays out the extra layers of writing that make up the 'visual' text of the puppet theatre (79). Chapter one deftly deals with some of the issues surrounding the semiotic function of the puppet before moving on to discuss the puppet's differing enunciations as animated figure and animated object and the moment at which an object comes alive through breath (22). Chapter three explores the various types of puppet by methods of manipulation. Francis clearly identifies all the major forms of puppet, briefly explaining their modes of performance and construction, including a helpful discussion of the current prevalence of what Francis dubs 'rear-rod puppets' (often referred to as Bunraku-style or tabletop) (70).

The five articles Francis chooses to reproduce in full in chapter six are all worthy of inclusion and will probably be familiar to many who have a pre-established interest in puppetry. Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* and Barthes' *On Bunraku* in particular are often reproduced and referenced in other works. This chapter is a valuable part of the book and Francis offers brief but informative introductions to each essay that frame their context and author.

The final chapter's potted history of world puppetry provides a much needed introduction to the development of the art form. As with most of the book, the focus is on Western Europe. Whilst it is not as detailed as Jurkowski and Francis' 1998

two volume work *A History of European Puppetry*, it brings the narrative more up-to-date and provides an easily accessible history to the newcomer that charts the puppet's development from specific animist origins (145) to its common use by 'directors and designers who, despite a lack of any specialist training, are nevertheless discovering new dramaturgical uses for puppetry' (175).

Much of this book is useful but given its slim profile it is not surprising that it is not entirely satisfactory. As an introductory book, for the relative newcomer, it is informative. It provides many useful descriptions and insights from Francis herself and her years of experience of puppetry, as well as excerpts from many of the most prominent practitioners and theorists of the puppet theatre. While it is useful to have these collected together into one volume it is at times frustrating that more of these disparate articles have not been reproduced in full to enable the reader to engage with them first-hand rather than mediated through Francis' musings. A broader, more comprehensive puppetry reader to collate the 'scattered' (3) articles on puppetry is still very much needed. Although this book will probably become a standard text in British libraries, its Anglo-centric focus may prevent it finding universal acceptance. The personal nature of much of the writing also makes it feel less accomplished than previous works. For these reasons, despite its broader scope, Francis' book is probably destined to sit alongside, rather than supplant, *The Language of the Puppet* (1990) and John Bell's *Puppets and Performing Objects* (2001). However, it is a welcome addition to the field and will, I am sure, become one of the standard reference points for those wishing to gain a brief introduction to puppet theatre and its theories.

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